May the circle be unbroken? A study of daughters with African-American imprisoned mothers.

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ABSTRACT

AFRICANA WOMEN’S STUDIES

PARRISH, DA’TARVIA A. B.A. LIVINGSTONE COLLEGE, 2000
M.A. NC A&T STATE UNIVERSITY, 2001

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN IMPRISONED MOTHERS

Advisor: Professor Josephine Bradley
Dissertation dated May 2008

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imprisoned mothers and explores factors that attribute to their success. This study
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mothers in the penal system, their children, and programs designed to assist them.

The researcher found that the literature, reports and data, and personal
narrative correlate in dealing with mothers in prison. The conclusions drawn
from the findings reveal and suggest that the most effective strategy is not to
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who was once a child of an imprisoned mother, take authority when considering
solutions for successful outcomes.
MAY THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN? A STUDY OF DAUGHTERS WITH AFRICAN-AMERICAN IMPRISONED MOTHERS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF ARTS

BY
DA’TARVIA A. PARRISH

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICANA WOMEN’S STUDIES

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 2008
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<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>American Broadcasting Channel</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACA</td>
<td>American Correctional Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>AETN</td>
<td>Arkansas Educational Television Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>CNA</td>
<td>Certified Nurse Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Correctional Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWLA</td>
<td>Child Welfare League of America</td>
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<td>ITVS</td>
<td>The Independent Television Service</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>USBJS</td>
<td>United States Bureau of Justice Statistics</td>
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of incarceration on African-American women and their children. This research also examined the mother-daughter relationship, the influence parents could have on their children, as well as the lived experiences children underwent when a parent, particularly the mother, was imprisoned.

The research indicates that children with imprisoned mothers should be engaged in programs that teach self-reliance as opposed to or as well as focusing on maintaining contact and developing a "traditional" relationship with the mother. Furthermore, prison is not the answer to social problems and rehabilitative methods should be in place to serve the needs of individuals and communities. The researcher's personal narrative as a child of an imprisoned mother provided insight as the primary focus in mother's behavior that led her to prison and the impact that behavior has on her children, particularly daughters - the fastest growing segment of the prison population.¹

This study is an acknowledgement of American, African-American, and women's social and mental health and history as a legitimate research inquiry. As such, it is related to the issues of human growth and development, normal and abnormal behavior,

the relationships of individuals and groups, what a particular culture’s influence has on moral development, substance abuse, social and developmental processes, causes and patterns of expression of maladaptive behavior, families and communities, and women's health issues in their social, cultural, and historical contexts. One example, in particular, is the cycle of crime, arrest, incarceration, release, and recidivism. This combination appeared to have a cumulative effect that increased as children grew older. However, this research does not provide an in depth analysis of the mental and social health development, but rather presents the lived experience of the researcher as the child of an incarcerated mother.

To assist children with incarcerated mothers, there are several projects in place such as Girl’s Scouts Beyond Bars with Girl Scouts of America and a number of prisons that offer programs such as Idaho State Prison to assist women who are mothers. These agencies, like many others, primarily focus on maintaining the relationship between mother and child throughout the mother’s incarceration. On the other hand, programs that center primarily on maintaining the children’s mental, physical, and overall health are few, and the existence of many has not been noted. This may be a direct reflection of the people who develop and administer the programs. Most often, they do not seek the input of the children, but the input of the children’s parents and other professionals.

Statement of the Problem:

As Diane and Edward Reed state, “the cycle of parental crime, arrest, incarceration, release, and recidivism is particularly devastating for children, but no study
has yet directly observed a large sample of these children.” 2 They further note that what is most known about the children is obtained from information provided by the children’s incarcerated parents or caregivers. In order to successfully remedy and/or understand children of incarcerated parents, the children must be the priority and their voice must be heard.

The Child Welfare Journal reports that much of the research conducted on children with incarcerated parents has been methodologically limited and as they are small, many of the studies do not have adequate comparison groups. Their findings disclose that the research on these children has relied on self-reporting by incarcerated parents or the children’s caregivers. Thus, there does not appear to be any longitudinal research and no standardized assessments to follow children through phases of the parent’s incarceration and release. Most importantly, the children’s voices have been omitted from the process as “almost no research has been conducted through direct contact with the children.” 3

In addition to the lack of research on children with imprisoned parents, there are few reliable statistics on children who are affected by parental incarceration. There are law enforcement officers who do not obtain information about children of arrested adults and correctional facilities. They have not questioned inmates for specific information about their children. Furthermore, there is no specified agency or system charged with collecting data or information about this population, so “it is unclear as to how many


children are affected, who they are, or where they live.”4 This work provides an opportunity for understanding. The narrative is more than personal. It is an effort to give a voice to children with incarcerated parents, particularly those who have mothers in prison, and by providing an example of how to survive and overcome the odds which are against them. Who will understand the children who are six times more likely to go to prison than their counterparts?5

Since statistics reveal that many of these children become prisoners, it may be hard to separate the “mess” from the “message” because they were and are at an increased risk to engage in all behaviors and disruptions associated with criminal activity. In addition, the children are at risk for poor academic treatment, truancy, dropping out of high school, gang involvement, early pregnancy, drug abuse, and delinquency.6 Nevertheless, their voices are credible as they share similarities and themes prevalent in the life of persons with the similar backgrounds – an incarcerated mother.

Research Questions:

This research questions, in what ways do the controlling factors of the behavior of incarcerated mothers have on their children? Also, given the incarceration of the parents, what are those factors that contribute to a child’s success or behavior that emulates the parents? Researchers do not seek the primary sources – the children of incarcerated mothers. Just as many cases in history demonstrate, resolutions have not been provided for mainstream concerns without the assistance of persons or subjects that are directly

4 Ibid., 22.

5 AETN, “Mothers in Prison, Children in Crisis.”

affected by these issues. In American history, one of the greatest conflicts, slavery, was remedied with this solution as portrayed in Frederick Douglass’ narrative:

“A beloved friend from New Bedford prevailed on Mr. DOUGLASS to address the convention: He came forward to the platform with a hesitancy and embarrassment, necessarily the attendants of a sensitive mind in such a novel position. After apologizing for his ignorance, and reminding the audience that slavery was a poor school for the human intellect and heart, he proceeded to narrate some of the facts in his own history as a slave, and in the course of his speech gave utterance to many noble thoughts and thrilling reflections.7

Similar to children of imprisoned mothers, the above quote demonstrates how Douglass is initially embarrassed and intimidated to tell his story. From 1830 to the end of the slavery era, abolitionists were in a fight against the inhumane treatments of slavery and slavery itself. However, at times many of the stories, lectures, and speeches audiences heard about the cruelties of slavery were the abolitionists, not the slaves’. With a new genre, the Slave Narrative, Garrison and others discovered the missing link to the battle against slavery that soon became the main source for anti-slavery protests. It is the slaves’ voice that is considered by many scholars to be an accurate depiction of the life of a slave and an exemplary piece of American literature.

The voices of the slaves were needed in the fight against slavery, just as the voices of the children are needed in the fight for children with imprisoned mothers. The power of Douglass’ narrative and the exposure of real incidents in raw form, permit this work to have a unique first-hand voice from a first-hand experience. The same is true

with my story, which is representative of children experiencing similar circumstances – imprisoned mothers.

Even with the rise of interest in mothers in prison, the stories of adults who were once children of mothers in prison have not been told. My voice as a child with an incarcerated parent is not peculiar, nor do I feel I experienced harsher or better treatment than most, but like Douglass, it is (initially) an embarrassment to explain my state of slavery, and a subject that is too passionate at times to discuss. Furthermore, it is a burden knowing that the narrative will tell stories of people other than me and that those persons may not want particular information to be revealed. My hesitancy to tell a true story, that is my story regarding children with incarcerated mothers, is the exposure of family secrets and the question: How will people respond to an opinion that goes against the odds, as many believe the child’s best place is with the mother.

Methodology:

The telling of stories can be a profound form of scholarship moving serious study close to the frontiers of art. . . .

As researchers in the social sciences and the humanities are currently engaged in telling stories that encompass a range of narrative approaches, including autobiography, auto-ethnography, biography, personal narrative, life history, oral history, memoir, and literary journalism, this dissertation emerges out of the need to give a personal, genuine voice to children with incarcerated mothers, the authenticity researchers are interested in discovering. Joseph Featherstone proclaims the narrative has the ability to combine empirical and aesthetic description of human conditions creating methods of “making

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visible to their reading audiences how the choices they make in collecting, analyzing, and representing their data reflect the theoretical frameworks within which they work.”

This presents a first-hand experience to understand one’s own life as well as the lives of others.

Reflecting on past narrative inquiries, Featherstone states that recent emphasis on how people understand themselves and their experiences began in the mid-1970s when social sciences moved away from their “traditional positivist stance towards a more interpretive posture.” This move towards a “teller's point of view” expanded the scholarship and methodological aspects of storytelling to a linguistic sense, particularly the narrative, as some depict snapshots of past events that are linked thematically. Prior to postmodernism, writers maintained their innocence in academic writing as their voices “hid” behind fictional characters and omniscient narrators. However, writers today question the academy’s adherence to outdated writing practices:

We are restrained and limited by the kinds of cultural stories available to us. Academics are given the “story line” that the “I” should be suppressed in their writing, that they should accept homogenization and adopt the all-knowing, all-powerful voice of the academy. But contemporary philosophical thought raises problems that exceed and undermine the academic story line. We are always present in our text, no matter how we try to suppress ourselves. 9

With this thought prevalent in academia, teacher educators and research methodologists struggle with the decision to elevate the narrative inquiry, especially pertaining to collaborative research; however, this thought is not prevalent when considering the need of stories we tell about ourselves. The use of the narrative inquiry,

9Ibid.
to understand one’s own life and the lives of others, is an essential part of the story that
must be clearly conveyed and is best when the author becomes one with story and the
audience.

As the definition of the narrative is both process and product in this particular
study’s approach to analysis, it provides “an organization borrowed from literature, (the
plot), from language and thought, (cognitive reflection and understanding), and from life
events (actions and outcomes).”10 This analysis reduces stories to a set of elements that
reveal a particular case in time and place. As Garaway proclaims that narratives have
common elements such as drama, satire or love with characters seen by themselves as
survivors, heroines, or victims, he concludes that the stories map in cross-case
comparisons. As a result, a comparison of this type provides evidence for researchers of
the usefulness and trustworthiness of the methodology.

According to Heather Richmond, the approach of the methodology relies on three
dimensions- temporal, personal, and experiential.11 The three interrelate as time- present,
past, and future, disorder and confusion and organization and clarity, and the presences of
self, family, community, schooling, and work, are considered when composing the
narrative. Furthermore, a benefit of researching a narrative is when it is analyzed. As
stated previously, the researcher works to actively find the voice of the participant in a
particular time, and place, whereas themes are easily surveyed and the message of the
work is clear and concise.


(2002).
This narrative is a start. It portrays the life of a child who has a mother in prison from a first-hand experience. Furthermore as a narrative, the genre enables appeal to a wide range of readers, but particularly those who have undergone similar situations as typical of many children with incarcerated mothers. Scholars and researchers interested in the plight and studies of children with incarcerated mothers, African-American cultures and/or communities, mothers and daughters, and third-generation parenting, all benefit from this research inquiry.

This narrative, written as a semi-autobiographical undertaking, requires a combination of the “real” academic discourse and the personal I. The narrator believes it is the personal, I, that gives academic and authentic credibility to the work. As the voice of the child is too often omitted, I choose to write from first person in order to examine those factors representative of success as opposed to children who engage in the behavior reflective of the mother.

This child’s voice does not detract, but rather adds a new element to the story. However, the issue of children with incarcerated mothers written by persons other than specialists - raises questions of its credibility, its acceptability and its acknowledgement as a legitimate experience. Nevertheless, a legitimate voice is the needed research to promote social change or another approach to the problem.

Chapter Organization:

The work examines children with imprisoned mothers in two parts and five chapters. Part one, beginning with Chapter I, provides the foundation of the research. It offers a rationale for the research, and writing the narrative, as my response to the

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omitted voice of children with incarcerated mothers. Chapter II reviews the literature as it identifies research conducted in the field that is primarily related to mothers and women in prison. Moreover, it addresses several programs that aid women in prison with children.

Chapter III details the context of the problem highlighting the psycho-socio-political backgrounds of the penal system, ethnic backgrounds in prison, women in prison, mothers in prison, and children who have parents, particularly mothers, in prison. The chapter explores the recent studies of women in prison and behavioral patterns of their children.

Part two of the dissertation begins with the findings in Chapter IV; it examines literary genres and a semi-autobiographical account, and describes a personal narrative of a child of an imprisoned mother. The chapter gives a voice to children with incarcerated mothers whereas the event is examined in four ways. The first focuses on a child’s home placements and a child’s reaction to a mother’s incarceration. The second explores a child’s interaction with a mother in prison, including prison visits and letter correspondence. The third describes how the aspect of the mother’s behavior that led her to prison affects the child, as the fourth describes strategies a child may provided to survive an unstable environment.

Chapter V concludes the study with a narrative analytical discussion and offers future recommendations. Researchers are motivated by three major sources: an authentic voice of a “past” child with an incarcerated parent; the relationship between past children and present children; and how the past can help in the solution of the problems of the present and in some ways, offer solutions for the future.
Conceptual Framework:

The decision to use the narrative as a blueprint for research related to children's response to a mother's incarceration was framed around a letter to William Lloyd Garrison from his friend, Wendell Phillips (who prefaces Douglass' work). The letter states:

My Dear Friend: You remember the old fable of "The Man and the Lion," where the lion complained that he should not be so misrepresented "when the lions wrote history." I am glad the time has come when the "lions write history."  

This fable, like all fables, has a moral to the story. Misrepresentation can readily occur with any subject; especially when the story is told by those who are in actuality, not "the subject." Thus to be properly represented and understood, children with imprisoned parents must take their own stance and create their own voice when dealing with their history.

Ten years ago, I was no longer declared a "child" as I reached the adult age of eighteen-years-old. Thus, maybe some of the emotional distress and maladaptive habits from my childhood should have vanished; however, they were a part of me then, and they are a part of me now. It is a constant fight I am liable to win, lose, or draw on any given day as the concepts and ideas of convicted criminals constantly dictate my actions. According to Schiraldi, the inner-city neighborhoods' expressions and subcultures are a trickled down mirror of prison yards, a tangible sign of "prisonization" particularly in communities of color. For the most part, as persons from these families experience prison life and bring these habits home, they will influence their youth just as their more successful counterparts have influenced theirs. Consequently, "the growing prison

13Garrison, "Preface to the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass."
culture observed in many low-income, inner-city neighborhoods plays a big part in assimilating children into what is becoming an intergenerational norm.\textsuperscript{14}

As the struggle for destiny and identity occurs, I am torn between maladaptive habits and goals yet to come. Am I only the child of an incarcerated mother? Am I destined to follow the footsteps of my parent? Or, can I be the Professor of English and orator I strive to be? Even more, am I able to give an accurate account of the past with an unstable identity?

Sydney Shoemaker explains that there are parts of people that allow them to make accurate memory statements about their own past in a way that does not involve the use of criteria of personal identity, since it is a conceptual truth that memory statements are generally true. Moreover, "it is a conceptual truth (or a logical fact) that the memory claims that a person makes can be used by others as grounds for statements about the past history of that person."\textsuperscript{15}

Although I am a person who confesses to multiple identities, I am able to tell a true and accurate story. This narrative is not a sympathy request, yet a demand to say that children with imprisoned parents are in need of support - communal support to succeed beyond society's predicted statistics. Children with incarcerated mothers are a disfranchised group, and there is, to quote author Toni Morrison, "...joy and protection


in the clan."16 This protection from the “clan” omits the necessary need for interaction or a relationship with the incarcerated parent. A child who is a product of a united and caring community that instills self-reliance as a primary goal is more beneficial to the survival of the child, rather than the child maintaining contact with an un-rehabilitated parent. Children that maintain this contact easily adapt much of the parents’ maladaptive behaviors as depicted in the poem “Your Skirt:”

You were forty-five and I was fourteen when you gave me the skirt. “It’s from Paris!” you said as if that would impress me who at best had mixed feelings about skirts.

But I was drawn by that summer cotton with splashes of black and white—like paint dabbed by an eager artist. I borrowed your skirt and it moved like waves as I danced at a ninth-grade party. Wearing it date after date including my first dinner with a college man. I never was much for buying new clothes, once I like something it stayed with me for years.

I remember the day I tried ironing your skirt, so wide it seemed to go on and on like a western sky. Then I smelled the burning and, crushing, saw that I had left a red-brown scorch on that painting.

But you, Mother, you understood because ironing was not your thing either. And over the years your skirt became my skirt until I left it and other parts of home with you.

Now you are eighty and I almost fifty. We sit across from each other in the prison visiting room. Your soft gray-thin hair twirls into style. I follow the lines on your face, paths lit by your eyes until my gaze comes to rest on the black and white, on the years that our skirt has endured.17


It is a reality for me to acknowledge that my mother passed me the crafty skirt of stealing. Considering that I have never been arrested for theft, sometimes I think it looks better on me than her. The way it glows with my summer skin is amazing as this was often the time of year I made a living wearing this garment. It is my mother who brags about her victories of fistfights and public quarrels, and, in admiration, and the need to be connected, I was compelled to act likewise. The constant presence of maladaptive competition is prominent in my mother’s presence and it is a consistent behavior seen in me and in my siblings. Although I quest for an identity of my own, I am in some way bound to the label of a child with an incarcerated mother. How can I break this circle when I constantly hula-hoop it?
Definition of Terms:

For the purpose of this study the following definitions were defined. Terms two through five are those used in Levy County, Florida, and are applicable only in the state of Florida. Other states may have the same depiction, but will classifications vary:

1. Recidivists- An habitual criminal.

2. Crime- An act committed or omitted in violation of a law according to Congress, or a state or local legislative body, forbidding or commanding it and for which punishment imposed upon conviction or fine or both; Unlawful activity; A serious offense, especially one in violation of morality; or An unjust, senseless, or disgraceful act or condition.

3. Felony- Criminal charge that carries the potential sentence of death or a year or more in a state penitentiary. Felony charges include Murder, Manslaughter, Burglary, Grand Theft, Kidnapping, Forgery and Uttering, Aggravated Battery, Aggravated Child Abuse, Sexual Battery, and Worthless Checks. Felonies are classified for purposes of sentencing into the following categories:

   - Capital Felony
   - Life Felony
   - Felony of the first degree
   - Felony of the second degree
   - Felony of the third degree

4. Felony of the Second Degree- Up to 15 years of imprisonment and a fine of up to $10,000 or any higher amount equal to double the pecuniary gain derived from the offense by the offender or double the pecuniary loss suffered by the victim.

5. Felony of the Third Degree- Up to 5 years of imprisonment and a fine of up to $5,000 or any higher amount equal to double the pecuniary gain derived from the offense by the offender or double the pecuniary loss suffered by the victim.18

6. Mandatory Sentencing- A judicial decision setting the punishment to be inflicted on a person convicted of a crime where judicial discretion is limited by law. Typically, people convicted of certain crimes must be punished with at least a minimum number of years in prison.  

7. Rehabilitation- A method used to restore good health or useful life, as through therapy and education; to restore to good condition, operation, or capacity; to reinstate the good name of; and to restore the former rank, privileges, or rights of.

8. Three Strikes- Law says that if someone commits a third felony after committing two prior similar felonies, then the sentence is a mandatory 25 years to life.

9. Habitual Offender- A individual who frequently has been convicted of criminal behavior and is presumed to be a danger to society. Once an individual has been convicted of three felonies they should qualify for habitual-offender status and receive a lengthy prison term.

10. Lifter- An individual who is a professional thief.


12. Parenting programs – prison programs that specifically address the woman’s role as mother and attempt to facilitate her performance of that role, and/or aid in the development of parental skills.

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20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Relevant literature was reviewed relating to the variables considered in this study. Attention was given to the variables of female prisoners, role strain, race, and the type assistance programs available.

Women's Prisons:

The number of women in prison is consistently on the rise so much that girls and young women are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population and the prison systems.\(^1\) The American Correctional Association (ACA) reports that demographically, female and male inmates represent similar characteristics in regards to race, ethnic background, and age as these women are young, unmarried, economically disadvantaged, have little job skills, and are disproportionately minority. In addition, they are substantially more likely than men to be serving time for a drug offense and/or property crime – usually larceny, and less likely to have been sentenced for a violent crime.\(^2\) Further, many of them obtain convictions under a male influence as they possess illegal drugs for boyfriends and male relatives and engage in activities such as sexual prostitution and shoplifting.


Bloom explains that since many correctional facilities are designed for male inmates, the gender-specific differences among prisoners have an important impact on the treatment and management of the system, as they do not provide or design applicable programs for the needs of girls and young women.\(^3\) Also, many of the young girls are the daughters of female offenders, or, become adult female offenders, the relationship between the mother and child and/or simply the child herself, should be examined before any recommendations can be made. Data from Bloom’s research provides individual and social factors that contribute to risky behavior and delinquency among girls and women, whereas family problems, including relationships with parents and communication problems were the girls’ main justification for criminal behavior. Nevertheless, although there is limited study on children with imprisoned mothers, the primary goal of some who have taken an interest in the subject, often consider increasing and/or maintaining contact between parent and child.

Caulkins states that the recent increases in the statistics are most likely a result of the mandatory minimum sentencing and “three strikes” or “habitual offender” laws made by Congress and many state legislatures during the 1970s and 1980s. These laws forced judges to administer fixed sentences without parole to people convicted of certain crimes. While the intent was to punish high-level offenders, the laws have had the opposite effect—jailing low-level offenders for unusually long sentences. This policy allows prosecutors, not judges, to have the discretion to reduce a charge, to accept or deny a plea bargain, to reward or deny a defendant’s substantial assistance or cooperation in the prosecution of someone else, and ultimately, to determine what the final sentence will

\(^3\)Bloom, “Focusing on Girls and Young Women,” 127.
be. However, under mandatory minimum sentencing and habitual offender laws, high-level offenders continually plea bargain their way to reduced sentences, while low-level offenders with no information to trade for leniency, are sentenced to the unusually long terms. The average sentence for a first-time, non-violent drug offender (81.5 months) is longer than the average sentence for rape, child molestation, bank robbery or manslaughter.5

This is unfortunate for mothers as Berry explains in 1994; hence, there were more arrests for drug offenses than any other crime index category except larceny - theft, an increase in 20 percent from the previous year.6 Although there are no available figures on the total number of people who have been sentenced to periods of imprisonment as a direct result of mandatory sentencing, figures show a dramatic increase in the number of people sentenced since the commencement of mandatory sentencing. Statistics also reveal that the impact mandatory sentencing has had on the imprisonment rates of women have been astounding with an increase of 232% in the first year of the operation of the legislation.7

In addition to mandatory sentences and other policies that keep women in prison from their families, Bloom recognizes that the few female correctional facilities literally drive an even further distance from the mothers and their families in location. Over 60%

5Drug Policy Alliance, “Mandatory Sentencing.”
6Phyllis Berry, “Mothers in Prison: How they Define and Fulfill their Role of Parent While Incarcerated” (PhD diss., Oklahoma State University, 1999), 2.
7Ibid., 3.
of children live over 100 miles from their mother’s prison. As a result, distance from the
prison accounted for over 41 percent of the reasons cited by mothers for infrequent or
absent visitation with their children. The Child Welfare League of America adds, “visits
are difficult for many reasons: the geographical location of many prisons, inhospitable
visiting areas, and the parent’s reluctance.”

With parents in prison, gender plays an important role. When a man is arrested,
the mother is usually in place to care for his children; however, when a woman is arrested,
the child may be placed with other family members, or even positioned in foster care.
Moreover, if there is more than one child, the children are at risk of being separated. As
most women in prison are mothers, several studies have focused on the female prisoner’s
role as a mother; however, the current literature lacks studies on the children, and how
the mother’s behaviors that led her to prison, affect the children.

Berry and Eigenberg’s research states that women in prison experience high
levels of role strain as a whole, and that if mothers are allowed to engage in mothering
activities, this level will decrease. Furthermore, the study suggests that white women,
women who had served longer sentences, women who had not lived with their children
prior to incarceration, and women who did not approve of their children’s custody
arrangements had significantly higher levels of role strain. As the researchers identify
traditional and cultural definitions of “motherhood,” their work intricately unweaves a

8 Barbara Bloom and R. Steinhart, “Why Punish the Children? A Reappraisal of the Children of
Incarcerated Mothers in America,” San Francisco: National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 1993,
quoted in Facts and Figures, “Incarcerated Women in the United States,”

9 CWLA, “Children with Incarcerated Parents.”

10 Phyllis Berry and Helen Eigenberg, “Role Strain and Incarcerated Mothers: Understanding the
prison mother from this definition as she battles institutional constraints. This work affirms that role strain is produced when a woman holds the status of being a mother, yet, she is unable to conduct “mothering” activities. So, as women in prison are disconnected from their families and communities, much of their identity may be compromised and their self-esteem lowered.

Another factor Berry and Eigenberg highlight is the disparity amongst race in incarceration. The research affirms that while “almost two-thirds of women on probation are white, over two-thirds of women incarcerated in state and federal prisons are women of color... African-American women alone account for nearly one-half of the female prison population, as Hispanic women account for 1 in 7 women in state prison and 1 in 3 women in federal prison.” Furthermore, the study reveals African-American women have a higher rate of incarceration than African-American men.

Activists and educators have formed several observations and causes for the above statistics, primarily focusing on minority injustices. Lois Wacquant’s “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration” identifies the four successive “peculiar institutions” that account for American racism and the result of it, proclaiming that slavery began the racial division by denying blacks the fundamental right to freedom, and after the abolition of slavery, the Jim Crow system was devised to discriminate and segregate blacks from the end of Reconstruction to the Civil Rights era. The ghetto, a product of mass migration and urbanization, was a way to confine blacks through residential segregation by operating as an “ethno-racial prison.” The final institution, the prison system, is a part of

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{Ibid., 103.}\]
the “de facto policy ‘carceral affirmative action’ towards African-Americans.” 12 Wacquants’ theory professes that whites have strategically dictated a life of misery for blacks as they continue to develop new institutions of “slavery” that blacks are doomed to become a victim.

Furthermore, the Black Cornellian Woman expresses the theme of Ryan King’s The Sentencing Project that speaks of the prison system in terms of “discretionary politics.” King affirms the presence of the racial caste system in prison by recognizing some programs and alternatives available for white prisoners that are not as accessible to and for blacks. As a result, the racial caste system is “designed to withhold blacks from successfully transitioning back into society by denying ex-offenders access to public housing, welfare and educational opportunities; moreover, affording them the statistic rate of 66% recidivism.” 13

The need for gender-specific facilities is the focus of Movement Building as they proclaim that inadequate health care is highlighted when considering female prisoners as many of their needs are overlooked in a system designed primarily for men. 14 Consequently, medical issues that are prevalent to reproductive and feminine health such as gynecological and breast exams are overlooked as they are few, mal-equipped, and sometimes not sterile. Women who may enter prison “disease-free” are subject to leave with gynecological or other infections because of these circumstances, not to mention the abuse by guards and other women prisoners.


13 Ibid., 9.

More notable are the 10% of women who are pregnant while in prison. The pregnancies are often high risk since the women may have been drug users or have avoided or neglected medical treatment. Further, Pollock notes that some research indicates a higher than average rate of miscarriages for women in prison due to women being transported to outside medical facilities for delivery and prenatal emergencies.\textsuperscript{15} Adding to the report, guidelines are addressed to mothers who deliver while in prison, as they have 24-48 hours to make custody arrangements so they can return to prison.

Movement Building proclaims even the, “psychological issues that surround imprisonment of a single female household is often overlooked” as some women may not know the whereabouts of their children and how their homes are maintaining structure. Oftentimes mothers are unaware of their children’s whereabouts days after incarceration. This psychological issue can become detrimental to the health of the prisoner, and like all other medical issues, it, too, will rarely be addressed. The health care aspect of women in prison is further considered as organizations relate to the backgrounds of many imprisoned women who, are survivors of physical and sexual abuse, and have lacked previous health care in their communities. These two factors that put them at even greater risk for having high-risk pregnancies and for developing life-threatening illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and HPV/ cervical cancer, should be remedied in proper medical facilities as opposed to inadequate prison grounds. Adding to this dour truth, “despite being imprisoned and presumably safe from harm, in multiple prisons throughout the United States, women are victims of sexual abuse by prison staff, at times

\textsuperscript{15}Pollock, “Parenting Programs in Women’s Prisons.”
during routine medical examinations. These statistics add to the lack of medical attention and the increase of medical mishaps waiting to happen.

Bloom echoes gender-specific program requests as she confirms that gender-based differences should be taken into consideration by researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. In terms of policies and programs, the juvenile justice system does not tend to identify and address the separate issues of girls and young women, as many require specialized staffing and training. This is due to the fact that many of the women and the persons who work with them, need classes in terms of relationship and communication skills, substance abuse education, and developmental stages of female adolescence. Moreover, social risk factors such as racism, sexism, and economic discrimination must also be addressed.

Ultimately, Bloom expresses that girls’ pathway into delinquency can be articulated through further analysis and research, as well as the development and implementation of model programs incorporating gender-specific approaches. Also, initiatives developed to address female delinquency should be based on the developmental, psychological, social, educational, and cultural characteristics of this specific population. Gender-appropriate program models should address a continuum of care and provide comprehensive services to delinquent girls and their families.

Prison Programs:

According to Johnston, when parents are imprisoned in the first year of a child’s life, parent-child bonding may never develop. This reality can leave many children unable to develop and build future relationships, whereas they will ultimately have a life

\[16^\text{Ibid.}\]
of instability. Furthermore, the development of autonomy and initiative in children aged two to six can be compromised by trauma considering that the children will remember the disturbance, but will not have a way or know how to process or adjust to the pain without assistance.\footnote{K. Gabel and D. Johnston, \textit{Children of Incarcerated Parents} (New York: Lexington Books, 1995), 9.}

Children, ages seven to ten, began to identify themselves as they are elected as classroom or school leaders, engage in physical activities or recreational sports, and many even began the phase of “puppy love.” Having the ability to engage successfully in a collaborative setting is important and necessary for survival; nevertheless, Johnston reveals that children with incarcerated parents, between ages seven and ten, may have difficulty in school and getting along with peers as they may precipitate aggressive behavior, because of the parent’s absence. So, children with imprisoned parents are less likely to positively engage in society’s norms, and are considered at-risk, as quickly as their social life begins. The overall negative effects of parents being incarcerated are seen in their children ages 15 to 18 years-old, as “their experiences have left many with negative attitudes toward law enforcement and the criminal justice system. The parents of many have served multiple jail and/or prison sentences and will not reunify with them. A large, but unknown proportion will engage in criminal activity.”\footnote{Ibid., 82.} Notably, this is also a time when teens engage in “adult” behavior and make “adult” decisions. Compiling the statistics of prior years, children at this age who are negatively affected by their parents’ incarceration many times follow their parents’ footsteps.
The emotional difficulty of loneliness and abandonment and most of all, the stigma of having a parent in prison, are serious issues for the children. Despite the government having few policies or protocols in place to ensure that children’s needs are met, children are often regarded by the behavior they have or may exhibit as the child of an incarcerated parent. Reports state the few studies that have directly examined children of incarcerated parents are troubling as the Reeds found, “of 56 children identified by their teachers as having the most severe behavioral and disciplinary problems at school, 80 to 90% had experienced parental crime, arrest, and incarceration, and 25% had a parent who was incarcerated at the time of study.”19

As many recognize the restrictions of motherhood for an imprisoned mother, several agencies have developed programs to assist these women in efforts to maintain a “mother” status. These programs range from parenting classes of a few hours to nurseries where imprisoned women and their infants can live together during the mother’s term of imprisonment. The programs throughout the United States are grouped by the CWLA in four categories - Corrections-Based, Community-Setting, Community-Based, and Child-Welfare Based:

1. Corrections-Based
   These are programs based in prisons and jails that provide services to imprisoned parents and their children. The most common types are parenting education programs, facilitated visiting programs, and programs that enhance parent-child communication and interaction.

   **Bedford Hills and Taconic Nursery Programs (Bedford Hills, NY).**
   Designed for mothers who deliver during their periods of incarceration, these programs in New York enable mother and infant to live together for periods up to one year or 18 months.

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19Reed and Reed, “Children of Incarcerated Parents,” 3-6.
Programming includes prenatal care and postpartum classes on such topics as nutrition, immunization, infant development, and parenting; and substance abuse treatment

Children's Center, Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (Bedford Hills, NY) (Est. 1980). Provides a children's center at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility that includes a playroom, nursery, and infant daycare for inmates' children. Also provides parenting classes, children's advocacy, tutoring, and visiting programs.

Family Works (New York, NY) (Est. 1986). Provides a parent education program for incarcerated fathers at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. Also provides a Children's Center adjoining the prison visiting room.

2. Community Setting
These are programs that operate as alternatives to incarceration for parents under criminal justice supervision. For example, a mother convicted of a nonviolent felony may enter one of these programs as a condition of probation. The goal is to keep offender parents and their children together in the community while providing services that preserve and strengthen families. The programs typically provide residential and/or day-reporting services.

Summit House (North Carolina) (Est. 1988). Residential and day-reporting services for mothers and their children. Goal is to provide therapeutic intervention and rehabilitation. Clients address issues such as parenting, substance abuse, life trauma, relationship skills, child and maternal health, education, employment, financial management, and other life skills.

Hopper Home Alternative to Incarceration Program (New York, NY). Clients in this New York-based program begin with a period of residence at Hopper Home and then transition into living in the community. While in the program they receive intensive supervision, case management services, and skill-building training. One of the program goals is to keep children of women offenders out of foster care or to reduce children's length of stay in foster care.

3. Community-Based
These are programs based in the community that provide a variety of services to children, caregivers, and incarcerated parents. Common elements include transportation to visits, facilitated contact with children, and support groups for children and caregivers.
Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (National) (Est. 1992). Developed by the National Institute of Justice, this program has been replicated in more than 20 states across the country. Incarcerated mothers and their daughters participate together in traditional Girl Scout activities. The program provides transportation to the prisons where Girl Scout meetings are held. The program is designed to enhance visits between mothers and daughters, reduce the stress of separation, improve daughters' self-esteem, and reduce reunification problems.

Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers, Inc. (AIM) (Atlanta, GA). AIM serves incarcerated mothers, their children, and family members. Services include provision of educational materials about dealing with the criminal justice system, transportation to prisons, children's services (e.g., summer camp, after-school tutoring), and caregiver-child support groups.

Chicago Legal Aid to Incarcerated Mothers, Inc. (CLAIM) (Chicago, IL). Serving incarcerated women, their children, and families in Illinois, CLAIM offers classes, support groups, and printed material addressing legal issues regarding parental rights, child custody, legal guardianship, kinship care, and visitation.

Project Seek (Flint, MI). Offers home-based outreach services to children and families of incarcerated fathers. Provides case management, tutoring and support groups for children, adolescents, and caregivers. Also provides family outings, emergency financial aid, referrals, transportation to visits, and parenting programs for fathers. (Evaluated).

CHIPs Support Group (Syracuse, NY). Psycho-educational support groups for children with incarcerated parents. Conducted in collaboration with the local school district, the support groups address issues of isolation, self-esteem and shame, making positive choices, goal setting, self-reliance, developing support systems, substance abuse, the corrections system (visitation, contact, parole, release), and legal issues. Additionally, contact is developed with the children's current caregivers in order to provide support and advice through four caregiver support meetings during the year.

4. Child Welfare-Based
These are programs that focus on children in foster care who have incarcerated parents. Program activities include support groups for children and caregivers, transportation to visits, facilitated contact with parents, individual and family therapy, and reunification services for recently released prisoners.
Treatment for Residents with Incarcerated Parents Program (TRIP), Children's Village (Dobbs Ferry, NY) (Est. 1999). Designed to meet the treatment needs of children with incarcerated parents. Provides individual and group therapy to address children's emotional issues, including guilt, shame, identity development difficulties, and negative self-esteem. Also provides regular visitation with incarcerated parents and ongoing family therapy with the child, the incarcerated parent, and other family members.


St. Rose Residence (Milwaukee, WI)(Est. 2000). Provides family reunification services for prisoners and their children. Services include facilitated visits and foster parent training.

Considering these agencies, Pollock asserts that a well-thought-out program should address the following issues. First, the mother's needs, including cycles of poverty, domestic violence, and drug addiction should be considered. Furthermore, poor parenting, marital discord, mental illness and/or depression, lack of education, and parental abandonment should be addressed. The program should next address the children's needs as it must provide an opportunity for the child to visit the mother in a non-threatening environment. Moreover, emotional support that allows children to discuss their feelings concerning abandonment, anger, and embarrassment of having a parent in prison should be in place. Next, Pollock suggests caregivers should be given financial and emotional support as well. As many of the caregivers are grandparents, there are often physical and emotional limitations whereas something as small as transportation support could help alleviate some of the burdens.

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20CWLA, “What Happens to the Children?”

21Pollock, “Parenting Program in Women’s Prisons.”
Regarding all concerns mentioned previously by researchers and justice agencies, the United Nations based upon the reports by Quaker bodies and the findings of the various UN human rights bodies, made the following recommendations concerning women prisoners and the children of imprisoned mothers. Overall, states should ensure that female prisoners are adequately protected from violent and sexual assault, in particular, by prohibiting the inappropriate use of male correctional staff and the mixing of genders in prison facilities. For women who have committed non-violent offenses, alternatives to prison should be considered including pre-trial intervention methods, and if these women are mothers, ensure that the best interests of the child is considered in decisions on detaining or imprisoning their parent. Moreover, states should consider alternatives to pre-trial detention for mothers of babies and dependent children, including clarifying how, when, and by whom, the existence of such children is ascertained, and take into account, whether or not pre-trial detention is necessary.

This chapter presents relevant literature review for this study. First, the problem is introduced. As criminal justice systems have implemented new laws that mandate certain type of crimes to receive particular punishments, this system has "systematically" targeted certain groups, whereas these persons have substantially increased in the prison population. As women are the fastest growing segment in the criminal system, the dilemma is disaggregated to race, as it directly correlates with the subject, daughters of African-American imprisoned mothers.

African-Americans are incarcerated at a rate that doubles and triples other racial groups, and many still correlate these truths with racial inequalities and cultural injustices in American formal institutions. Nevertheless, the inadequacies of blacks in prison are a
double-hit for black women in prison. They are apart of both of the leading categories in the penal system.

As the literature reveals, the typical female offender is probably a member of the minority group, between ages 25-29, unmarried, and has one to three children under the age of ten. Moreover, she is a likely victim of physical abuse, has a current alcohol and/or drug abuse problem, multiple arrests, first arrested around 15, a high school dropout, on welfare, has low skills, and has held mainly low-wage jobs. These women, who are also mothers, have minor children who, too, will take their rightful place in society. Grimly, they are six times more likely, than other children, to follow their parents’ footsteps. As America has recognized this relatively “new” problem, solutions to aid the dilemma have been comparatively small, and somewhat unsuccessful.
CHAPTER III

CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

"Racism, sexism, and classism all converge in the problem of prisons and the justice system in the U.S. today."¹

US Prison Statistics:

The increase of mothers in prison is an alarming discovery to many residents of the United States of America. The number of women in prison is consistently on the rise so much that it is the fastest growing segment of the prison population.² According to the United States Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics report, in a year-to-year comparison, the percentage of women is now the highest it has ever been beginning with the first annual collection of prison statistics in 1926. Specific findings include the following:

- From 1980-1989, the male population increased by 112%, and the female population by 202%
- More than two-thirds of the women in prison were recidivists—having previously been sentenced to probation or incarceration as a child or an adult
- Nearly half of the women in prison (46%) had been previously sent to incarceration or probation at least twice
- 31% had been sentenced three times or more and 13%, six times or more
- Most of the women at 59% were sentenced for nonviolent

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crimes: 17% fraud, 15% larceny/theft, 12% drug offenses, 5% public-order offenses such as commercial vice or weapons violation

- An estimated 41% of the women in prison reported previous sexual or physical abuse
- A third of all female inmates reported they were under the influence of drugs at the time of their offense; 39% said they were using drugs daily in the month before their offense, and 24% reported use of a major drug (cocaine, heroin, methadone, LSD, or PCP) in that month
- More than 76% of the women have children in prison, compared to about 60% of male inmates
- Nearly 4 out of 5 mothers with children under age 18 reported that they lived with the child/children before entering prison
- 53% of the mothers with children under 18 reported that the children lived with the maternal grandparent. 22% said the children were living with the father, and another 22% said the child was living with another relative. A tenth of the mothers indicated their children were living in foster care or some other institutional setting
- 85% of the women reported they intended to live with their young child or children after release

At the end of 1989, the *Bureau of Justice Statistics Report* accounted women for 4.1 million of the adults in care and custody of corrections agencies and today the numbers have increased. Nationally, there are nearly seven times as many women in prison than in 1980, as eighty percent of these women are mothers, and seventy-five percent are mothers of minor children. The average mother has two children and her children’s average age is eight-years-old, whereas studies show that these children are six times more likely to be imprisoned in their futures. Tougher prison sentences and the impact prison have on children may be the main cause of the above statistic.

In short, Holtfreter and Morash explain that the females in the correctional system are mostly young, poor, and undereducated women of color who have complex histories.

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4Ibid.
of trauma and substance abuse. Most are nonviolent and are not threats to the community. Survival (of abuse and poverty) and substance abuse are their most common pathways to crime.\(^5\)

Blacks must prove that they are worth something to White society beyond the economic niche they help fill in prison. Blacks must prove that they are a benefit which Whites cannot do without. Once We have established ourselves as benefactors then We can begin to break down the walls of institutional racism, stop the digression of our communities, and truly advance.\(^6\)

Reports on the African-American population are even more critical to its children and its communities. The United States Department of Justice reported in 2000, half of the parents in state prisons were black, about a quarter were white, and a fifth were Hispanic. Therefore, an estimated 767,200 black children, 384,500 white children, and 301,600 Hispanic children had a parent in prison.\(^7\) Considering that the African-American population of the United States is less than either the United States’ White or Hispanic population, the report is a catastrophic truth to the plight of Black Americans. The disproportionate representation of Black Americans in the United States’ Criminal Justice System is well-documented. In *Race to Incarcerate*, Mauer reports Blacks comprise 13 percent of the national population however they are 30 percent of people arrested, 41 percent of people in jail, and 49 percent of those in prison.

Moreover, 9% of all black adults are under some form of correctional supervision

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including, in jail or prison, or on probation, or on parole, compared to 2% of white adults. As many notable blacks continue to stress, the injustices and inequalities of the American judicial system must be challenged. Nevertheless, the successful plight of blacks in America is at a constant decline and the race must not only attack injustice or racial concerns, but indeed save itself.

The racial disparities increased in incarceration rates in the 1980s and 1990s as the number of blacks sent to prison grew at a faster rate than the number of whites. Although both races increased in incarceration rates between an eleven year-span from 1979 to 1990, the number of blacks as a percentage of all persons admitted to state and federal prisons increased the highest from 39 to 53 percent. It is a grim reality that in every state, the proportion of blacks in prison exceeds all others and sometimes by a considerable amount. Nationwide blacks are 8.2 times more likely to go to prison than whites, and among individual states, the racial disparities are even higher.

Mauer continues that in the seven states of Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, the incarceration rates of blacks to whites are higher than nationwide statistics reporting at 13 percent. More shocking, Minnesota has, by far, the highest disparity as blacks in that state are incarcerated at 23 times the rate of whites, and the District of Columbia tallies in at 34. To top it off, states with the smallest racial disparities such as Hawaii and Vermont report that blacks are incarcerated at more than double the rate of whites. Ultimately, “Blacks are incarcerated nationally at a rate of 1,547 per 100,000 black residents” as in many states the rates are extremely high. In the states of Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, Wisconsin and the District of Columbia, “blacks are incarcerated at rates that exceed
2,000 per 100,000" and "the lowest incarceration rate for blacks, 570 in North Dakota, exceeds the highest rate for whites, 440 in Arizona."

Moreover, although rates have increased for both blacks and whites since the late 1980s, Mauer’s research shows that in most states, from 1988 and 1996, blacks’ rate increased more than whites as the national rate for blacks increased 67 percent from 922 to 1547 per 100,000, and the national rates for whites increased 28 percent from 134 to 188 per 100,000. The black rate of incarceration doubled in the nine states of Iowa, Kentucky, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin, “while in another twenty-six states, the rate increased by fifty percent or more.” In contrast, the white rate increased by fifty percent in fifteen states and in only two, South Dakota and Washington, the rate of whites incarceration doubled whereas the ending result reports the ratio of the rates of black to white incarceration increased from 6.8 to 8.2.8 The numbers add to a fighting cause for blacks in America.

Ultimately, all the factors contribute to the racial disparities of the “American” way of life which eventually leads to the penal system where the same is true. As often as the penal system is criticized for insufficient standards and many more inadequacies, the bureau’s purpose speaks for itself. Just as all agencies, the Federal Bureau of Prisons has created mission and vision statements. They are as follows:

Mission Statement
It is the mission of the Federal Bureau of Prisons to protect society by confining offenders in the controlled environments of prisons and community-based facilities that are safe, humane, cost-efficient, and appropriately secure, and that provide work and other

8Marc Mauer, Race to Incarcerate (New York: The New Press, 1999), 121.
self-improvement opportunities to assist offenders in becoming law-abiding citizens.

**Vision Statement**
The Federal Bureau of Prisons, judged by any standard, is widely and consistently regarded as a model of outstanding public administration, and as the best value provider of efficient, safe and humane correctional services and programs in America...The Bureau provides for public safety by assuring that no escapes and no disturbances occur in its facilities. The Bureau ensures the physical safety of all inmates through a controlled environment which meets each inmate's need for security through the elimination of violence, predatory behavior, gang activity, drug use, and inmate weapons. Through the provision of health care, mental, spiritual, educational, vocational and work programs, inmates are well prepared for a productive and crime free return to society.9

In general, the United States court system is designed so once someone has been convicted of a crime and serves their sentence; they are released back into society, but more particular, communities. It is assumed that after serving these sentences, these individuals will have learned their lesson or received justice and soon become law-abiding citizens who will less than likely re-offend or return to the penitentiary.

This “American Dream” is null and void considering the United States’ high rate of recidivism. Every prisoner’s situation is unique, and when different people are sent to prison, their sentences vary depending on their individual crime or problems. However, these “sentences” are only varied in length as there are no special treatments for particular crimes in place to assist or rehabilitate the persons of these crimes.10 As a result, there is difficulty meeting the needs of law offenders and even more difficult after

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they are all placed in the same confinement regardless of their crimes. For example, "all criminals are put in the same building, sometimes in the same cells, with other criminals who have completely different sentences. It is not strange to see a person committed for armed robbery sharing a cell with a person who has been sentenced for attempted murder or one that is sentenced for tax evasion." The convicted offenders in these cases are not the same and need to be treated separately and with completely different approaches and programs of rehabilitation.

The actuality that prisons are overcrowded, racist, and filled with crime particularly assault, does not uphold the mission or vision of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Although "rehabilitative programs are far less costly than incarceration, and often times, when informed by the principles of effective intervention, more effective and less harmful," they are not as prominent in American society as prison.

Current research is evidence that the public values rehabilitation more than increased incarceration and that the process is more cost-efficient, which, in return, should persuade legislators especially those considering how to allocate public funds. These efforts to rehabilitate prisoners have been the aspirations of many Human Rights activists. Studies show that persons who are rehabilitated transition into society at a higher success rate than a non-rehabilitated person, and although the United States has not promoted a report of such in detail, Canada, a country known for prominent health care has. In the case of the *Incarceration v. Community Comparison*, the data showed a

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11Ibid.


13Ibid.
“7% increase in recidivism (49% v. 42%) for those offenders who were imprisoned.”

Moreover focusing on drug offenders, the Drug Policy Alliance reports that United States’ citizens prefer treatment and not incarceration. Thus, with recent studies on incarceration and rehabilitation and treatment, should not the government cease to building prisons and redirect the focus to building venues designed to house productive rehabilitative programs?

Rehabilitation and treatment are alternatives to incarceration pertaining to certain crimes, but this theory and preference will not happen over night. One favorable finding for the position is in a recent survey sponsored by the Open Society Institute, Changing Attitudes Towards the Criminal Justice System, as “63% of Americans consider drug abuse a problem that should be addressed primarily through counseling and treatment rather than the criminal justice system.” For that reason, although the exposure and implementation of rehabilitative treatments are preferred and appears to be beneficial for society, will it serve its purpose, and furthermore, what will be the plight of the prison system?

Statistics of Children with Imprisoned Parents:

A good mother makes all the difference. What she is. What she does. A mother is the great influence for her children.
A mother is the great teacher of her children. For good or ill, a mother shapes and directs her children's destinies.
Motherhood is a calling. Motherhood is a challenge.

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15 Drug Policy Alliance, “Treatment vs. Incarceration.”

16 Ibid.
Today, motherhood is more demanding than ever before. It is hard to be a good mother. It is hard to be a responsible role model. Good mothers are responsible role models. Good mothers care for their children. Good mothers protect their young. Good mothers make their homes safe. Make their children safe. Good mothers defend their children.¹⁷

The United States Bureau of Justice Statistics advises about ninety percent of fathers in state prisons said that, at least, one of their minor children was living with the mother, while twenty-eight percent of the mothers said the child’s father was the primary caregiver. Also, fifty-three percent of mothers said that while in prison, their children’s maternal grandparents were the caregivers as opposed to the thirteen percent of fathers.¹⁸

As it is popular in many cultures for a child’s place to be with the mother, a maternal incarceration is more detrimental than paternal. As natural caregivers, mothers have a dominant role in the lives of their children and when they are absent, for any reasons, the children will not go unaffected. Even more common, third-generation parenting plays a role in the life of children with an imprisoned mother as many grandparents become the primary caregivers of their daughters’ children.

According to When the Bough Breaks: Mothers in Prison, a documentary film, “children with incarcerated mothers are more likely to wet their beds, do poorly in school and refuse to eat.” In addition, the children experience financial hardship as many of them are already in poverty-stricken areas and more crucial, the mental side of the children is challenged as they carry the shame and social stigma of prison and fear for the


¹⁸US Department of Justice, “Almost 1.5 Million Minor Children Have a Mother or Father in Prison.”
safety of their mother. Not only does the children affect themselves, but this behavior also affects society. These children are considered at-risk and they are at an increased hazard to have poor academic treatment, truancy, dropping out of school, gang involvement, early pregnancy, drug abuse and delinquency,” nevertheless, their concerns are overlooked by many children advocates.19 These children and their mothers are essential to the development and overall health of society. More important, if the mother is sent away and not rehabilitated, the effect of the mother’s separation, as well as the mother’s maladaptive habits, will become a negative concern for the child and society.

The Child Welfare League of America’s data parallels the aforementioned as it has documented from its studies the effects on children of parental separation and incarceration. The child’s reactions are listed in six categories. The first, “self-image” includes identification with incarcerated parent, awareness of social stigmas, and low self-esteem. The second category is the child’s “cognitive development” as they may have intrusive thoughts about parents, concerns about outcomes and uncertain futures, fatalism, and flashbacks to traumatic events.

The third category details the child’s “emotions” as they are mixed with fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, loneliness, abandonment, embarrassment, guilt, resentment, emotional withdrawal from friends and family. Category four relates to the child’s “mental health” as it may include depression, eating and sleeping disorders, anxiety and hyper-arousal, attention disorders, and developmental regression; as category five, their “behavior” may reflect physical aggression and disruptive behavior. Category six focuses

on the child’s “education” which may include diminished academic performances and classroom behavior difficulties which eventually leads to truancy and drop-outs.20

Adding to the behavior, “children of imprisoned mothers generally have insecure relationships with their mothers and caregivers” considering the loss and attachment of the mother.21 Reaffirming the CWLA’s reports, Poehlmann states that “researchers found, children’s reaction to the separation from their mothers typically include sadness, worry, confusion, anger, loneliness, fear, sleep problems, and developmental regressions.”22 These psychological, emotional, and physical needs will more than likely go unaddressed as the children do not find comfort or security in their home placements or provisional agencies, and often times lead a life of instability.

Little attention has been paid to the plight of children with incarcerated parents and little is known about how to assist them. In efforts to offer a solution, there are several types of programming for children of prisoners that are in existence throughout the United States and according to the CWLA, they are grouped in four categories; Corrections-Based, Community-Setting, Community-Based, and Child-Welfare Based:

Nevertheless, the general objectives of these programs are to embrace parental contact. The Corrections-Based Programs that are centered in prisons and jails are not seeking the primary interest of the child. To begin with, it is housed in prison. Although it is a convenient place because the parent cannot be released, it is not an appropriate or the best place for a child to visit. Further, parenting classes, prenatal and postpartum

20CWLA, “What Happens to the Children?”

21Ibid.

classes on such topics as infant development, nutrition and immunization are offered, but there are no reports of rehabilitation for the parent. Ultimately, these type of programs focus on maintaining and enhancing contact as it facilitates visiting and communication programs for imprisoned parents and their children.

The second type of program is the Community-Setting that operates as alternatives to incarceration for parents under criminal justice supervision. For example, a mother convicted of a nonviolent felony may enter one of these programs as a condition of probation. The goal is to keep offender parents and their children together in the community, while providing services that preserve and strengthen families. The programs typically provide residential and/or day-reporting services. Again, this is another type of program that focuses on the parent.

Thirdly, the Community-Based Programs and possibly the most sufficient by far, do focus on the children, however its common agenda is to provide and increase communication between parents and children. In addition, these types of programs provide support groups for children and caregivers, and are supported by members of the community. The Child Welfare-Based programs have similar agendas to Community Based programs, but these type of services primarily deal with children in foster care, as they provide support groups for children and caregivers, transportation to visits, facilitate contacts with parents, individual and family therapy, and reunification services for recently released prisoners. Thus, as seen above, programs that primarily cater to the children are lost in the “holistic approach” as many of the programs thrive to include parents and caregivers. As there have been a number of national surveys conducted to determine the range and extent of programs for inmate-mothers, few numbers of women
were involved in any meaningful parenting programs. For instance, only 14% of women prisoners were enrolled in parenting classes, less than 10% of all prisoners were enrolled in drug treatment, only about 10% were enrolled in psychological counseling, and only 5.3% of all prisoners were enrolled in employment training programs. Pollock concludes that mothers in prison programs, should provide, the opportunity for children to have expanded visitation with their mother in a natural setting, the ability for children to those who understand what it is like to have a parent in prison, and the ability to receive support for issues and problems in the child’s life that the inmate-mother cannot assist with. It is clear that all the previously mentioned programs do not apply to “recommended” criteria.

Largely, women and African-Americans make up a majority of the growing and current prison population. Considering that children of incarcerated mothers are six times more likely to be incarcerated, are the women who make up majority of the prison population, daughters, of these incarcerated parents? Moreover, since the mother is the primary care giver of the child, thus the child’s first “teacher”- what are the contributing factors related to the mother’s deviant behavior that not only impacts, but influences the life of the child?

The CWLA reports children with imprisoned mothers experience an accumulation of risk and the factors that combine to create a multiplicity of these inter-related risks are poverty, parental substance abuse, parental mental illness, exposure to criminal activity, and child maltreatment. The parent who enters prison is guilty of a crime and often drug abuse, whereas they will not receive adequate mental or medical health care. They are

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23Pollock, “Parenting Programs in Women’s Prisons.”
not rehabilitated, complete their served sentence, and soon reunite with their offspring. The child will not only be influenced by the parent’s maladaptive way of life, but experience the harshness of the parent’s sufferings as they strive to gainfully transition back into society.

As poverty has a multiple effect entailing the quality and adequacies of housing, education, and employment, many offenders have no chance of making it on their own. Linking poverty with other habits similar to its victims, the substance abuse rate of parents of incarcerated children are alarming as “85% of parents report drug abuse prior to incarceration and 65% of incarcerated women report using drugs regularly.” Another detrimental factor, literally, are the parent’s mental illness as 24% of the mothers account for this illness, which may be a result of family instability as 60% of incarcerated mothers report sexual or physical abuse.24 Again the statistical outcome of the child is a challenged success.

All of these factors add to the maltreatment of the child. They are first-hand exposed to the parents and/or community’s criminal activity, and are placed in different systems and with different caregivers, where they may expose their learned behavior. The child develops a family pattern that simultaneously prevents others from providing appropriate care. Moreover, upon the parent’s release, stresses associated with community and family reintegration may also increase the risk of abuse or neglect.

In the end, the children may experience multiple risks to their cognitive and behavioral development and attachment relationships. They may deal with involuntary separation from their mother, and may develop a history of living in poverty and maternal

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24Ibid., 142.
substance abuse, depending upon the characteristics of the substitute caregiver.

Ultimately, it is the caregiver who determines the ongoing contact with the mother and the nature of the child’s social support, whereas all of the above mentioned, factors the statistical outcome of the child.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

Analysis of Prison Literature:

The voice of the child of an incarcerated parent is not only lost in data reports and new-found facts and figures, but it is, too, often omitted in literary genres that depict and relate to prison life. From literary classics to film documentaries, a majority of these works detail the offender’s life and the devastating effect of incarceration on the body, mind, and soul of the offender.\(^1\) While prison literature focuses primarily on the ups and downs of the penal system, the effect that the prisoner has on the persons “outside” are not as present as these genres often expose or as they give voice to the imprisoned.

The *Heath Anthology of American Literature* has included a new component to its text. This cluster section titled “Prison Literature” primarily deals with contemporary writers who began their writing careers in prison and/or prominent writers who have imagined the prison experience. Although this text examines contemporary works, prison literature is not a theme that recently began in the 21st century. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s American Classic, *Scarlet Letter*, begins in prison as, it too, concentrates on the injustices of American society and highlights how the United States the confronts majority of its social problems - through the prison system. Additionally, Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” and Nat Turner’s “Confessions” end in prison, as Henry David Thoreau’s “Resistance to the Civil Government” centers on the prison experience. Also, literature

of the Civil Rights Era encompasses incarceration including two prominent leaders, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, who wrote about and from prison. Malcolm X extensively discusses his prison experience in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Dr. King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” is an exemplary example of how incarceration highlights injustice.²

In women’s voices in literature, particularly black women, Alice Walker deals with the reality of prison in her Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Color Purple*. In the work, she depicts prison life through the most physically dominant female character, Sofia Butler. Again, the theme of the detrimental effect prison can have on a person and the reality that the United States uses prison to solve its social problems is vivid in this work as well. A closer look at the role of women in prison highlights two of the above works mentioned the classic, *Scarlet Letter* and the award winning, *The Color Purple*. Hence, the analysis related to the impact of an incarcerated individual on others, especially, the children, is presented through selected literature and the experiences of the researcher.

Hawthorne’s Prison:

Hawthorne’s work addresses spiritual and moral issues in Puritan American society, contrasting passion and individuality. This transcendentalist influence is seen in his use of symbolism throughout the text, particularly with the character Pearl. Pearl is the daughter of an incarcerated and ostracized mother, although she does not experience, or rather, is too young to experience her mother’s imprisonment. Her mother, Hester Prynne, the novel’s protagonist, is arrested and imprisoned for the immoral crime of

²Ibid., 2653.
adultery and is sentenced, not to remain in prison physically, but metaphorically as she is forced to wear a prominent scarlet letter “A” denoting her crime for the remainder of her life. Both Pearl and the “A” are symbols of the sin Hester has committed that constantly reminds her of the flaw throughout the novel. Hester is described in the public marketplace:

She bore in her arms a child, a baby of some three months old, who winked and turned aside its little face from the too vivid light of day; because its existence, heretofore, had brought it acquainted only with the gray twilight of a dungeon, or other darksome apartment of the prison. When the young woman-mother of this child-stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed to be her first impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought or fastened into her dress. In a moment, however wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her hip and with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed looked around at her townspeople and her neighbors. ³

As Hawthorne notes Prynne’s “wise” judgment, to disregard her motherly instincts and place her need of “signifying” to the townsmen, “I am not ashamed;” she indirectly chooses not to be a mother in her actions. She does not consider the needs of her child, particularly securing it, but rather insists on making a silent statement for her audience. This decision foreshadows the remainder of her actions that reflect her failed parental obligations throughout the work and her neglect to become a parent to her daughter, Pearl.

Chapter IV of the text is anchored in the behavior of the infant, as more is revealed

about the naming of the child. Pearl, “as being of great price, purchased with all she had, her mother’s only treasure!” Again, the child is seen as a symbol as this name refers to the book of Matthew 13: 45-46 in the Holy Bible, as the kingdom of heaven is explained “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went out and sold all he had, and bought it.” Thus, for Pearl, who is young during most of the events of this novel, real importance lies in her ability to provoke the adult characters in the book.

Pearl does not deal with the sin of her being and never develops a voice of her existence or her mother’s sin and/or offense. Because she has not truly undergone the experience of her mother’s shame, she does not successfully develop a voice as a child of an offender. Instead, she is the voice of radicalism as Chillingworth says, frowning, referring to Pearl in the graveyard, “There is no law, nor reverence for authority, no regard for human ordinances or opinions, right or wrong, mixed up with that child’s composition. . . What in Heaven’s name is she?” In essence, Hester loses her role as a mother, as she rarely treats Pearl as a child. Pearl easily dictates Hester’s life and Hester often regards to her child as something “devilish” and never disciplines her. As a result, like many children with imprisoned mothers, Pearl is reduced to being an “it” - a symbol of something not restrained by organized systems, however, she is wiser than man who chooses not to interact or understand her.

Hawthorne’s goal for the Scarlet Letter was to center on the pain and sufferings Hester endures and even considers Pearl as one of those pains. He highlights the

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4 Ibid., 1071.

5 Ibid., 1096.
moralities and ethical standards of society, not the influence a prison or “prisonization” has on others. If this were so, Dimmesdale, the character who is affected most by the imprisonment as it eventually leads to his death, would have been the novel’s protagonist.

Walker’s Prison:

In a different context, Walker’s text entails the women’s prison experience through zero-tolerant Sofia Butler. Notably, Sofia is the only main character who is a mother that lives with her biological children, whereas this leads to the subject of mothers in prison. Sofia is introduced in the story as a saucy, strong-minded and strong-willed mother-to-be. As like many women prisoners, she enters prison with health care issues. She is a victim of sexual and physical abuse by her male family members and her husband.

Despite the physical quarrels she and her husband have, readers can sense she is a good mother, though not necessarily a good wife. She takes care of her children and home; moreover, when she decides to leave her husband, she takes all five of her children (she eventually has another totaling six) with her. The love Sofia has for her children as well as her temper is her downfall. As the mayor’s wife, Miss Millie, equates cleanliness with love, Sofia is sentenced to twelve years in prison for relentless lack of self-control when she engages in an oral dispute with Miss Millie. Celie explains, “All these children... Cute as little buttons... She [Miss Millie] stop, put her hand on one of the children head. Say, and such strong white teef... She say to Sofia, All your children so clean, she say, would you like to work for me, be my maid? Sofia says, Hell no.”

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confident person who is often filled with pride, Sofia’s response reflects that she is offended by Miss Millie’s kind suggestion. Immediately, Sofia is attacked by white society and “the police come, start slinging the children off the mayor, bang they heads together. Sofia really start to fight,” as she screams at the prizefighter to take her children home.

A victim of police brutality, Sofia portrays many offenders’ complaints on being arrested:

When I see Sofia I don’t know why she still alive. They crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her tongue the size of my arm, it stick out tween her teef like a piece of rubber. She can’t talk. And she just about the color of an eggplant. ³

Although neither Sofia nor Celie details what actually takes place, from the way Sofia now looks, as opposed to her being what Celie and Shug once described as a woman who did not look as if she had six children, and who even Mr. ___ identifies as pretty, it is vivid to all, she will never be the same, physically.

As revealed earlier in the statistical data, when Sofia gets incarcerated, her children go to live with her sister, Odessa, a maternal relative. Nevertheless, the children’s father Harpo is still present and very much in their lives. In addition, Harpo’s woman Mary Agnes (Squeak), as revealed in a conversation Sofia has with Harpo while he, Squeak, Mr. ___, Shug Avery, and Celie visit her in prison. Sofia inquires, “How the

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³Ibid., 90.
⁸Ibid., 91-92.
children? She ast. They all fine, say Harpo. Tween Odessa and Squeak, they git by.'”

Again, although Harpo is alive and able to care for his children, Sofia’s sister Odessa and her husband assume the main caregiver role in the children’s lives. Possibly to fulfill one of the “womanism” themes, that of unity, Walker presents the family as a united front, yet she still yields to the truth and primarily places the children with a maternal relative.

After the family conjures a plot to rescue Sofia from prison (at the expense of Mary Agnes’ rape), Sofia quickly becomes a victim of the society King describes in The Sentencing Project. She does not transition successfully back into society and is then sentenced to a figurative prison, as the maid of Miss Millie. Consequently, she becomes a mother to Miss Millie’s children, particularly Eleanor. She is reintroduced as a biological mother on Christmas Day as Miss Millie graciously allows her to spend fifteen minutes (due to a driving error) with her children. She has been absent from their lives for five years, and she comments, “Nobody told them I was coming, so they don’t know who I is. Cept the oldest two. They fall on me, and hug me. And then all the little ones start to hug me too.” Sofia is now a stranger to her younger children. Living the isolation and agony that being a mother in prison brings, it is the lack of prison visits that impacts the relationship between Sofia and her children. Sofia complains, “I am at they beck and call all day. They won’t let me see my children. They won’t let me see no mens.” Her cry to maintain a mother role is prevalent as she places the need to be a mother before her own.

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9 Ibid., 94.
10 Ibid., 109.
11 Ibid., 108.
She sees her children being first, and then for herself the pleasures of a man. Although Sofia is pleased with her children’s placement, she still suffers from role strain. She is often seen depressed because her position as a mother no longer exists with her biological children.

Sofia’s children behaviors are introduced as they react to their mother’s incarceration and their feelings are slightly surveyed. Highlighting Johnson’s theory that children with imprisoned mothers ages fifteen to eighteen usually demonstrate negative behaviors, Sofia’s oldest boy, whose name is not mentioned, is described as “tall and handsome, all the time serious. And he mad a lot,” as he corrects Sofia on her diction while she converses with Celie. Not having a mother-child bond with her son, Sophia does not recognize his feelings and misreads his actions. She does not acknowledge the root of his problem or any of her children’s concerns. She and the community eventually discover the challenges facing her children when they become older.

Celie describes Sofia to Nettie and explains to her that the woman she saw with the mayor’s wife was the defeated Sofia. Nettie stated, “One minute I was saying howdy to a living woman. The next minute nothing was living there. Only its shape,”12 Celie’s explains that her daughter-in-law was sentenced to twelve years, but they “kept her eleven and a half years, give her six months off for good behavior so she could come home early to her family. Her bigger children married and gone, and her littlest children mad at her, don’t know who she is. Think she act funny, look old and dote on that little

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12Ibid, 137.
white gal she raise.”\textsuperscript{13} The actions of Sofia’s older children are loud and clear, as their true feelings are reflected in their behavior. Just as many children with imprisoned mothers, they did not maintain contact with Sofia. Moreover, as she has exited prison and is not behaving in the manner they think appropriate, they do not know her, do not care to know her and for the most part, do not like her.

In this small passage, Walker addresses only the children’s actions. Embracing the ole’ saying, “actions speak louder than words” Walker focuses on what the children do. She could have chosen to communicate the children’s feelings through an adult conversation, disconnecting its authenticity, as the voices of children become the adult’s whispers; nevertheless, she simply disregards their behaviors and unfortunately, like many imprisoned mothers, Sofia misses out on important irretrievable moments and events in her children’s lives. Instead, she experiences the psychological effects that are affiliated with mothers and prisoners and their children who long for family and freedom.

Moreover, as a walking dead person, Sofia has lost the mother-child bond with her children as they neglect to refer to her as their parent. Celie confesses, “Children call Odessa mama. Call Squeak little mama. Call Sophia ‘Miss.’”\textsuperscript{14} Imprisoned Sophia not only loses her spunk, but her role as a mother to her children which may result in her efforts to still “raise” Miss Millie’s daughter, Eleanor. On the other hand, Walker’s hopeful ending allows the character to regain her identity, and soon, reclaim her motherhood as she chooses her daughter Henrietta over Eleanor’s needs. Ironically, in

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 205.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 206.
the end, Eleanor returns to Miss Sofia as her maid, primarily focusing on the dietary needs of Henrietta. "Yeah, say Sofia. Miss Eleanor Jane gon look in on Henrietta and every other day promise to cook her something she’ll eat."\(^{15}\)

The "mission" of prison system defined previously, failed Sofia. Like many women in prison, Sofia, once a young, fiery, woman of color, soon becomes a little colored girl and most of all, what means so much to her, the ability to live free from restrictions and be a mother, are all taken away. Although Sofia does not physically engage in any more altercations after her release from prison, her feelings towards whites are primarily the same as she displays them through her conversations with Ms. Celie and her remarks to Eleanor about her son.

Ultimately, Walker examines the role that prisons play, such as, children witnessing parent incarceration, prisoners’ inability to transition back into society, and most of all, the importance of prison visits and/or communication between parents in prison and children. Sofia’s children do not visit her in prison, nor does she correspond with them while she is in prison. As a result, they do not know her and she loses her role as mother in their lives. The reasons or the issues for this decision not to have contact between Sofia and her children are not addressed in the novel, but it is a key factor many specialists consider crucial to the survival and development of the child.

Also, Walker does not fully give the child a "voice" in the novel as she focuses on adults, primarily the women. Sofia’s children are only referred to by Celie describing Sofia’s out-of-place position and two of the six children’s actions are noted, as only one of their names is mentioned. Possibly, one of the older children could have become a

\(^{15}\)Ibid., 288.
character of focus whereas more about their life could have been revealed. Overall, the child’s voice of the mother’s incarceration is never directly revealed, but the actions of the children portray a dismissal of Sofia’s parental role and reflect their “voice” although it is not a holistic one.

Further, if Sofia did maintain contact with her family, instead of “losing” herself, would she have been as Mr. ___ described, the same “crazy” Sofia setting a “crazy” example, for her children’s “crazy” future, who would in return create “crazy” situations? How are Sofia’s children affected by this behavior that led her to prison? A little of this “crazy” is seen in Henrietta, who is paradoxically Sofia’s last child and is being reared by her mother.

Prison Films:

Films that portray prison life have similar themes as prison literature. They exploit the brutality of the penal system and depict strategies inmates use to survive. Prison films that center chiefly on women surfaced in Hollywood, in the 1930s, in such films as Hold Your Man.¹⁶ However, Caged, released in 1950, and Women’s Prison released in 1955, depicted prison life as the entire story line of the films was set on prison grounds. The theme of these “B” rated cinematic works were that young heroines’ lives could be conformed to righteous living, something that prison along with Pulp and Paperback Magazines, sought to instill in the audiences of each.

In the 1970s, the films took a turn as many of them transformed into works that exploited women’s sexuality, rather than real prison life. The most well-known examples

are the 1974 releases *Ilsa: She Wolf of the SS* and *Caged Heat*. African-American
actress Pam Grier is noted for her performances in *The Big Doll House* (1971), *Women in
Cages* (1971) and *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), as she represents the African-American
woman in prison. Her race is overshadowed by her sexiness as these films exploit
women’s sexuality with catfights and shower scenes. Women who are subjected to
physical and sexual assault usually by other women, and women who often engage in
lesbianism, are the themes of the women in prison films during the 21st century.
Consequently, many of them are banned by the British Board Film of Classification and
the United Kingdom. Moreover, the above themes have maneuvered to mainstream
works such as *Chicago* (2002) and *Strangers with Candy* (2006).17

Women-in-prison films that are not created for Hollywood cinema have also been
influenced with these same themes. After four years of narrative and case study research
in Minnesota’s Shakopee Women’s Correctional Facility, Cheryl Dunye and Catherine
Croutch produced *Stranger Inside*. They presented the work at the San Francisco
International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and were awarded Best Women’s Prison
Drama in 2001.18

Dunye’s Prison:

*Stranger Inside* is a thorough depiction of female prison life as it traces a young
girl in “juvie” becoming a woman in a maximum security prison. The film opens *in
medias res* at the Youth Authority Department of Corrections facility with its main

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17 Ibid.

18 Popcorn Q Movies, “Stranger Inside,” Movie Reviews
character, Treasure Lee, celebrating her birthday. She is seen holding a cigar, and
dancing with her girlfriend and fellow inmates to the hip-hop artists Jay-Z’s, “I Just
Wanna Luv Ya.” They all scream “Go Treasure, It’s ya birthday” and conclude their
chants repeating “G, G, G, G,” denoting the name of their prison family. The women are
interrupted as a male Correctional Officer (CO) enters the room, instructs the women to
cease their actions, and informs Treasure that her wish has been granted.19

The audience views an unexpected side of prison life as the CO, referred to as
Leonard by Treasure, openly sit and converse while sharing marijuana, as Treasure
confesses to Leonard that she stabbed another inmate Keisha, to ensure her wish of being
sent to a maximum security prison in hopes of being united with her birth mother,
Brownie are fulfilled. Treasure boasts and pauses between marijuana puffs, “Moms doing
life... I never met her... only seen pictures... I’m going home.”

Jay-Z’s popular hit sets the tone for the film. This hip-hop artist provides a
portrait of ghetto life and his song’s title depicts the feelings and wants of most prisoners,
particularly Treasure, “I just wanna luv ya.” Furthermore, the scene explains why many
juvenile delinquents become adult offenders. There is no discipline present in the facility
and although Treasure has built a trustworthy relationship with the CO, it is clear who has
the upper hand in the relationship as she openly admits a violation of the law and is
currently violating it. Moreover, no form of rehabilitation is taking place in the facility.
Treasure is in need of security, identity, and most of all, love, which is obviously lacking.

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as she constantly engages in delinquent behavior, and longs to be with her mother, reflecting the primary stage of development for a child with an incarcerated mother.

The health care of the prison system is exploited as Treasure is transferred to the maximum security prison. While new inmates or “fresh fish” are being checked in, they undergo several procedures where they are informed by the COs, the rules and regulations of the facility. After being stripped naked in the presence of male guards where many women report sexual abuse, every part of the women’s bodies is inspected. It is obvious that one inmate, Tanya Pierce, is uncomfortable with the presence of the men and the procedures of the prison. She voices her opinion about the sterility of the gynecology equipment that guards attempt to use on all of the women who are checking in. She exclaims, “Wait a minute, you can’t use that on all of us- it’s not sterile.” Consequently, CO Nelson refers to this “princess” behavior as “interfering with an officer’s performance of their duties” and Tanya is sent to the “hole” (solitary).

Once Treasure is inside, it is difficult to overlook another prison inadequacy, the overcrowded cell. There are four other inmates in the small room, adding Treasure and Tanya, once she is released from the hole. Thus, it is safe to conclude that there are four to six persons per cell, and only four beds. Like many women who have been “in the system” for a majority of their lives, Treasure finds security quickly as she is comforted when she meets another GG Gang member and cellmate Leisha. In this scene, a softer side of Treasure is evident as she protects Tanya’s, (a stranger) check-in bag from her gang sister, who attempts to raid the property. The audience recognizes the act of humility and senses that Treasure may not be so bad after all.

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20Ibid.
Furthermore, after being sentenced to work duty for obtaining illegal food, Treasure is shown a kind or forgiving gesture by Mama Katz. Earlier, Mama Katz, a white prison cellmate, encounters an oral dispute with Treasure. However, when Treasure returns from work duty, Mama Katz is sleeping on the floor, indirectly indicating that Treasure may sleep in her bunk. Both incidents depict a cell filled with kindness, and in a hardcore manner, as echoed in Berry’s research, it illustrates how women in prison must present a certain type of image and the strategies many of them use to survive.

In bed, Treasure daydreams flashbacks as a child of an incarcerated mother. Yielding to third-generation parenting, Dunye allows reassure to reflect on brighter days spent with her maternal grandmother in a vegetable garden, as she finds her mother’s jail pictures in her grandmother’s Bible. Most noticeably, Treasure reflects on the cruel taunts of neighborhood children shouting “You aint got no mama!” as Treasure begins to defend herself and her mother with physical quarrels. The reality of the dream is the horrors that many children of incarcerated parents undergo. Children wear the shame and humiliation of their parents and quite frequently, many of them long to see or hear from their parents, whereas much of these decisions depend upon the caregiver of the child.

The next morning, Treasure is welcomed by her friend from “juvie,” Shadow, who briefs her on the ins and outs of the prison. It is obvious that Shadow is not the same girl from “juvie” as she informs Treasure of all the positive things to do in prison, including vocations such as learning to read. Shadow explains to Treasure that everyone in prison has to work their program as she becomes a representation of inmates who aspire to change and make the best of the prison system. Moreover, she is a representation of the
statistic that many women in prison lack education and are victims of truancy or high school drop-out. It is inferred that Shadow has not obtained a high school diploma, and, thereby, acknowledging her inability to read. This positive view of prison life is interrupted as she continues her depiction of Treasure’s new home and explains the set-up of the prison. There are three levels, Unit A the top level containing the “lifers” (where Brownie is located), Unit B occupied by them or the traditional prisoners, and Unit C, the basement, better known as the “hole” where all the “crazies” live. Although the women are separated by levels, “in the yard” they all are free to interact with each other as murders, shoplifters, and prostitutes are all unjustly forced together.

As the women enter the yard, they witness one of Treasure’s cellmates, Doodle Armstrong flirting with a married CO (insinuating they are having an affair). Meanwhile, a sexual lesbian “groupie” Sugar approaches the women making her “self” easily accessible to Treasure. The women behave “as promiscuous men”. Shadow makes a sarcastic comment to Treasure about Sugar; “This is a G girl’s door knob” as they do a fancy pound shake and say laughing in unison “everybody gets a turn.”21 Lastly, Treasure engages in her first encounter with Brownie. Shadow signals Brownie’s presence to Treasure as Treasure confirms Brownie’s identity from afar. Treasure recognizes a tattoo her mother has on her arm in a photo from prison that Treasure found in her grandmother’s Bible. As several aspects of the prison experience are surveyed in the yard, it is clear that the intermixing of inmates is an injustice. Shadow, an example of inmate rehabilitation, is constantly forced to interact with negative behaviors and trouble makers such as Brownie.

21Ibid.
Subsequently, Treasure is introduced to Brownie and her children (prison crew) during a basketball game. Brownie is playing unfair and “dirty” as she strikes a Spanish inmate, Rosita, and bloodies her nose. Boasting loudly about her actions, Brownie sarcastically solicits another player to join them. Treasure seizes the opportunity to meet her mother. However, against the will of Shadow, Treasure replaces Rosita on the opposing team of Brownie’s. Brownie is impressed with Treasure’s game literally, as she asks Treasure her name. Treasure responds, “Treasure, Treasure Lee” in hopes that “Moms” will identify her, but the acknowledgment does not take place. The scene portrays the variety of roles women play in prison. To remain a “moral woman,” inmates sleep with prison guards who are oftentimes married, dispelling the belief that all women in prison become lesbians. Nevertheless, this too is a statistic as 10% of the women in prison, become pregnant. Many inmates become or are lesbians and some are masculine or “butch” and others are feminine or “femme.” These two usually join and create society’s traditional relationship of man and woman. This union is an example of one of the types of families in prison - as gangs are also a depiction that are oftentimes formed by race, bullies and flunkies, or juvenile cliques. Nonetheless, as depicted in Holfreter’s research pertaining to the formation of families by female prisoners, both provide the essentials of a family as a sense of belonging and protection is given.

The film’s heart of the story emerges as the women engage in group therapy, a mandatory process for all new inmates. In the first session, the women’s lives are examined as they refer to their past while revealing their background and past criminal convictions. Every woman in the circle who speaks is a recidivist and most of them have
been “doing time” since they were juveniles. One inmate speaks of characteristics associated with the ethno-racial prison as she roars that she is not angry, but she was sixteen-years-old with two kids and begging for assistance. She declares she was never given assistance and eventually resorted to criminal activity that led her to prison. These sessions show a more humane side of the women and can be viewed as a rehabilitation method. Nevertheless, because it is only required for new inmates for a certain period of time, (until they pass) many women go to prison with a inspirational mind to change, but much of it leaves, as they are forced to adapt to the ways prison life that is explored throughout the remainder of the film. This reality is a direct reflection of the low percentage rate of inmates engaging in rehabilitative prison programs.

Trying to win the femme lesbian Sugar, Treasure woos her during a card game with G sisters Leisha and Shadow, as they are bombarded with the frustrated inmate Kit (Brownie’s white daughter), who questions the whereabouts of Sugar, her lover. Disgruntled with the interruption, Treasure physically attacks Kit and as a result, the two are thrown “in the hole” for thirty days. The grim reality of prison life is seen here as “the hole” is nothing but a concrete box-shaped room that consists of a toilet, a concrete shaped bed with no mattress, and a sink. Persons occupying the unit have only, tissue, soap and toothpaste. Initially, upset about her placement in the hole, she realizes that she has driven herself further away from her mother. Treasure keeps herself busy with exercises and artistic expressions, as she draws her mother’s face on the wall with toothpaste. She is unexpectedly given hope when Brownie whispers to her through a
small square peep opening on the cell, commending her on a job well done with Kit. She invites Treasure to visit her once she is out and affirms, “I got a feeling about you.”

Once released, Treasure bribes another inmate with cigarettes to attain a work duty pass that will allow her access to Brownie’s floor, Unit A. Treasure reveals the picture (shown in her earlier flashbacks) she has of her mother from her grandmother’s Bible. She aggressively flashes the photo to Brownie and her children, and insinuates that Brownie is her mother. Treasure is hoping for a “talk show” mother-daughter reunion, but Brownie dismisses everyone from her cell. She gives Treasure a brief synopsis of her background, and denounces Treasure by saying she has no feelings for her and that Treasure is on her own. This heart-break moment displays the lifestyle many women develop in prison. They create their cliques for protection and are very reluctant to trust new incomers. Moreover, this means of protection does disappear upon prison release. Even so, with the aforementioned being a sad case, it does not overshadow the disturbing reality of actions that are transpiring in Brownie’s cell. She is allowed freely to violate prison laws as she is seen drinking alcohol, playing loud music, and smoking cigarettes. The links and cracks in the penal system are exploited once again.

In the yard, Brownie observes Treasure’s macho style and has CO Nelson, (who does not abide by prison rules and engages in illegal activities with inmate Brownie) arrange a private meeting with Treasure in the cafeteria. Here, Brownie apologizes to Treasure and the two are inseparable. Treasure’s wish has been granted and she is on a natural high. In a group therapy session, Treasure now speaks about her feelings as she
reveals that her goals in life are to be with her mother, get a place in the hood, and a fly car.

In alignment with the feelings of Treasure, this is a happy session where all the inmates are expressing their aspirations in life. One inmate even confesses to having a Bachelor’s Degree in Business. More notable, inmate Tanya Peirce is pregnant, justifying her complaints about the sterility of the gynecology equipment and highlighting the fact that women in prison, who are pregnant, receive inadequate health care, as many of their pregnancies end in fatalities due to medical mishaps. Additionally, Treasure’s low expectations of life display the mentality of G-girls from poverty-stricken areas, a reality that once she transfers back into the general society not rehabilitated. Treasure will still be a “problem” to society.

Immediately following the scene, the aspect of prison visits are displayed as Shadow, Mama Katz and other inmates are visiting with family and friends while Treasure who does not have family or friends visiting, receives an unexpected visit from an obvious drug addict who is a friend of Brownie’s. As Brownie and CO Nelson looks on from afar, Treasure hesitantly and naively accepts a box from her unknown and insulting visitor. Brownie continues to use and manipulate Treasure by wooing her with motherly love gestures and giving her a matching tattoo. Brownie relates to Treasure that she can get anything from the “outside” she wants - including drugs – an item Brownie refuses to sell. Treasure re-enacts a childhood moment by asking “Moms” to blow her painful tattoo, get her a walkman radio, and to make arrangements so they can be cellmates. As time reveals, Treasure only receives the walkman and is sent by Brownie to
Kit’s cell. Kit’s Nazi cellmates are disgusted at her interaction with blacks, but they respect Kit and her choices. In the cell, Kit introduces Treasure to Brownie’s drug operation.

Inmate Kit explains to Treasure her connection with Brownie and even more, how she has accepted Brownie’s to represent that of mother for life. Ironically, as Kit is seen calling Treasure a “nigger” in a previous scene, she does not regard Brownie in the same manner, and now that Treasure is her “sister.” Her commitment to Brownie who is a mother figure, overpowers her prejudices. The prostitution and manipulation of inmates are vivid in Kit’s character as she deals cocaine for Brownie and maintains loyalty to her in spite of her jealous feelings towards Treasure. Treasure has indirectly taken Kit’s girlfriend Sugar, and now is slowly taking her mother, Brownie. In need of love, Kit is taken in by Brownie and since then Brownie is pretty much all she has. Kit is also used to foreshadow the story’s ending as she tells Treasure; Brownie is a lifer because she did a 1-8-7 (murdered) on her cellmate. Deeply in love with Brownie, the women share marijuana and sell drugs in the open yard- nodding their heads calmly and in unison about and accepting Brownie’s malicious actions. As juvenile delinquents and habitual offenders, Treasure and Kit, are realities for black and white communities that choose to neglect the needs of women in prison and their children.

Representing butch lesbianism, Treasure is seen admiring the muscles she has acquired from working out in the yard, and goes to a “church session” with Sugar. The two engage in passionate sex as the Christian Madonna is disregarded or simply ignored. Possibly, Dunye inserts this scene to question the Christian morality of lesbianism, or it
may be a statement that Christ and/or the Virgin Mary, are irrelevant to women who deal with certain type of issues. Even so, the act also shows the difference in Treasure’s emotional behavior as she does not successfully partake in the act the second time around.

Still elated, Treasure visits Shadow in the library who shares that she is interested in starting a prison photo project. With Treasure’s new connect she attains all the items Shadow needs to build her camera and make the project a success. As both women come closer to reaching their dreams, it is obvious they are growing apart as Shadow tells Treasure to be careful of Brownie. Treasure replies, “I have been waiting all my life... just be happy for me.” Again, Treasure portrays the child of an incarcerated mother embracing and drunk with the unity of togetherness with the mother.

Upon returning to her cell Treasure finds that Mama Katz has been released from prison and without words, leaves her blossomed violet behind for Treasure as a kind gesture. The flower is presented to her by the new Asian cellmate, Mei who has agreed to cook Treasure fried rice for protection. Treasure is flattered and easily agrees to the task. Mei adds another dimension of women seeking protection in prison as she uses her special privileges, in this case a diet, to gain security.

Near the mailroom, a mother-daughter moment is seen as Treasure and Brownie share fresh oranges from California that brings back memories of Grandma’s tomato garden for Treasure. These recollections also lead Treasure to question Brownie about her actions to never write or maintain contact with her family. Brownie professes that she does not remember anything because she was always on the street, and that she
stayed on the street, because of her mother's (Treasure's grandma) negative words of her
not "being nothing." As they both appear to be a product of negative thinking, Treasure
attests to the negative comments made by Grandma and says that she used to tell her the
same thing. Treasure's denouncing her grandma and cursing her being shows that
Treasure is slowly coming full circle as a child directly and negatively influenced by an
incarcerated mother. Also, the caregiver and parent relationship is surveyed in this scene
as the child never visits or contacts the parent because of the negative relationship
between the two major influences - the caregiver and parent - in the child's life. In an
effort to build a rapport with her mother, Treasure has assumed many of Brownie's
behaviors, although she has not completely gone "bad" as seen with her care for the
violet and agreed protection of Mei. What is more, the conversation illustrates the role
caregivers play in the unification of imprisoned parents and their children. Treasure does
not know Brownie because she has not communicated or visited her and from her
grandmother's depiction - it appears that she may have opposed the mother-child
reunification, deleting the opportunity for any type of relationship. As many agencies
encourage mother-child visitation, they all have reported that the caregiver must
participate.

Further, down-home blues singing is heard as the women enter the yard for cleaning
duty lead by soloist and aspiring Black Entertainment Television (BET) star, Leisha. Her
call and response lyrics are, "How many months do I love my mother?" as the remainder
of the inmates join in with "twelve months of the year." Music, the universal language
unites all the women as they sing together without regarding race or color, but a specific
gender. This unity is depleted as racism in the penal system is vivid with white Nazi inmates who stand watching black inmates and one refers to the blacks as a “documentary for the discover channel...uggy buggy niggas...two generations from swinging in the trees." Kit, a “nigger lover” is upset with her cellmate and asks her to refrain from the language. Although prejudices are societal concerns, one cannot be as blatant with racial slurs as this example and go unpunished. On the other hand, in prison, this behavior is welcomed and overlooked, another dilemma increasing the difficulty of someone transitioning back into society upon prison release.

Kit’s heart is shattered when she attempts to meet Brownie for a drug money report. In this drug tally meeting, Kit has no money to report because Hispanic inmate Rosita has stolen her portion. Nevertheless, Treasure, who also deals drugs for Brownie, has her report and has temporarily replaced Kit to continue drug laundry with CO Nelson. Later seen in the cell eating fried rice from Treasure, courtesy of Mei, Brownie converses with Treasure as Kit visits to report her money. Hardcore and upset that Kit is fifty dollars short, Brownie nonchalantly stabs Kit in the leg and continues to eat with the same fork. Disturbed with Brownie’s harshness over a mere fifty dollars, Treasure tells Brownie to lighten up. Brownie literally throws her motherly love out the window and informs Treasure, she will do the same to her, if she does not report all her money, reflecting the need to survive in prison.

Subsequently, racial segregation is further exploited in group therapy session three, as Mei confesses her crime of killing a customer who is stealing. Racial slurs surface as black inmates sarcastically say to Asian inmate Mei that to her- all blacks look the same.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
and all are guilty of stealing. Slight physical altercations occur as Treasure defends Mei, and the session is concluded with a voice of reason. One inmate states that everyone in the room shares a commonality and that is being a woman (which it seems that many have forgotten). Treasure supports Mei’s action with the statement, “If a bitch steal from me, I’d kill her too.” This remark symbolically shifts the viewers back to the reality as to why many of the women are indeed prisoners. Mei’s reactions to the theft, demonstrates how it feels to have something unjustly taken from your possession.

Consequently, instead of presenting a united front, the habit of judging is consistent with the inmates’ interactions with each other. This attitude of judging, especially as a form of prejudice, is displayed by Doodle who sarcastically implies that Mei has been sent back to Taiwan or somewhere in Asia. Also, Doodle criticizes Treasure with phrases that God sees her having sex in the church with Sugar, and ridicules her for being a lesbian. Treasure counter punches with, “If God sees everything then he sees you f--- the CO” as she storms out leaving Doodle speechless. Running to “Moms” to be consoled, Brownie manipulates Treasure into beating Rosita with a pillowcase full of sodas. Shockingly, CO Nelson opens Rosita’s prison cell for the attack to take place. Again there is no safety for the women and the cruelty of prison life and “dirty” officer theme are featured.

Further, Treasure envisions an incomprehensible dream in which she is seen kissing Kit while Brownie is watching from afar. Once she arrives at Brownie’s cell, her vision is recognized. She is greeted by one of Brownie’s crew daughters Scar, who advises Treasure not to enter the cell. Reluctant to adhere to Scar’s advice, Treasure enters and
finds a disillusioned Brownie frustrated because she has been written up and has to spend a night in the hole. Instantly, she assumes that Treasure and Kit are conspiring together against her. She breaks a bottle to the floor, pushes Treasure’s face near the glass, and threatens her life. Treasure escapes, but is emotionally upset because of Brownie’s accusations.

Following this mother-daughter fight, the last therapy session is ironically about the mothers and their children. This is one of the most touching scenes in the film as all of the inmates are seen crying and emotionally disturbed about their lack of the role of mother. Professing role strain, one mother explains that her biggest pains are her feelings dealing with her kids. She admits with tears overflowing to her shirt, “They don’t want a mom that’s an ex-convict, they don’t want a mom that’s a prostitute, they don’t want a mom that’s a burglar.” One of the more noticeable mothers, who is always seen angry in the other sessions, is broken with despair. She laments, “My kids hate me... I make mistakes... I’ll pay for it the rest of my life. Everybody say I got so much anger... When my kids needed me I wasn’t there... The last time my daughter told me-I hate you! People say why you so angry. I have always been able to reverse things, but no matter what I do or what I say, I can’t get through to her.”

Dunye allow the mothers’ to express their feelings as a mother - a side of prison life that is often overlooked next to criminal activity, gang activity, and lesbianism. One important factor is that in these two testimonies the child’s voice is heard. The reality is that many of the women in prison are mothers and as many of them that are in prison are recidivists, many of them have been absent from their children for most of the children’s

\[23\text{Ibid.}\]
lives. Consequently, the children soon do not care to maintain a relationship with the parent or they do not respect the parent’s rights as a parent.

The story concludes with a surprising twist. Under the influence of white supremacy, Kit has now partnered with her cellmates and white COs, against Brownie. Brownie has manipulated Treasure into fighting Kit, and has given her a blade to kill her once she has finished “kicking her a--.” The brawl takes place in the yard as the women depart in the same manner they meet, on the basketball court. Treasure is victorious in the fight and content with a simple fist-fight brawl. In contrast, conditioned by prison rules, Brownie tries to persuade Treasure that she needs to kill Kit. Instead, Kit surprisingly stabs Brownie in the neck. Brownie immediately falls to the concrete while an alarm sounds; and in what appears to be a procedure, all the inmates lie flat down on the ground. In desperation to give her mother blood, Treasure visits the hospital unit where she announces herself as Brownie’s “real” daughter and runs into her old cellmate Leisha. Leisha, the BET aspiring singer, who was released from prison about two weeks prior, has returned to the hospital ward as a heroin drug addict. The rehabilitation phase of prison is viewed again as Leisha, a drug abuser in prison, is freed to society where she continues to do drugs and quickly returns back to prison because of it. Never rehabilitated and able to support her drug habits in prison, Leisha is released in society still hooked on drugs. Celebrating her release, she attends a party that is eventually raided by police. There, Leisha is found, fast asleep near her drug pipe. She is then arrested and sent back to prison. The recently released prisoner has returned to prison as an un-rehabilitated recidivist.
Facing her own problems, Treasure is unable to listen to Leisha’s story in its entirety. She is distracted when the nurse calls her number “2.8.7.9” and professes that she can go because her blood, Type A does not match Ms. Phyllis Stubbs who is Type B. Treasure violently reacts to the nurse assuring her that her mother’s name is Margaret Lee. She is calmed by a CO who shockingly reads the chart, “Phyllis Stubbs 42... 1974, five years for fraud. . . 1978, twenty-five to life second degree murder. . . 1980, life without parole for the fatal stabbing of Margaret Lee.”

With mixed emotions and experiencing the “truth” about prison life, Treasure grabs her heart, chuckles, and screams hysterically as she realizes that she has been emotionally used and abused. Moreover what she longed for, being united with her mother- will never exist. The remainder of the scenes reflects her life as she is seen alone and emotionally disturbed. Incapable of developing a solid relationship with her caregiver and now even-a false mother, Treasure’s social life mirrors the statistics of children with imprisoned mothers who are described as unable to develop and maintain healthy relationships. What should also be noted is that like most women in prison, Phyllis Stubbs was originally sent to prison for the non-violent crime fraud for five years. Within four years, and while “in prison,” she became a harsher criminal.

The film ends as Treasure is sent to a minimum security prison at the sympathy of the warden, and with the agreement that she reveals the dirty operations of CO Nelson. Upon leaving the prison, fellow inmates are standing near the gigantic barbed wire fence wishing Treasure farewell. She rekindles her friendship with Shadow by allowing her to take a photo. At the new facility an inmate asks Treasure her name and Treasure

\[\text{24ibid.}\]
identifies herself as “Brownie.” Is she paying homage to her deceased mother or more drastic, has she taken on the role of Phyllis Stubbs? Either way she signals the cycle of incarcerated women.

Ultimately, the film examines all entities of women in prison. It surveys gang relationships, masculine/femme lesbian relationships, and inmates and guards’ relationships. Inadequate health care, lack of rehabilitation, injustices and racism in the system are also revealed, along with the explanation as to why many prisoners return to prison once released. On the other hand, as much as these entities are featured about the prison experience, minimum footage is shown about mothers in prison. Besides one group therapy session, the “mother” voice is not heard in the film, and in return the voice of the child is omitted.

However, metaphorically, Treasure is the voice of the child, but only in the child’s primary stages. Because she has never had any contact with her mother including prison visits or letters, she does not experience the in and out parent cycle that is prevalent in most children of incarcerated parents’, nor is her delinquent behavior directly influenced by that of her parent. She does however, in terms of child care placements and caregiver interactions- identify with many children considering her similar living situations, interactions with peers and family opinions. As seen in her flashbacks she is raised in poverty, constantly fighting with peers, and does not build a relationship with any family member. Treasure is never visited in prison nor does she ever speak of any relative besides her caregiver, Grandma. She lives a delinquent life vicariously through her mother Brownie’s reputation.
In opposition to women in prison films, documentaries such as *When the Bough Breaks*, interviews young children that reveal their sad thoughts and feelings about their mothers being away from home. The children, who usually long for their mother’s presence, are often seen in a distressed state. Further, these works allow the woman in prison to release her voice as a mother. Diane Sawyer’s ABC November 4, 2004 Dateline Special focused on women in prison, whereas it too sheds light on the children who are longing for these imprisoned women.

These fairytales gone-bad, leave viewers with the same feelings as they would have watching “Feed the Hungry” specials. Viewers want to help the poor starving children (children with imprisoned mothers) and they do with the instructions of the Hollywood star (Host of the special, i.e., Diane Sawyer) who is asking for the assistance (what are we going to do about these mothers in prison?), without considering the organizations (mothers) that are receiving the funds (special prison programs) who in return-distribute them in a limited manner (un-rehabilitated mother) to the persons in need- the children (soon mother is reunited with the child). What are the longevity benefits of the viewers’ seventy-cents a day? The child will have food (the mother) but what about shelter, health care, education, and other basic essentials the child will lack that the seventy cents a day cannot provide. Not to mention, how long will the child want to continue to eat generic oatmeal? At these early stages of the children’s lives, many of them cannot express their feelings. They simply replicate the words and whispers of caregivers and persons who have not undergone their experiences.
As these works examine prison life, again the focus dissects the prison experience particularly women, dealing with the same themes as other literary works. Primarily, the works examined reflect the injustices of the penal system and the hard core reality of life inside prison as women are subjected to sexual and physical abuse. The women develop strategies to survive by engaging in lesbian relationships, relationships with officials, and by forming cliques for protection. The person's role as parent, as many of them often are, comes last considering the inmate's needs to consider the first law of nature, self-preservation, which includes adapting to an environment and surviving. Children are not the first priority to prisoners.

These endeavors are seen in all of the above works mentioned, however, another effort, to hear the voice of the child of the parent, is moderately addressed in two works - The Color Purple and Stranger Inside. Moreover, it is important to note that this voice is different from the wishes of many agencies and counselors who professionally suggest that mothers and children should be united. Hence, before making plans and implementing programs for prison mothers and their children, maybe agencies, organizations, and counselors should seek to hear the voice of the child, which may be opposite of their professional opinions. Who can write the lion's history without misrepresentation? - the lion. Who can give an authentic voice for the child? - the child.

Personal Narrative of a Child of an Imprisoned Mother:

Six percent of women are pregnant when they enter prison, yet most states make no special arrangements for the care of newborns. Pregnant inmates are often required to be shackled while giving birth, and after delivery, mothers and
babies are sometimes separated within hours. The infant is sent then to live with a family member or placed in a foster care system.\textsuperscript{25}

It was a typical hot spring day in April in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1987. We had had our daily 30-minute rain, and the streets were steaming and quickly drying so all the \textit{Bottom} children could reconvene to their normal activities: roly-poly, touch football, or hide-n-go-seek. I was a chubby, gap-toothed, eight-year-old, and my other three siblings at the time were slender and fit, twelve, ten, and four-year-olds. I was always different from them. As I was the one “just like my mammy” as I was often reminded whenever my behavior was not suitable for a little southern A.M.E. Zion church girl, or when I was acting “like a Phillips.” Whatever this behavior encompassed, I displayed it on a daily basis. On this particular day, I was to meet my match - someone who would not put up with my intolerable behavior and ungrateful attitude. This “bad mamma jamma” would “tear my a-- up” because that is what she liked to do. My birth mother, Irene Yvonne Phillips, or \textit{Mean Rene}, as the neighborhood, and everyone else who seemed to hold on to their glorious high school days affectionately knew her, was guaranteed to straighten me out.

I remembered when she entered my grandma’s house. Her image was nothing like I imagined or possibly remembered. She looked nothing like me. In fact, she looked like my older brother and sister, Bardenie and Cardennia. She was a dark almond, petite figure, standing about 5’7 inches tall; with soft reddish-brown eyes and nappy corn rowed hair that was 10 years overdue for a perm. Surprisingly, she was pretty, and even more

\textsuperscript{25}ITVS, “When the Bough Breaks, Mothers in Prison.”
shocking; she was pregnant! I thought to myself, while making a screw face, “She is not like me at all,” or more specifically – I am not like her at all.

For days we had been expecting her. Mama Hazel and Uncle Alvin had encouraged us to clean up and look presentable. The most memorable part of their behavior was their efforts to get us excited. They told us stories about her, and sometimes threatened our behavior with the stories. Mama cooked up a big meal, and Alvin gave Aunt Zelda money to take us shopping for new clothes. Zelda also made sure my hair was stylishly braided, my sister’s Carefree curl was fresh, and my brothers’ peas were neatly cut and picked for the early summer. On the day of her arrival, we were to keep the phone lines free because she would call once she reached the downtown Greyhound Bus Station, and Alvin would pick her up. I knew when she entered the house because of my other maternal uncles, Hal and Charles’ warm and enthusiastic greetings. They laughed and hugged and indirectly beckoned for us to do the same. I do not remember much of what my siblings’ reactions were; I think for a minute I tuned out my environment. When I was brought back to reality with an inclined baritone pitched “Traboo!” I went to her and waited for her to hug me. She did. It was tight and accompanied with a wet kiss that reaped the scent of “Newports in the box” and peppermint candy. I liked it. I liked it a lot.

This would be the one of many times my mother would come home from prison or being incarcerated. In fact, this was her third prison release. Her first, and I guess, the most significant to me, was her sentence to Federal Prison, in 1978, for “3, 6, 9”- three years, six months, and nine days. The year - 1978- was my birth year, and I, unlike the
rest of my family who brags about being born and bred in Duval County, Florida, was born in the foreign land of Fort Worth, Texas. I later learned that I was born in a Methodist hospital that allowed inmates at the Federal Correction Institute of Fort Worth to deliver on their premises as opposed to the prison grounds. However, I, and those like me, had the luxury of being denoted from the “normal” infants with a Federal Correction Institute of Fort Worth, Texas, black, ink stamp on the top left hand corner of the back. Invisibly, the number is still on the top left hand corner of my back.

Humorously, my siblings and I often entertained each other with activities exploring our body parts. In a birthmark game, I concluded that everyone in the world must not have a birthmark because I was not born with one. As usual, I was told that I thought I knew it all, and was proven to not know it all because I had once had a birthmark on my back, although it had since faded.

Dazed and remembering my siblings’ firmness, I searched for this “mark” as a twenty-four-years-old adult. After bringing up the topic to my first caregiver, Aunt Hazell she then informed me of its issuance and significance. I concluded my family must have conjured up a story to satisfy the curiosity of my siblings and inquiries of “nosey ni --- who don’t mind their business.”

My mother’s habitual efforts to indulge in unlawful acts resulted in her being away from her children during most of her early adult life. Ultimately, she was not a mother, and we were motherless. Figure 1 is a photograph of Irene. This photo was taken in 1978 prior to her incarceration.
The tone for my early child development years with Irene are best expressed in the quote from Nancy Neff. She writes:

It didn’t help that when we went to visit the mother at Gatesville, she turned to her daughter and said, ‘I got to get pregnant again so I can have me a pretty one!’ “The girl cried the whole way home and tried to commit suicide
several times that year,” Cuba said. She [the girl] is slowly building self-esteem through troop leaders and mentors by increasing the amount of attention given to her and giving her leadership roles to build her self-esteem. “Her grades are good, she has lost weight from eating better and exercising, and she reads a book a week, said Cuba. “Her education will save her life.26

My first family, the Clarks, resided in the poor community of the Cleveland Avenue area in Atlanta, Georgia. The family that I had known since about one-month-old consisted of my mother’s oldest sister Hazell, her husband, Charles, my aunt’s oldest son from a high school mishap, Alonzo “Lonzo” Phillips, and her son from marriage, Charles “Muffie” Clark Jr. Although this was my immediate family and Lonzo and Muffie were my siblings, I was aware that I had other brothers and a sister in my family’s original hometown of Jacksonville, Florida.

I began to live with this family after my mother gave birth to me in Fort Worth, Texas. I was born at night, but I am not sure what time, nevertheless newborns had to be picked up within 72 hours or become property of the state of Texas. My mother’s youngest sister Zelda was sent to the rescue and a couple of weeks later, Hazell became my caregiver for the next eight years, as displayed in Figure 2. Her home was probably the most pleasant of my memories and then the cruelest. At 44 Mount Zion Road Apartment B2 is where I had a complete, yet incomplete family. Sure, I was often reminded that I was an outsider by the jokes and taunts of my cousins, but I was still apart of a complete family that consisted of a mother, father, and brothers. This picture

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perfect portrait was often marled by sibling molestation, unnecessary beatings, my being sent back to Jacksonville because I was just too terrible, and most of all, unpleasant visits.

Figure 2. Da'Tarvia with first caregiver, maternal aunt, Hazell Clark.

I was a busy child. I liked to be in all types of activities. I wanted to be an A-student, majorette, a dancer, a musician, an athlete, a debater—as long as I could “cuss” and, above all, I strived to be the “if you can do it I can do it better” person. My attitude was never to get me far I was assured. I had a temper and I was “just like my mammy.” Moreover, if I did not get it together, someone would surely “send my ass to Jacksonville.” So in Atlanta, I only became an A/B student, a tap dancer, a beginning musician, and a top-of-the-line “cussing” debater.

I never really knew Irene, but from stories of family members, I knew what she was like. The first time I recall being “just like my mammy” was when Muffie and I had a verbal fight or “ranking” contest outside in front of all our neighborhood friends. He embarrassed me by providing an explanation of his lack of clothes and shoes because of my gain. His birthday request to Hazell and Charles and his announcement to his peers
was that he was going to get the new Shell Toe Adidas sneakers. When this did not occur, he eloquently explained that his mother and father had to take care of me because my mother was in jail, and as a result he did not receive his new Adidas because I “needed” something immediately and he had to wait until Friday when Hazell got paid. Even more, this creator of tales explained that he did not know why his mother and father had to take care of me because my other brothers and sister lived in Jacksonville with our grandma in a big mansion.

Hazell was a prankster. She had presented a new Adidas box to Muffie with his old shoes in the box. Laughing hysterically, at the time she could not explain to him that Lonzo was bringing the shoes home later that day for she had hid them in Lonzo’s car and would have to wait until he got home from work. But this was too late. After discovering my secret was unveiled-I never tried to hide or deny it. “So what if Irene is in jail, who cares? What can I do about that?” were the thoughts I convinced myself of and soon refocused on the ‘bigger’ issue, “Muffie is a liar-he knows good and well Mama’s house is raggedy.” This was my retaliation and ridicule of him and his character, not his parents for they were mine too. I had a reputation and I had to uphold it. Nobody talked about me because I was “bad.” So me being the five years-old Traboo I was, I had to let Muffie know what was up. I won the fight as I made sure everyone knew the physical description of his private, naming it “ugly” and any disgusting habit he engaged in as I proclaimed that every time he came home from school, he “doo-dooed in a C shape.” Unlike Muffie, I presented factual evidence because I saw them both. In opposition of Lonzo, Muffie did not molest or “hump” me often, and each time he had his
pants on with a grin that accompanied a Ronald McDonald face, Joker’s laugh and rough up and down or back forth movement. Until he finished, which usually took about one or two minutes, I normally focused on the gold paint or the Pittsburgh Steelers arrow-shaped thing on the wall. I think it had thirteen stars on it.

Lonzo, on the other hand, was much more serious. While Hazell and Charles were at work, as the oldest, Lonzo was our babysitter. As a girl, I had to be in when the streetlights came on and Muffie, older and a boy, probably stayed out about 30 or 45 minutes later. If Lonzo had no company, I guess this seemed like a more perfect time, he would take me to Hazell and Charles’ room. He took longer than Muffie even if we were interrupted with him jumping up assuming someone was coming, or because someone was coming for real this time. He usually put me on the edge of the bed where I could barely see my face and his dark butt with tiny specks of hair in the mirror. I discovered this the first time and constantly pictured the image whenever I looked into Hazell’s mirror. Next, he would take my Wonder Woman or pastel colored underwear off, put his head to the right of mine, hold my arms by the wrists, and pull down his pants. I felt him skin to skin; or should I say skin to hair. It was warm and it often felt like something oversized was hitting my funny bone too hard over and over again. I played invisible. I closed my eyes, held my breath, and stayed still as much as possible. When he finished he would get up, usually take a shower, and tell me to prepare for bed before Hazell came home.

One summer break, my brother and sister, Bardenie and Cardennia came to visit, and I saw Lonzo do the same thing to Cardennia that he usually did to me. I felt sad, mad,
and confused-all at one time. She was there with her pajamas pulled up and a jerry curl bag on her head. His pants were to his ankles as he moved in a medium-paced circular motion, with his head to the right of her shoulders protected with a wave cap. I wanted to run in and interrupt, but I lacked the courage. I made a loud noise to save her but the two of them only looked in my direction and continued with their motions. I thought maybe she liked it as her face reflected a pleasant smirk when she looked in my direction and in a different way, I was relieved. He would now “do it” to Cardennia and not me. She never told me anything about it and I never asked.

Cardennia was only with us for a short period of time and when she left, I despised Lonzo. Whenever he told me to do anything I rebelled and rebelled to anyone who supported him. If Hazell was not home when the street lights were on, I stayed out until I thought it was dark enough and she would be there. I guess he, in a different way, won the battle because after that time, for some or any reason, he would have to beat me and tell Hazell about it when she got home.

Hazell came home from work many days tired because she worked two “piece a jobs” but we, her children and I, never really knew it. We had everything we needed. We had good food, name-brand clothes, all the toys we could wish for, and we even ate out at restaurants, and went to every event that came to town including the Circus, the New Edition Concert, and the Harlem Globe Trotters and Atlanta Hawks Basketball Games. Sometimes, at night, Hazell and I stayed up late and watched “Dallas” or “Dynasty” ate Lime Sorbet or Lay’s plain potato chips drenched in hot sauce. Sometimes when she
came home she had cookies for me, and sometimes she had paper, pencils and little note tablets.

The best were those days when she told Muffie and me to catch the Marta bus and meet her downtown when she got off work. It was always fun when she came home so I was happy when I returned to the family at the beginning of my third grade year. I had been sent to Jacksonville in the second grade because I was too terrible, but now I was in the third grade and this year was to reveal a better me.

One day, Hazell came home and told Charles that we were going to see Irene. As usual, I overheard the conversation and waited for either one of them to come and tell me. To make it more convenient for them, I went outside to play and reentered after about an hour or so. By this time Lonzo and Muffie were in the house. Days passed and no one ever mentioned it to me. Then one day out of the blue, we all got in the light blue Mustang and went for the longest ride of my life. Our destination was Birmingham, Alabama. When we got out of the car, Hazell held my hand and told me that we were to see my momma Irene. I did not think much of it. As hot as it was and after the long ride, I was more relieved to exit the car than to focus on Hazell’s words. Regrouping myself and not knowing what to expect, I was hesitant, at first, but the appetite of curiosity in me longed to be fed.

It took forever to get to her! We walked down this long hallway with beige brick walls. Then we were checked in and searched by some guards. We walked through metal detectors and were asked to remove our shoes. The lady officer constantly touched Hazell’s body like Mrs. Brown did anyone in class when she was searching for candy,
and then the officer looked inside her purse. A male officer did the same to Charles and Lonzo. After we left that area, we walked further through a tunnel hallway until we finally saw people.

There were people one side with us and there were people on the other side of this glass similar to the ones at the drive-up teller at the bank, but it had black diamond-shaped lines in it. In front of the glass was a boxed-in counter with a stool and on the side of the wall was a black telephone. Hazell and Charles started to laugh and pointed to a behind the glass who was laughing too. She was dressed funny. Hazell told Muffie, Lonzo, and me to come up to the window as she pointed to each of us and said our names as if the person behind the glass was a stranger. The stranger gestured "oohs" and "ahs" winging her arms to the side insinuating how big we were while jokingly shaking her head and smiling. Charles picked up the phone while Hazell stood back with us and insisted on telling me with a silly smirk, inclined eyes and raised eyebrows, "That's your momma." I was eyeballed up and down by Muffie and Lonzo for a reaction so I did not give one. Next, Charles stood with us and Hazell took the phone. The sequence followed with Lonzo, then Muffie, and then me.

When I picked up the telephone receiver her scratchy voice delightfully said "Heeeey Traboo." I smiled and blushed while saying "hey." She then stated how she heard I was doing so well in school and how I needed to keep up the good work. My smile grew wider, but before I could "cheese" she expressed her concern with me being so fat and black. She could have said more; I did not care. I just smiled and nodded and handed Hazell the receiver when she signaled me to do so.
We left the glass window and exited the same manner in which we had arrived. Irene, the stranger behind the glass blew kisses from where she was standing in a lined formation and soon left with the other people who were dressed similar to her. Hazell, Charles, Muffie, and Lonzo smiled and waved goodbye while I stood there with slightly filled teary eyes. Muffie comforted me with his arm around my shoulders affirming, “It’s alright Traboo, you’ll see her again.” His efforts to comfort me were useless being that his words made my stomach feel as if I had just burped and swallowed mini-vomit and was in disbelief and disgusted with the taste. I could not stomach the hallow words expressed by my mother. We walked on the other side of the detectors, and the officers now much more friendly, told us to have a good day.

When we passed the beige walls and the tunnel, we arrived to the car quickly. The car was quiet so I had a moment to think about my mother’s comments. I looked at my Uncle Charles’ light barley skin and lean figure, my aunt Hazell’s dark almond skin and full figure, Muffie’s light brown skin and full figure, and Lonzo’s dark chocolate and athletic build figure. “CC [Charles] is the only one who looks good” were Irene’s words. If he is the only who of us who looked “good” then how did we look? How did I look?

I slept on these words all the way back home to Atlanta, Georgia, and when I woke, they were my thoughts and wishes. I dreamed of being different. For once, I saw a problem with my skin. I wanted to be a shade or two lighter, I wanted longer hair, and most of all, I wanted to be a smaller size. When we arrived home I expressed to Hazell I wanted the Get-N-Shape Girl workout kit I had seen during the commercial breaks on television when I could not concentrate on my homework. As usual when Hazell came
home from work one day, I had the Get-N-Shape Girl Kit, as shown in Figure 3. My next prison visits with Irene transpired in Jacksonville, Florida. What I tell now is how this came to be.

Figure 3. Da'Tarvia with the Get-N-Shape Girl Workout Kit

One after-school activity that guaranteed me a torn picture was homework. It did not happen often, just when Charles did not have his second job, and was home in the afternoons. When Muffie and I came home, we were always greeted with a “Hello” and “How was school?” Then, Muffie would put his books down, change clothes to go outside and play-usually with his basketball goal. When Charles was not home, I would put my book bag up, change clothes, fix me some cereal, and watch “Heathcliff,” “The Flinstones,” and “Inspector Gadget.” Sometimes, if “The Jetsons” was boring, I would turn it to “Encyclopedia Brown.” But, if Charles was there, I would pull my homework out in front of the television, pretending to be able to both watch television and complete “A” homework at the time. Maybe I liked the attention because I knew this act would
certainly guarantee that I would go to school the next day with holey, wrinkled, and "A" homework.

The hardest assignment I had was mathematics. It was difficult to understand the concept of less than and greater than. I just could not get it—at least I thought. Every time I wrote down an answer, it was accompanied with, a loud authoritative voice that advertised Kool Filter Kings cigarettes and Schlitz Malt Liquor Bull-projecting, "Traboo, Imma turn the d--- tv off!" or "Traboo-pay attention, Imma tear the picture out the frame!" After a while, I was sorry I started the game and tried to end it by breaking my pencil lead knowing that we did not have a pencil sharpener in the house. That did not work. Charles sent me to the kitchen to get a knife that worked just as good as any pencil sharpener.

At the end of these episodes, we were sure to have gone through the following; the initial slow patient voice, me ignoring it; the patient voice, me ignoring it; the deeper patient voice, me ignoring it; the loud threat of the television being turned off, me giving three seconds of attention time; Charles jumping up turning the television off; me just staring at the homework assignment; the threat of tearing my picture out the frame, me writing down any answer; the two spanks with the hand, me breaking the lead; the actual tearing the picture out the frame, me finally doing the homework while sobbing, screaming, and eating snot. I guess I had no choice but to be an Honor Roll student.

Continuously my homework fiascos pressured Charles too much, just as my plundering habits burdened Hazell. This Inspector Gadget was as worse as Gadget himself, without a niece like Penny to save me. I admired Hazell, although Irene had
ridiculed her and described her as being big and black. She was pretty with long black hair, and her skin was amazingly clear. It was similar to Anika Thomas although she was much lighter than Hazell. Anika was the girl in my third grade class that everybody in the whole world adored. She was my friend because my middle name is Arnikka. I guess she had a special connection with everyone. Mrs. Brown, the teacher, allowed her to get up and get her glasses during reading time; she was always picked as a teacher’s helper, she was the official representative of the third graders during assemblies; and she had long ponytails filled with colorful barrettes that matched her clothes and sometimes she even wore a French cut bang! Most of all, she looked like Charles – just the right skin color.

My face was not as pretty as Anika’s and her skin was much lighter than mine. Her eyes were big; mine were slinky; her hair reached the top of her butt; mine reached my shoulders, she lived with her dad; and I never met mine. Anika signed up for tap-dancing and so did I. Anika signed up for sign languages and so did I. Anika played the clarinet-and so did I. I excelled higher in these areas. I was better than Anika in dance, sign language, and in playing the clarinet, but I was just not prettier. I began to put different things on my face to make me a beauty potion like I thought Hazell used. I mixed car wash liquids with water, calamine lotion with water, and even gave myself an egg facial. Little by little, I used Hazell’s Oil of Olay-the pink stuff she put on at night, but with use of all the formulas and potions, there was no difference.

Then one day, another student, Nigel came to school with Vaseline on his face. The teacher commented that Nigel, who was also categorized as a problem student like
me, had changed his attitude and was ready to learn with his shiny new face. The next
day at home in Hazell’s room I searched for some Vaseline, and found some eyeglasses!
Now, I could be more like Anika. I too went to school with a shiny face, but Mrs. Brown
did not comment. So during my free time, I decided to write her a letter and tell her how
I was going to change my attitude, do better, and that I wore glasses. She seemed proud
of me and on our way to the library that day she made me the line leader.

The next morning while preparing for school, I tried to put the Vaseline on my
face again, but Hazell told me to take it off. I was determined to carry the glasses so I hid
them in my underwear until I reached the school grounds. This happened for about two
weeks until Hazell found out about the glasses. I tried to put them back everyday when I
got home and take them out in the morning, but she was much smarter than I. She said
she knew I had the glasses because she had been looking for them.

I learned the glasses did not belong to Hazell but they were actually Zelda’s and
she had not worn them since 1970! I did not understand the problem with me having the
glasses, and wondered why she wanted to take them away from me. She “tore my picture
out the frame” for “old”, using all of her Oil of Olay, and “new,” stealing the glasses. As
usual, I screamed and tried to run, and when that did not work, I huffed, puffed, blew
snot, let it run down my lips, and began to sip on it as if it was a delightful treat for I
knew Hazell was sure to say, “Trabia-get yo nasty a-- out my face” and that would be the
end of that episode.

I returned to school with no glasses and no Vaseline. I was frustrated that my
master plan had failed and about a week later, I eventually picked a fight, and beat up
Anika after school while we were walking from the bus stop. Funny thing is we had been friends all day in school, until someone on the bus reminded me of how pretty she was. They asked her, “Who takes the time to do all of your hair?” She replied in a nice confident voice with a full smile, “My daddy.” Immediately, I was no longer her friend of admiration, but an enemy of envy.

She tried her best not to fight me. When we were friends, she told me that her mom was white, so as soon as we got off the bus, I did the most dignified thing in pre-fighting techniques and opened with name calling. I reminded her of her racial heritage as I sarcastically screamed with a roll of the neck, Zebra and Oreo, justifying my remarks by pretending she violated me with a bump and shove as we both exited the bus. When that did not work, I mushed her. . . when that did not work, I pushed her down to the ground, and . . . when that did not work, I grabbed her long pretty silky hair and wrapped it around my short stubby hands. I proceeded to put her in the headlock position, and punch her face and head for about six or seven times. She begged me to stop and kept screaming my name, “Da’Tarvia! Da’Tarvia! Da’Tarvia!” Maybe, the last Da’Tarvia registered because I did stop and when I looked at her I saw her red face and big pretty eyes filled with tears.

The rest of her tears formed a trail rolling down her cheeks to a bloody mouth and a blood-stained, white, ruffled blouse, reminding me to read my history assignment, The Trail of Tears. Her eyes gazed at me with question. I had no answer. I had walked her in the headlock all the way to my apartment’s entrance. When I let her up, I heard the
cheers of others confirming I was the champ and congratulating me on how I whooped her a--.

I tried to call Anika when I got home to apologize, but she was not there. She had told her father what happened and he had driven back to Cleveland Avenue Elementary in protest of his daughter’s punishment. The school contacted Charles in reference to my outrage and in the office that day, he learned that I boasted to the teacher-she could call my momma all she wanted because “Hazell aint my real momma anyway.” He also learned that I exclaimed, “My real momma name Irene; she in jail!” Anika’s father was also in the office with Charles, and when he got home, he told his lovely daughter to stay away from me because I had problems. The next day, Anika shared with Martina Ellis, another student, the secret about my mother. They taunted me with jokes about something I had no control over. I did not understand how she could do this. She was my friend and I had shared with her an untellable secret that she had now shared with Martina.

Additionally, another classmate Selena Green was my friend and my cousin Muffie was her brother’s Booker friend. Unlike the rest of us, including Anika, Selena did not live in apartments. She lived in a house, through a shortcut in the woods. Our after school hours were filled with picking sour green apples from a tree in her neighbor’s yard, to picking muster dines, and selling them door-to-door to my apartment neighbors. Her home even had a basement where we could play Barbie or with our Cabbage Patch Kids. Maybe our fantasies were too little to be third graders. Selena had a younger male cousin who was probably a first grader. I am not sure if he lived with them, or visited
them often because he was there much of the time with her brother. In an innocent way, he had a crush on me, and everyone knew it.

Selena and I decided to take a break from Barbies and get a Popsicle. While we were enjoying our cool delightful snack, I had banana and she chose cherry, her brother, my cousin, and maybe three or four of their classmates were all standing behind us in the kitchen. Selena went back downstairs in the basement and I went to the bathroom. When I exited the bathroom, I was snatched, jerked, and carried to an adult’s bedroom by at least four or five of the boys. They were all chanting, laughing, and screaming unidentifiable noises. They tried to blindfold me, but were unsuccessful in that attempt, so they ended up throwing me on the bed, while trying to pull down my pants.

From my screams and their screams, Selena ran upstairs, I guess, because by the time I looked up at the crowd, the first grader was on top of me wiggling and making “ooh-ah” sounds. Selena and the rest of the boys were standing around looking and laughing. Although each one of my limbs was held by at least a fifth grade boy, I broke loose and kicked the hell out of one of them. Suddenly, things got serious as they all accused me of not wanting to have fun. Booker, the oldest of the two whose home we were in, instructed me to leave. Why would they do that? Because they are silly boys, Anika explained when I told her what happened. Why would my cousin help them? Because he’s a boy, too, she proclaimed and with her unique way of comfort; I understood.

I do not remember much of the rest of the school year, but by the end of it, I was eight years old and my home had an addition to it. Hazell had a baby girl, Ellarisha
Ter’Rikki Clark who Irene so brilliantly named after my great-grandmother Ella and my grand-father-Richard. Because of the new baby, Hazell worked harder and longer, as did Charles. Lonzo who was 18 or 19 years-old at the time was never home, and Muffie, who was about four or five years younger than Lonzo, was never home. I am not sure what their activities consisted of but mine was to baby sit Ellarisha. She was very tiny and pretty and she always smiled and slept, but when she did not smile and sleep, she constantly cried-hysterically! One day, Ellarisha cried uncontrollably while the Flintstones were on and I could not stop her crying no matter what I did. I rocked her carriage; I gave her a bottle of milk; I picked her up; but she would not stop. She cried louder and louder. I told her to be quiet. She did not. I told her to shut up. She did not. I screamed at her shut up. She did not. I looked at her for a while and picked her up again. She would not stop, so I started to cry. I looked in the mirror at myself and I looked stupid. Ellarisha better shut up before I tear her picture out the frame. She did not. Frustrated, I put her in her carriage, turned up the television, and fixed me some cereal.

Hazell came home and saw the chaos. I was so relieved because I knew she could stop her from crying. She asked me why I had the television so loud and I told her because Ellarisha would not stop crying. A week later, after I was sent to Jacksonville, I learned that Ellarisha was wet and needed to be changed. I spent the remainder of my elementary and middle school years as a student in Duval County Public Schools in Jacksonville, Florida.

In Jacksonville, Florida I resided on 5840 Briley Avenue. My family was larger and I seemed to blend in well with them at times. My grandmother, Hazel was the head...
of the household although my uncles lived there too. My grandmother, the mother of nine, was living with six of her nine children on an on and off basis.

The oldest, my uncle Rogers was in Chattahoochee. He was incarcerated in a mental facility after he shot my grandmother’s parents when I was about four or five years old. They died and as a result, their home, which is directly across the street from my grandmother’s house, was and is successfully occupied by my grandmother’s children, their children, and any neighborhood friends who are in need of a temporary home. The second oldest of my grandmother’s children is Uncle Charles also known as “Pint” because of his limited height. Next are Uncle Harold or “Hal”, then Uncle Alvin, Aunt Hazell, Uncle Garcia, Irene, Aunt Zelda, and Uncle Richard, who is known as Baby Phillips, but pronounced, “Bay Philup”. No child of the siblings ever addressed them with the title uncle or aunt; we simply called them by name.

Their father Richard Phillips who they called RC passed away in 1977 and their mother “Mama” worked long hours as a cook to provide for the family. She had to. RC was a tailor by day and a gambler by night, who frequently lost more than he won. The family explanation for his death was due to a heart attack because of a huge loss at the Greyhound Dog Track. He died before I was born, however, his thoughts, and words still live through his children.

One of his thoughts that described the household is an argument he had with my grandmother in reference to her being a mother to her children. Whenever Mama complained about the things the house needs and how no one assisted her, Hazell freely reminds her of the words of RC “Dem ni---- gon’ be grown and yo’ a-- still gon’ be
taking care of 'em!" Although this pleased Hazell and Garcia to jeer at Mama because they did not reside on Briley Avenue, Mama was not moved by it.

Figure 4. Da'Tarvia and older sister Cardennia on Briley Avenue.

Therefore, as a fourth grader my family now consisted of Mama, Cardennia, (my older sister seen with me in Figure 4) Bardenie, Jake, and Zelda in the big house, and Pint, Hal, Alvin, Bay Philup, and Irene, at times, in the house across the street. Of the adults, Mama and Alvin worked and Zelda went to nursing school. Alvin worked at Beaver Street Foods and was often the bread winner for the family. Hal was a mechanic and tried to re-establish a family car lot business but was unsuccessful. His mechanic duties were unsuccessful. The house across the street had a yard filled with broken down cars and a broken down school bus that was a reminder of the family’s old business, Phillips Chevron Gas Station and School Bus services.

Pint was the cook and he was good at it. Bay Philup was an intellectual crack head without a high school diploma. In fact, of the nine children, Alvin, Hazell, and
Garcia were the only high school graduates. Irene, who was now out of prison, lived across the street with Har’Rikki my new little sister. Har’Rikki’s dad, Harry, never showed up and rumor has it he was a guard at the correctional facility when she was incarcerated in Chicago. It did not matter because soon Irene would meet a new boyfriend, and eventually leave and live him, leaving us to care for our younger siblings.

Figure 5. “The Big House” at 5840 Briley Avenue.

The big house was not fully functional. It was, during Irene and her siblings growing up years, a huge home that was the talk of Jacksonville. It was a two-story home that had a patio and front porch, foyer, den, living room, breakfast area, three bedrooms, and an attic. The sons came up with the idea of turning the attic into nine bedrooms, to place a skylight in the roof, and to create a balcony.

As the additions took place new furniture was bought, new doors were installed, and most of the house consisted of wood foundation and sheetrock. The skylight which
had a leak in it for several years ruined everything in the home because it rained inside 
the big house. The carpet on the floors were mildewed and surfacing the floor. The walls 
were peeling, revealing the wood and sheetrock foundation behind them. There was no 
running water so our water came from across the street. Every weekend one of our 
chores was to carry about 30 gallon jugs of water to the big house to ensure we had water 
for the week. We had no bathroom for traditional purposes. The bathtub was utilized if 
we had to urinate and if anyone had to have a bow movement, they had to go across the 
street. If we took baths, they were either in a large, grey, restaurant-style, bussing tubs or 
across the street. Both required the same preparation: heat the water on the stove and 
carry the pot to the tub. This process only took about 30 minutes, but if you waited any 
longer, your water would easily seep out through the tub drain or turn cold.

Subsequently, the big house looked like a work in progress. The house across the 
street was a house in distress. It was a traditional three-bedroom brick house. It had a 
den, hardwood floor living and dining rooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a garage, that 
my uncles closed in and eventually made a living-den. The outside was white. Next it 
was white with glitter, white trimmed in green, white trimmed in red, and then yellow 
and trimmed in brown.

It was a strong house. It survived hurricanes, deaths, fights, and arguments, the 
constant cycle of The Phillips’ household. However, crack cocaine had gotten the best of 
my uncles, and it seemed to hit Alvin the hardest. Because he was the strength of the 
family, the family was weak.
Hal had a girlfriend, Ne-Ci, who delightfully enhanced our childhood as she often tried to take us out to the movies and parks with her two children Boo and Tank. Although Hal has a daughter, Michelle, and a son, Travis, he spent much of his time at restaurants such as Famous Sandwiches, Krystals, and Dunkin Donuts, convincing regular customers, and strange friends that he was a profound business man. On the other hand, Pint and Bay Philup worked as a team. Pint was previously married twice and had one daughter, Charlette, in Jacksonville and another, Nephiteria, in Chicago. Bay Philup had a daughter, Jon’ Tilla, who was also brilliantly named by Irene. Jon’Tilla’s mother was Mama’s fifth cousin’s daughter. But Bay Philup did not care about what others thought and in that same spirit, he often stole things from our home to support his drug habit and Pint usually assisted him in reaping the benefits.

Pint worked around the house and the neighborhood doing odd jobs for five or ten dollars to support his fix, but Bay Philup stole anything he thought had value. If a family member discovered what he had done and questioned him, he enthusiastically helped look for it. We never knew but this was how he usually discovered our hiding places and secret stashes. When he would “get straight” he obtained construction jobs that either helped the household tremendously or sent him back to the streets with the possibility of being an overdosed statistic.

So sometimes we had things and sometimes we did not. We always knew when he relapsed because items disappeared. One of the most embarrassing memorable events was when a childhood friend of ours and now a 13 or 14 year old petty drug crack
cocaine dealer, came to the house across the street asking my brother Bardenie did we have any corndogs because Bay Philup had just tried to sell him some.

We lived in a community known as The Bottom. The drug dealers in The Bottom usually worked with us because they knew us. That is, they alerted us of our possessions sold by our uncle. But if Bay Philup sold any of our belongings to the dealers in Hill Top or Golf Brook, other drug-infested communities in the area, they were as good as gone. One event that had Bay Philup written all over it is when Irene asked me to go to the big house and heat up her cinnamon roll. When I arrived there was no microwave.

These were the kind of things that Irene said were just too much for her to deal with, therefore she left home as much as possible. Although she never found a place of her own, she systematically gained her way into many of her male companions’ homes until her system became permanent. Although we dare not visit her at her companions’ home, she awaited our visits at prison.

The prison visits were usually preceded beforehand with a letter to one of her dear and loving children professing her love for us and requesting necessary items that she needed for her survival. (See Figures 6a, 6b, 7, and 8). She wanted hair products, make-up such as eyebrow and eye liner pencils, lip stick and nail polish, jewelry, and shoes.
Hey Tray '83:

Getting a little off this time. Hope the
less. When these few lines find you I
pray that you will be in
God's gracious health physically, mentally
and spiritually. For my self, I am
Blessed, here, for I will complete the
year as you know, you close one a little
get, and I went to visit but got to long
so tell "slice" to well. Thanks the
"slice" picture when he call again tell
him. I put on all my best to write
him but got out his list. So get busy,
now to have my picture. Paint is here.

And I want you to deliver the messages
to the people. And tell them what I
would like for them to get for me. The
affair this one 7 years, I would like to get
another one, when the cutting then post.
Therefore it would be greatly appreciated
and when you mail it, look for the
permit in the envelopes on the back side.

8/17/95
10:48 P.M.

Friday Night...
Figure 6b. Letter cont. Page 2 of 2.

Figure 7. Picture of item Irene requested from prison.
Figure 8. Prison item submission form/package permit.
These were the items we were to send through the mail but Mama and Zelda simply ignored Irene’s requests with replies that became our actions; “Irene shouldn’t done what she did to go to jail and if she won’t in jail she could get her own stuff;” “Where da hell she thank she going?;” “Who in da hell she trying to impress?;” “She aint did nothing for y’all and want y’all ta do something for her;” and mostly, “She could have gotten it herself- she went to jail wit a pockabook full of money and gave it ta dose other ni----.”

Hal’s girlfriend Ne-Ci felt differently and as a mother who deeply loved her children, she sympathized with Irene’s request to see us. So it was Ne-Ci who took us to see Irene while she was on the prison farm because none of the immediate family members would. At the time, I was 11 and Cardennia was 13. Our first visit was quite pleasant. Ne-Ci, Cardennia, and I rode about forty minutes from Mama’s house until we reached our destination.

The road was dark; there were few lights, and soon we saw plains of green grass fields and gigantic silver fences topped with large rows of barbed wire. The buildings were plain and white and were somewhat similar to the buildings at Jacksonville Navy Base. We passed several buildings until we turned down a dirt rock road that turned into a parking lot. No one spoke a word. We all seemed to know what to do next. As we approached the building through another large fence we walked up a board ramp. We immediately walked into a room where we were instructed to sign a log, and then move to a designated area. Cardennia and I went one way with a female officer, while Ne-Ci went another. Wearing gloves, the officer patted Cardennia while telling her to raise her
arms and spread her legs. Next she told both of us to remove our shoes and she inspected
them with a slight peek and shake. Maybe the officer noticed my face that displayed
confusion and distastefulness as she was searching Cardennia. She patted me on the head
and instructed us to stand and wait by a thick golden yellow line that looked like traffic
lines painted on the floor.

Soon, Ne-Ci joined us and we walked to another area where we could now see
people interacting. The room had potential to be crowded but the people were too spaced
out. We could tell the inmates by their clothing and even more noticeable, they were
sitting on the opposite side of their visitors. Also, there were no children.

Next, another officer gave us instructions, and we soon joined the others in the
area designated. It finally became apparent to me that the area was a cafetorium. The
long white tables with connected white benches were similar to the tables I had at school.
There was an empty area in front of the tables which I concluded was where the visiting
speakers must have stood. Also, there appeared to be another part of the building behind
the heavy duty beige painted doors, but I was not interested. Then, Irene soon came to us,
hugged us, and like the other inmates, sat on the opposite side of the table.

Her friends began to scream across the room at her. They wanted to know if we
were her “babies”. They also introduced their relatives to her. Then, most of the inmates
who were mothers began to tango the names, ages, and accomplishments of their children
to each other, however, their children were not present, so they soon refocused on their
visitors. Irene spoke highly of us and everyone said we were beautiful and smart girls.
She confirmed that she always talks about her children while gazing upon us with a hard,
creased, closed-mouth grin. Ne-Ci and Irene conversed most between themselves as Cardennia and I gaped inquisitively on our surroundings.

My mind began to assess the words the women had spoken. Cardennia, who was repeating the seventh grade, was not smart. I was not beautiful. I was 11 years old wearing a size 16½, and now, being in Florida, I was at least two shades darker than what I was when I visited her in Alabama. Also, if she always talks about us, why were her friends so clueless about us? About 30 minutes passed and Irene announced that she had to go. Ne-Ci assured us that we would visit again so our goodbyes were short. We waved and smiled, and Irene blew kisses and signaled her love for us with two arms across her chest while slightly turning her body from side to side.

Our ride back was fun. We ate at McDonald’s, listened to my favorite station 101.5, and took turns singing songs individually and with each other. Cardennia and I mostly sang off key, but Ne-Ci could really sing! She was an undiscovered Stephanie Mills. We sang until we reached our house on Briley Avenue.

No one asked us about our visit but I could see the displeasure on Mama’s face. She was a salad bowl. Mama was made up of several ingredients that went well together, but never mixed. Usually, when Irene was present at home, Mama wanted us to act as if Irene was our mother, as long as it never interfered with any of her [Mama’s] decisions. Moreover, Mama frequently made her decisions known, but there was something different about this situation. I wanted to ask her about her feelings, but I did not have the courage. So, I stayed up a little longer and made noises that were loud for her to hear and
conclude that I had not gone to sleep. I assumed and hoped she would then come and ask me about my feelings, but the meeting never took place.

Our next visit to the Prison-farm was similar to the first, initially. Ne-Ci came to pick Cardennia and me up from Mama’s, but this time she was concerned about our wardrobe. Prior to coming, she called and insisted that we wear our matching jean outfits. They were black jeans with magenta, violet, rust, and gold floral prints made by Guess with matching jackets. Cardennia’s pants were so tight, if she had a penny in her back pocket, you could see the date under Lincoln’s head.

On the occasions when Irene actually “got” her children something to wear, the clothing was usually a misfit. Nonetheless, we were so excited when she did bring things for us because we knew they would be name brand and different, we wore them anyway. I was dressed first and waited for Ne-Ci in the garage that was now a den, and Cardennia was in the back bedroom, probably talking in the mirror; so when Ne-Ci arrived I was sure to see her because of my location. When she entered the house she commented that we were already “ready” and inquired the whereabouts of Cardennia.

As time passed I became impatient and went to see what was taking them so long. I found, Ne-Ci assisting Cardennia with her underwear. She was helping her place cigarettes wrapped in toilet tissue in the seat of her panties. Ne-Ci complained about a budge so Cardennia put on a pair of my thick Sunday tights to decrease the hump. Although I never asked, I knew what time it was and got the impression that Cardennia did too.
We left the house and played the radio much of the way there. No one was in the singing mood, but we sing a little unable to resist the popular hits. When we reached our destination we checked in the same manner as before. We were separated from Ne-Ci who advised us to stop looking so crazy, but little did she know, she was “looking crazy” too.

This time, there were several female officers in the area chatting. They treated us as if we were disturbing their coffee break, as one nonchalantly searched me, while continuing her conversation and gesturing to me the movements to make while she patted up and down my legs, my stomach and chest area, and completed her last sip by searching my shoes. Another female officer, much younger than the lady who searched me checked Cardennia. She engaged in the tunes of the other ladies with a light snicker and an occasional nod of the head. This duet was interrupted as she looked at Cardennia with low eyebrows and repeatedly patted her private area. Cardennia looked at me, and I looked in the air, while trying desperately to gaze at the scene from the right corner of my eyes.

The domino effect traveled to the officer who checked me as she asked, “Who y’all here to see?” I replied “My momma” and she questioned more firmly, “Who?” I looked her in her eyes and with a huge air frog in my throat, hoarsely affirmed, “Irene Phillips.” I stood there for a second and lightly folded my arms and my lips to where you only saw my chin and plump red cheeks. I felt Cardennia looking and knew I could not look at her. The guard who searched me told us to stand at the thick golden yellow line and whispered in the ear of the woman who was searching Cardennia.
I felt as if I had just run the 50 yard dash ten times on May Day Play Day, my heart was beating so fast. The officer told us to follow her, but pretending not to hear, we did not move. She turned, looked at us, and repeated with raised firm eyes “Follow me.” We moved hesitantly, and suddenly saw that we were entering the same room as before and quickly joined Ne-Ci.

In the cafetorium Irene awaited with extended arms and a warm smile. After we greeted her, she sat on the same side of the table with us whispering to Ne-Ci, did we get it, and after she was assured, she moved to the other side of the table. We were conversing about nothing when one of Irene’s friends hastily came over to the table. She was strong looking and had a box fade hair cut like the Fresh Prince of Bel Air, but neater and smaller. She came over and sat on the same side as Irene, but before she sat down, her words were in the air, “Irene, did ya get it?” she said with a concerned forehead and eyes which narrowed down into a childish grin that displayed her mini gap smile.

Aggravated, Irene sighed “yeah, yeah” and shooed her friend away with two flicks of her wrist. Ne-Ci looked at the lady with a confused attitude, as Irene concluded “Dese hos kills me acting like dey aint use ta sh--.”

Cardennia looked confused and soon asked what appeared to be to all of us, a confusing question, “When do I take the cigarettes out?” Taking charge, Irene calmly explained as if we were conversing about something else, that Ne-Ci and I should sit around Cardennia. Then, I should stand up and yawn to the right of Cardennia, while Ne-Ci sits blocking her view to the left. Cardennia was to then quickly retrieve the
cigarettes, and pass them to Irene over the top of the table, under the sleeve of her jean jacket.

The sequences were executed and the plan worked. In the thrill of it all, Cardennia stated that the officer who checked her patted her area several times, but she thinks the officer thought it was a sanitary napkin. Irene asked Cardennia what did the guard look like and after a two generic descriptions, short hair cut and brown skinned, Irene replied, “Oh yeah-that’s my girl-she cool” and soon bid us goodnight. 101.5 carried us straight home this time. We did not stop at McDonald’s nor did we perform solos, duets, or trios. Once we reached our destination, everyone said goodnight to one another. We did not visit Irene again after that day, nor did we ever speak to each other about bringing her the cigarettes.

However, in January 2007, one of my younger sisters Har’Rikki, attempted to smuggle cigarettes into the P-farm while visiting a male friend. He requested that she bring him cigarettes and leave them in the bathroom. The officers received an anonymous tip and soon apprehended Har’Rikki and her friend, who in fear, exclaimed she did not place any cigarettes in the bathroom. Har’Rikki, embracing her loyal friendship, confessed to the officers that she was the person responsible for the placement of the cigarettes in the bathroom. Immediately she was taken “downtown” to be booked and her friend drove Irene’s car back to Mama’s house and informed the family of Har’Rikki’s arrest. Nonetheless, Har’Rikki’s behavior was typical for a child of an incarcerated mother.
A depiction of my adolescent years with Irene is briefly highlighted in Today’s Parent magazine:

The high-conflict years with girls can start as early as nine and last till the late teens. Most of them aren’t about major decisions, such as moral paths or academics programs. They’re about life’s daily and sometimes annoying routines.27

When Irene was home, I never felt much like her responsibility and I do not believe Bardenie, Cardennia, or Jake did either. We had other parents: I had Hazell, although she was not in Jacksonville, and Bardenie, Cardennia, and Jake had Mama, Zelda and Alvin. Nonetheless, Irene was our birth mother, so although we did not want to, we had to listen to and obey her at times. She often cursed us out for “no reason” particularly when she cleaned up the house. Superstitious, she would get extremely upset if you swept her foot with a broom. “Step on a crack-break yo’ momma’s back; Sweep ya feet-go to jail” Irene believed these sayings, particularly the latter, so when someone swept her foot, she pushed them back, snatched the broom, spit on it, and threw it down on the floor for them to pick it up. She acted as if she was better than us. We received a welfare check and food stamps on our behalf. We never saw the benefits of it, however, Mama convinced us that the people with whom Irene affiliated herself with were the benefactors.

One day we were all roaming around the house very hungry because Mama had not made it home from work yet. Bardenie had the courage to tell Irene he was hungry and like Pavlov’s dog, he salivated her response. She sarcastically replied, “Um hungry too; eat ya fingers.” Bardenie left with a bowed head and disappointing murmurs;

Cardennia did her typical sass, with the rolling of the eyes and silent treatment. Also, in her sass she came across the street and told me the news. Sick and tired of her attitude, I was determined to teach Ms. Irene a lesson. Later on that week while she was sleeping, I stole food stamps out of her purse. The total probably added up to about $100. I kept $10 for myself and gave the rest to Zelda, so she could get us some groceries.

Two or three days went by before Irene said anything about the theft. Bay Philup asked her for a cigarette and she told him to get his own, by selling the food stamps he had stolen from her. He was finally innocent of an accusation, and feeling good about his accomplishment, he exclaimed “No I didn’t,” as he paused for thirty seconds and added, “I didn’t take a d--- thang. Dem churen took it.”

The room was quiet and everyone’s eyes became wondering grapefruits. My numb heated tongue was accompanied with a throbbing heart. I was afraid and wiser. I knew then that Zelda had told everyone what I had done if Bay Philup knew. But most of all, Irene, discovering what I had done, was the ultimate betrayal. I knew that if Irene knew “we” took it; she would soon know that the “we” was actually Traboo, either by Scooby Doo scary Cardennia, or, she would analytically think about the situation and know that I was the only one who would have done it.

Needless to say, she found out and later confronted me about it. She said “If you ever take aan’ thang out my muthaf---- pockabook again, I’llma kick yo’ fat a--.” I did not mind the threat. I understood it. But the name calling was intolerable. So what I was fat. I was not even really fat, just a little bigger than most children my age. She better not call me that again.
After a moment of these thoughts, I replied with still eyes and no body movement, “We’ll see.” She grinned with the top right of her lip creased and fixed eyes, as she walked toward me, slowly asking me, “who da hell you thank you talking to?” I ignored her by folding my arms and staring on an object that had no value to the situation, as she continued in my direction.

Once she reached me, she took her fingers that are always accompanied with two rings per limb, folded them in a fist, and aimed for my mouth. She missed and punched me in chin. I took the punch and jumped up from my seat with a wrathful testimony. “You sorry bitch, you f-----g hit me again and I’mma beat yo’ a--.” That is about all I could get out before I was interrupted with another punch, and my nose began to bleed.

As an amateur “grown people” fighter, I charged and pushed her against the wall. Actually, I rammed my head into the wall because she had me in the headlock. Next, she grabbed a cordless light with a steel cage and hanger hook that Hal used when he working under the hood of cars at night and she started to beat me in the head with it. When I realized I was losing the fight, I no longer tried to win, but rather defend myself.

She kept her word and fought me like I was “a nigga off da street.” I left with a bloodied nose, a blood shot eye, several knots on my head, and headaches for days. My days were quiet after the fight. No one said much to me, not even Mama. I did not know how to feel. I was embarrassed for losing; I convinced myself that I was right for stealing the food stamps. However, I was still mad and wanted to cry. I thought everyone would feel sorry for me since I was beat-up for the good cause of stealing the food stamps so we could eat. Most of all, I was angry because the persons for whom I had stolen the food
stamps, did not help me. I felt even more betrayed when I overheard Mama saying to Cardennia, children should respect their parents and that I was wrong for hitting Irene.

Irene and I had several fights after that one. There were two while I was a fourth grader, but none while I was a fifth grader. While in the fifth grade, Irene’s new boyfriend John Johnson, my youngest sister’s father, lived with us. In addition, John liked me a lot, so Irene dared not argue with his favorite child of hers if she wanted him to stay around.

During the end of my fifth grade year, John moved out of Irene’s mother house and into his own mother’s house. In an effort to win him back, Irene drove to their residence and asked me to tag-a-long. I did, and was rudely awakened with my first experience of domestic abuse.

Irene went inside the house and left me in the car. She stayed there for about three minutes until, she stumbled outside and the door was slammed in her face. Angry and shouting, Irene repeatedly knocked on the door and rang the door bell in one motion. The knocking and banging became louder and louder, until the door was opened and Irene fell inside. Suddenly, she was thrown out about ten feet from the door where she landed on her back. I identified the thrower as John, who proceeded to attack and humiliate his victim.

In a sudden realization of possible death approaching, Irene grasped for the door of our vehicle. She successfully made it inside when she was suddenly snatched, jerked, and punched in the head, while being dragged back to the battlefield. Realizing she was
trying to escape, I found my voice. In a state of fear and rage half leaning out of the car, I screamed, “Ni--- you betta let my momma go!”

Unaware of my presence, John’s surprised look was filled with guilt and embarrassment. As I found my voice, he immediately found his heart, and began apologizing to me and Irene. I ignored his attempts to apologize as I sat back into the vehicle and shouted to Irene that we needed to go. We left, but we did not speak on the way home, and I never revealed her secret.

John did not come back to live with us, but some time later, there was a warrant for his arrest and the charges - Attempted Murder. The family discovered this in Irene’s attempt to hide John from the police at Hazell’s house in Atlanta. John and Irene’s visit in Atlanta lasted too long for Hazell. When she questioned Irene about being an unwanted guest, Hazell learned one of her guests was in actuality, Wanted by the police for attempted murder.

My battles with Irene revived when I became a sixth grader. At Moncrief Sixth Grade Center, I was a gifted delinquent. As a school patrol officer, I followed school rules too much in the morning. I told all students, including bullies, they must not talk in the morning seating hall, and that they could only eat in the designated areas. This duty provided the opportunity to meet Sherry Clark, another student, in an unpredicted battle on an after school walk home. I had told her to be quiet too many times in the morning. As a person familiar with the area, she knew all the shortcuts to the neighborhoods around Moncrief, and also knew that I was a “walker.”
One unexpected afternoon, Sherry and a couple of students from the *Hilltop* community, decided they would fight the bossy patrol girl. Sherry was the only person with enough guts to do it, which began my first of many fights as a sixth grader. After our fight, and recognizing my strength, she wanted to be friends. Sherry was a product of *Hilltop*, and knew everyone in the neighboring projects, *Golf Brook* and *Palm Terrace*. Although my family was poor, we had pride. *Hilltop*, *Palm Terrace*, and *Golf Brook* were run down and drug-infested section-eight apartment communities. My neighborhood, *The Bottom*, was a run down drug-infested area consisted of homeowners, and my street, Briley Avenue, only had one community problem home, The Phillips. So, being apart of this new community, I adapted most of its concepts and habits based on poverty and crime.

Accordingly, Mama disapproved of my new personality and credited all my fights to my “henchmen” and to me being, “just like my mammy.” On the other hand, Irene loved me this way. She encouraged my actions by telling me her war stories and proclaiming, “Traboo kick a-- like me!” My grades fell and I was no longer a patrolman. I was, however, respectful and nice to the new and young Caucasian science teacher, who seemed to want to make a difference with poor, black, at-risk youth. This afforded me a star role in the school’s Thanksgiving Play.

I played the role of the mother in the play which entailed memorizing majority of the lines and singing a solo. The faculty and students enjoyed the show and most of all, so did Betty Mitchell, a teacher at Moncrief, who owned and operated High Chapparelle’s Modeling/Dance Troop. Mrs. Mitchell, who wished to be called Mother
Dear (pronounced Mudea), made me a Lieutenant of Moncrief's Troopettes, and a member of both of her outside organizations. Soon, I had no time for Sherry and the clique. My nights and weekends were filled with dance rehearsal, dance recitals, church performances, award banquets, Ebony Fashion Shows, and much more.

Nonetheless, Mrs. Mitchell became Irene and Mama's enemy, although Mudea never knew it. According to them, I would not do anything Mama or the other family members asked, but if Mrs. Mitchell asked me, or if Mrs. Mitchell drove up, I would jump, run, and go. So many times, I was prohibited from attending practice. Additionally, I did not have money for dance shoes or costumes. My feelings for Mudea often separated me from my family.

Adding to these thoughts, according to Zelda, I was "just like my mammy" Irene because I found happiness in "ni---- in the street." In efforts to regain family unity, Zelda often had family dinners at her new home, a new African-American luxury-apartment community Christopher Woods. Cardennia, Bardenie, and Jake lived with Zelda, so Irene had to pick me up from Mama's house. As we journeyed back to Zelda's, we saw Jarvis Gustarvis Parrish, the man, as it is written and proclaimed in the gospel of Irene, who is my father. When she saw him walking down the side walk, she looked twice in the rear view mirror to ensure it was him, before she confirmed, "Traboo that's Jarvis. Do you want me to call him over here?" I silently replied, "Yes" with the nod of my head.

She then called him and as he confusingly ran to the car, she announced herself as Irene Phillips. I observed his mocha complexion, lean figure, thick hair, and huge eyebrows and eyes as they were not a reflection of me in any way. Once he arrived to the
car, in an out of breath voice he said, “Hey Irene, wassup?” She pointed at me with her thumb and an assured grin, “Do you know who this is?” I looked over with a smile not too big and not too small, but with the “look at me” intention. He was perplexed. “No” he says, and asks, “Who is it?” After his response, I looked straight ahead and said nothing.

Then, trying to make the situation more comfortable, she asks again, enthusiastically, “You don’t know who dis is?” He was without response. She replied, “Boy, dis Traboo,” with a pitched tone that he should have already known. He replies with a shocking, but flat falsetto “Oh, dis Traboo?; Hey Traboo.” I said hey with my head down, focusing on newly found edible skin on the cuticles of my fingers as I ate it, and continued to look forward. After his greeting, he ignored me and conversed with her for about a minute or two.

When we arrived at Zelda’s house, I did not say. Irene told everyone of our meeting with Jarvis. Then, Bardenie asked me, “Traboo, you seen yo daddy?” I did not reply and Irene did not like it. When we got to Briley Avenue, I was silent and it was obvious, I had a nasty disposition as Irene called it, because I could not talk to anybody.

She came to the big house asking questions and I displayed the same behavior I did early in the day, I ignored her. We fought again but this time I had won the family’s approval which was much more important than winning the fight. Zelda who embellished the story, told everyone that Irene tried to make me say, Jarvis was my dad, and I would not. He had never done anything for me and had declared to Mama, he was not my dad. So Irene, in Alvin’s eyes, “Needs ta stop her sh--.”
Irene was not around much when I was a seventh, eighth, and ninth grader. I had a new baby sister Jon’Quetta Johnson, in addition to Har’Rikki, so I was not around much either. Irene returned prison so I ensured that I played every sport in middle school to avoid family chaos and babysitting my younger sisters. I was only home for dinner and to sleep, while my weekends were occupied with academic, athletics, and/or dance programs.

During the summers however, I could not avoid my sisters. Everywhere I or Cardennia and I went, a one-year and a three-years-old were sure to follow. Since Cardennia was older than me, the family was really much harder on her, forcing her to become the auxiliary parent. I do not know how she did it.

Eventually, Irene returned to live with us, and it was during my tenth grade year that we had our last brawl. I was not used to fighting anymore. I had a fight once in seventh grade with a teammate and once in eighth grade defending a friend, but those events were in middle school, when I was Hatchet. Now, I was in high school and I wore dresses because I wanted to, and not because of some athletic banquet. For that reason, I was indeed surprised when the fight happened and more surprised that I had won, finally. It was a different feeling though. I did not feel like the child fighting the forces of evil anymore. I did not want to fight her, but it seemed like there was an understanding, I had to.

About a week prior to the incident, there was a small dispute when Zelda and I were late picking up Mama and Irene up from the hospital. They were visiting Alvin, and we were trying to take a break from the hospital at the dollar movies. As a result, Irene
and Mama waited outside the hospital for about thirty minutes. Irene was upset because she started to argue with Zelda, and Zelda told her that she could get out of the car. Mama chose not take part in the argument, so Irene became frustrated.

Once we arrived at the big house, Irene took her anger out on me. She went to the living room and turned the television to BET. When she noticed that "her" song was playing by the artist Keith Washington, she turned the volume up so loud, the entire Briley Avenue could hear it. She then asked me the telephone number to the hospital, while she walked to back of the house.

During spring, summer, and fall I slept in the living room on a cot where the television was playing (in the winter I slept with Mama for heat). With the juke joint atmosphere, I would be unable to sleep in the noise, and knowing that she could not hear me, I thought responding was pointless, nevertheless I did. As she repeatedly questioned "huh?" and finally, out of frustration, I yelled the number to her. That was her cue to react.

She stormed from the back and asked me, "Who da hell you thank you talking ta?" I walked away while saying, "Irene gon', cause you know you ain’t even mad at me. You mad at Zelda." She followed me, picked up the telephone and hit me with it. When she attempted to hit me with it a second time, I grabbed the telephone and it was obvious to the both of us, I was stronger. I stood there firmly and called Mama, as she came to the front room and ended the dispute. That night, I slept with bleach in a cup to pour on Irene if she tried to attack me in my sleep, and as the days went by, I did not speak to her and she did not speak to me.
Later, the silence was broken one day when Irene came from across the street yelling about me not cleaning out the bathtub. She facetiously remarks, “You should keep yo’ a-- from over here. Keep takin yo’ birdbaths.” I knew the tub was not dirty and so did Mama, but after Mama asked me to go and do it, I did. Then, she returned with the same accusation and in a rebellious mode, I affirmed that I had thoroughly cleaned the tub. Keeping the peace, Mama (who mispronounced everyone’s name) said, “Traya please do as your mother has asked.” I knew this meant to clean the tub and be quiet.

When I returned to the big house, Irene came over a third time questioning me about eating her Red hot hotdogs. I denied eating them, but I was guilty. She called me a greedy, fat, bitch and told me to leave her sh-- alone because it was not for me. I replied, “Who is it for then?” She knew what I was insinuating and therefore, replied with a blow to my face. I laughed, as it did not affect me, and she spit in my face. Without thinking, I picked her up, and slammed her on the broken down sofa in the living room. I saw the shock in her eyes, but I did not care. I punched her face, chest, and stomach continuously, looking at her after every blow. She was hurt and I did not stop.

Irene screamed Alvin’s name, and he came over to discover the fight. He tried to pull me off of her, but I bit him. Then, Irene grabbed my hair, but I broke loose from her with a kick to her stomach. Finally, I stood there, mad, with a heaving chest, wrinkled forehead, and a slowly grieving heart, but I was indeed, victorious. Alvin looked at Irene, and then me, and in his huge eyes, I saw fright and the acknowledgment, I was too grown for The Phillips. I went into the middle bedroom of the big house, grabbed my books, and walked to the library. That day, I learned two disappointing things. I could actually,
beat, Irene and in doing so, I was too grown for The Phillips. Even more disturbing, I learned my uncle Alvin had full blown AIDS.

When I returned home, as always, Cardennia had the family gossip and told me how Irene was acting like a loser, saying she pulled out my hair, and that I was a “stupid ho” to bite Alvin because he had AIDS. Irene proclaimed she hoped I die from it. I knew she was speaking of when Alvin attempted to pull me off of Irene, and in his efforts, he grabbed my face and I bit his finger. I did not care about myself though. After all, he was, as my middle school friend’s called him, “Hatchet’s uncle.” Hatchet was the name I acquired as a beginning hacking basketball player and I never seemed to live it down. Alvin loved his name “Hatchet’s uncle.” But what he loved more, was that Hatchet was “somebody” and although he never said it, I knew it.

So consequently, there were questions of whether or not I might AIDS, and as a new disease, we did not know much about it. Nurse Zelda told us, “If you have Tuberculosis, you have AIDS.” So, I think, to solve the problem, Mama insured later that summer that the entire family went to get TB shots. While at the University Hospital Clinic, Zelda also mentioned that if we actually had TB, our arms would have flared up like the Chinese lady sitting in the big red chair. Ms. Yang, as we ignorantly named her, stared at her arm for minutes at a time, before she would fix the same stare at the wall, and then back to the big bubble that seemed to be turning brown and green. We left the clinic with opposite faces of Ms. Yang. Everyone’s test results were negative.

As a result of fighting Irene, I became a better fighter and by going on runs to stores with her, I became a better thief. We stole everything! Purchasing something as
small as lip gloss was not an option with Irene. Hazell never let me wonder off in the store, but Irene did. When we eventually returned to the car, I had demonstrated how well I spent my time in the store, especially in Pic-N-Save. When I revealed the items to Irene of what I had obtained, she responded with a smile, and an occasional, “Why you ain’t get me one?” or “Where you saw dat at?” Cardennia did not come much, but it seemed like when she did, things always went wrong. She was scary, scary-looking, and brought bad luck to our thieving activities.

However, it was at Zares in Gateway Mall, that I was first arrested. Irene asked me and Cardennia to go to the store with her. I knew what would probably happen, but she did not prep us in the car, so I did not think much of it. However, when she got out the car with shopping bags from other stores, I knew what she had in mind. Once we entered the store, Cardennia and I were acting like normal girls our age, looking at toys, play make-up and school supplies. Irene came and instructed us to hold the shopping bags she entered the store with, while she put some children, blue and purple, acid-washed, jean outfits in the bags. We did. Then, she came back with more clothing and put them in the bags we were holding.

Then, again, she came back with more merchandise, and asked us to put it under our clothing, while she stuffed her items in Har’Rikki’s baby stroller, and told us to walk out the side mall entrance, while she walk out the front door. We did. Maybe she returned because we never made it to the car. There was an undercover security guard who grabbed both of our arms as we exited the store. Our limbs were filled with stolen merchandise and our baby sister, Har’Rikki. I remember his voice. It was a low and kind
“Excuse me” as he stooped down to see us on eye level, “will you come with me?” Cardennia and I looked at each other and turned around as the gentleman had requested.

Next, we were taken to a beige room with tables, a couple of chairs, and a computer. There was a uniformed officer and another woman casually dressed, with a police officer badge on her shirt. They told us to sit down, as they removed the bags from our possession. They placed all the items on a table and asked us if we had anything else. Cardennia began removing the items that were under her shirt, so I did the same. They asked us our names and birthdays, and pulled out a black inkpad, a roller, and cards, which designated a square for each of our fingers. I learned the process was called fingerprinting when the casual dressed lady asked the uniformed officer to fingerprint Cardennia, while she finished with me.

The gentleman who stopped us at the door had an opposite face of me and Cardennia. He wore a satisfying grin and we looked clueless. The officers’ faces were placid. It seemed as if the procedure was a usual routine to them. When they finished, Cardennia and I sat quietly, looking at each other from time to time, but when we noticed the other person was looking, we look away in space or at our dangling feet that did not reach the ground.

Finally, Irene came and the gentleman, who was identified as the store security guard, explained to her that her saw us putting items in shopping bags. Irene looked at me wiping my fingers and asked, “They finger printed yall?” We nodded “yes.” Then the officer came over to us and said, “You have the right to remain silent” that followed with
more words that seemed like a routine. I felt pressure from his actions and began to bite
every nail, on each finger until they bled. Irene saw this, and then spoke on our behalf.

Meanwhile, Irene denied that we had stolen the merchandise, and assured the
guards that we purchased the items from Zares sometime ago, and was now trying to
match shirts, with the merchandise in our possession. She went as far as saying she could
produce a receipt and if she did, would they drop the charges, and asked that the security
guard apologize for his behavior. The security guard nodded and answered “yes.”

About a day or two later Mama asked me about the incident. She said that one of
her co-workers saw her “plump grandbaby” leaving the beige room in the store. I knew
that really meant Cardennia had told what happened, and Mama wanted to hear my side
of the story, so she could warn me of the dangers of going shopping with Irene.

I never told Irene about Mama’s conversation, but she later found out, in
argument she and Zelda had across the street. Zelda was accusing Irene of not doing
much for us, and Irene was arguing, that Zelda, was always trying to take the credit for
what Mama and Alvin did for us. So, when Irene said to Zelda, “Da only reason you
half way do fa’ em’ cause you get something out of it. Mama and Alvin got they stuff.
What you got em’?” Zelda replied, “B---, what you got em?” before Irene could respond,
Zelda completed her answer with, “A record. A God---- record.” I glanced to see Irene’s
reaction. She was outdone, so she walked to Zelda, and punched her on the side of her
face. The punch was really for us I felt. We had told a top secret, and it was obvious that
our loyalty was not to our mother. Hal broke up the fight; and as usual, afterwards,
everyone took sides. The family and Irene’s children were with Zelda, and Irene was
alone. Furthermore, when we discovered the merchandise we were stealing was not for us, but for Irene’s boyfriend’s David’s family, we felt used, and stood more firmly by the person who supported us.

As much trouble as the Zares’ incident caused, we were at it again about three weeks later. This time however, Cardennia and I had no clue as to Irene’s plans. As we arrived at Eckerd’s Drug Store in Gateway, Cardennia and I attempted to run around the store, however in an unusual stance, Irene confined us to a certain area. We found ourselves in boring cosmetics, and we watched Irene test several different shades of lipsticks and eyeliner pencils. We were soon approached with products from Irene, who told us to place them in Har’Rikki’s baby stroller.

First, the items were small, lipstick, eyeliners, lip liners, and nail polish. Next, there were make-up sets, such as matching lipstick and nail polish, and finally, there were perfumes as Irene sprayed Cardennia with the Chantilly powder, perfume, and lotion set. As she did this she said, “Ooh Cardennia, I like this cause I was going to name you Chantilly Chante.” More items followed, and all were placed under the blankets in Har’Rikki’s stroller as Irene, who had already won over Cardennia, convinced her to push the stroller out the door. Cardennia attempted to exit first, and I followed. As we exited, we were startled by beep, beep, beep. . . I stopped with the guilty “I don’t know what’s going on” look. Cardennia, continued to push the stroller outside to the car.

She was immediately followed by a store clerk as Irene rushed out behind him. He asked Cardennia to come back to the store, so he can discover what is signaling the alarm. During the journey, Irene silently told Cardennia to say a mysterious man told her
to put the merchandise in Har’Rikki’s stroller, and to meet him in the parking lot. So, after the merchandise that totaled to over $200 was found, Cardennia delivered the punch line, and Irene played along. “Cardennia, what’s this? What’s going on?” Irene asked. Cardennia replied, “It was a man who told me to do it?” The clerk interfered, “What man? What did he look like?” In a low, three-years-old voice, and earnest face, she replied, “He was tall.” Simply dumbfounded, the clerk inquired, “What was he wearing?” In the same responsive manner as before, she states, “He had on brown.” I am not sure how we left that store in Hal’s car, as opposed to a police officer’s. It was clear to everyone that no tall man wearing brown existed, at least not in Eckerd’s that day.

We did not go straight home after the incident, as we stopped at a local Walgreen’s. Irene “needed” new cosmetics, and it was obvious, she was going to get them. We were left in the car as she retrieved her items and the next day, Irene wore plum lips, trimmed in an aqua blue, with fuchsia nails and toes to match.

I admired the beautification rituals of Irene. It was like watching a rich white woman movie, live! She sank in oil bubble baths that reaped the scent of blooming spring flowers, and exited the tub delicately, drying each part of her body, limb by limb. Right foot, toes, right leg, right thigh, right buttocks, right leg on the floor meeting a 100% cotton towel; left foot, toes, left leg, left thigh, left buttocks, and left leg on the untouchable adult towel. She wrapped her body in another towel and entered her room, where there was a dresser full of cosmetics and fragrances, and on the bed, her creased iron name brand clothes that are perfumed with her chosen fragrance of the day, along with a satin-laced matching panty and bra set, to match the clothing of her choice.
The entertaining session began with an Anita Baker or Luther Vandross hit, as Irene paraded a sexy two-step walk followed by a snap, clap, and/or head swaying “heey” to the tunes. She sometimes included her audience with a finger point, insinuating “sing the next line.”

In the same manner she exits the tub, she lotioned her body with aromatic scents. Unlike us, who usually pour generic Shower to Shower on our chests that rained down to our tummies and the floor, Irene powdered her breast and vaginal area with scented sponges, from a circle shaped powder box. She used extra lotion on her backside, as it wiggled in a slight circle motion, and she boasted with a confident smirk, “must be jelly cause jam don’t shake like that” to any on lookers.

She would also “strike a pose” in the mirror, that was similar to the Polaroid pictures Cardennia and I found in her “home from jail” bag. She and about four other women were dressed like Prince girlfriend’s group in Purple Rain. They posed side by side, and, on top of one another with raised legs, poked out butts, and bared breast. I enjoyed these moments. It allowed me to see, naked Irene, as she often conversed on the telephone with her men, and indulged in something she felt made her special. Unlike her freedom, no one would ever be able to take away her womanhood.

In an effort to imitate her I often used her items, without permission, to pamper myself. I was caught several times and experienced her physical and verbal punishment, yet, whenever bored, or feeling the need to be “made up,” I resorted to indulging in the process. After being caught in the act, (she usually smelled her scents in the atmosphere or noticed that too much was missing) she delightfully gazed at me impersonating her, as
I lotioned my body, did the MC Hammer running man dance followed by a snap of my fingers with a "heey" and powdered my vaginal area.

Trying to "play off" being startled by her presence, I proceeded to put on my clothes as she commented, "Traboo girl, in the words of Jake, you blooming." I sighed a smile to the side and thought, what does Jake know about blooming? It can be noted that he obviously knew a lot since he at 25 years of age has six children. She was in a good mood, and that was always good for everybody. She waited until was finished dressing and invited our neighbor, her company, Frank in the room. Soon, my great-grand daddy (an expired minister) Papa’s room was filled with Irene, Frank, Cardennia, Bardenie, Zelda, Har’Rikki, and me.

As usual when Irene was feeling good, we all had a good time. We ate Rock Shrimp from Winn Dixie and drank Nehi Peach or Tahitian Treat sodas. Everyone shared funny and embarrassing stories, while laughter and problems of disenfranchised youth and law offenders, Frank was a local drug dealer, filled the room.

With limited seating in the crowded room, I sat on the edge of the bed with one foot on the rail and another on the floor. Maybe Irene was feeling good about the laughter and jokes, and soon got too caught up in the moment. Watching my vaginal area she soon uncontrollably blurts, "Traboo you got a long cussy like dem white girls," and everyone’s eyes and laughter was on me. I knew that displaying any of my emotions would have been an over reaction to the "funny as hell" comment, so I smiled, showing no teeth. Irene followed up with, "Lord we gon’ have to get a spoon for dat nose" while she pinched and pulled it with her index and middle fingers. Disgusted with her comments,
my eyes automatically watered and I attributed it to Irene pulling on my nose too hard. Everyone agreed I have “real sensitive” skin, so I am excused to dry my face.

I looked in the bathroom mirror, humiliated, frustrated. I hated the girl staring back at me. Why did she not look different? How did my nose grow so big and what in the hell are these veins on the side of it? I proceeded to the toilet sitting as if I was using it and examined my vagina with a broken mirror piece. It was long and no longer “pure.” With the sexual fantasies of first Lonzo and Muffie, and now Bardenie, it never stood a chance. Maybe, he did not think I was really his sister because I did not live with them. However, telling Mama Hazel did not help, she accused me of lying.

Later, I returned to the crowd and announced, that I was going to a neighborhood friend, Megan’s house to play. Someone replied, “Yeah-gon’ to ya twin house.” These words exited with me while I left the room. My family always joked that Megan and I looked like sisters. Megan was fat, really fat, because she was larger than me. Her kindness, intellect, and solid family background did not matter to The Phillips. She was fat, and often the punch line to many of their ‘behind the back’ jokes. However, she was my sanity.

Rounding out the summers, Irene engaged in the traditional norm of back-to-school shopping. Although she was not the main source of our shopping list, whatever she brought was a delightful treat. In an effort to shop for the event, Irene asked Zelda, to take her and John to the mall, and Cardennia and I tagged along. Irene stated she would not be long, as she and John went in the mall, Cardennia and I followed, and Zelda sat in the car. Irene and John “shopped” while Cardennia and I “window-shopped”
following behind them, but not closely, as we were absorbed in our favorite shoes or outfits on display.

We lost them after the noise of peers galvanized us in the Food Court, as we slightly conversed with classmates and others big enough to hang out at the mall. The Food Court was at the center entrance, as we could not miss Irene attempting to exit the mall without us. Realizing we were going to be left behind, we hurriedly traveled in her direction to exit the mall.

Walking to the car, we inquired to Irene the whereabouts of John, she did answer us, but she, instead, was grabbed by a male officer wearing black quarter top boots, army fatigue black pants, and a white polo style shirt. Another male officer ran in our direction as we looked on with immense eyes, and pounding hearts. The officer, who had Irene by the arm, asked us, “Are you with them?” I was speechless, but Cardennia replied in a firm voice, “No.”

At the tail end of the car, Zelda witnessed the episode, and the second officer, who ran to the scene in plain clothes, looked into the car at Zelda and confirmed, “No she wasn’t with them.” Irene was handcuffed and walked back into the mall by the officers, as they signal to other officers on the roof of the building, who are nodding “yes,” while holding a “thumbs up.” Irene did not say one word to us when she left, and we did likewise. We watched the officer walk her to the mall through a side door, as another officer stood with John, who was handcuffed to the door, with his hands behind his back.

We left the mall. I focused on the road while Zelda drove all the way to Briley Avenue, professing that she did not understand the actions of Irene. Cardennia continued
to proclaim our innocence reiterating, “We'int know.” The remainder of the day, we were eyed by Mama and our uncles. I did not provide a reaction, but Cardennia enthusiastically told the story with Zelda to Mama and the others. At that moment, Mama forbade us to go to the store with Irene.

There were not many more episodes with Irene’s first set of children that includes me, Bardenie, and Cardennia. Jake, the youngest of the first set, was always with Zelda. Our last group effort was to take family photos during the Christmas holidays at K-Mart. Irene selected red and green clothing from the racks and aisles of the department store for Jake, Har’Rikki, and Quetta, and told us, me, Bardenie, and Cardennia, to put on certain sweaters she had hand selected due to color coordination. Although we and no one else ever saw the photos, Hal heard about our efforts to be portraits of perfection from the store manager who was a close friend of his.

He did not say anything to me and Cardennia about it. However, in an overheard confrontation with Bardenie, Hal shouted, “Bardenie, why in the hell would you put on something when you know you hadn’t paid for it?” Bardenie replied, “I didn’t know. I thought we could do it.” His unbelievable response was true. Although we had many failed attempts, we thought we could do anything with Irene. She provided a security blanket that no other adult seem to have. She could persuade us to do anything and her way of life, was present and dominant on our way of life.

Irene was absent after the K-Mart incident, and much of it is attributed to my contribution. Determined not to be arrested for shoplifting, Irene discovered a new way to retrieve the items of her choice. Given a second chance at credit, she attained a bank
account at First Union. Unable to resist the temptation of a scheme, Irene soon engaged in fraudulent activities.

Waiting my arrival from school, Irene liked the way I imitated her signature on homework assignments I signed for five extra points, in her absence. As Mama spoke highly of Irene’s fancy penmanship, I proudly professed, “I can write just like Irene” and remembering my homework assignments, Irene afforded me the opportunity to demonstrate my talent. She presented me with checks to write her signature on the designated line, and was frequently frustrated, if I did not do it to her liking, as she often snatched her checkbook, snatched the pen, pushed my hand, and told me that I better do it right, as she made space for a fresh check.

In Gayfer’s Department store, I discovered her new method of stealing. She brought items to the counter and when it was time to submit payment, she did so with a check already signed, by me. She assumed she would not be held responsible for these items, as she detested the signatures to bank personnel and family members. Her efforts were effortless, as she was arrested and convicted of Worthless Checks.

After the age of eleven for me, thirteen for Cardennia, and fourteen Bardenie, we pretty much terminated our shopping sprees with Irene. She was back and forth in our lives and when she was present, we did not want her to be or we simply did not care. It was, now, obvious to us, she was only at home with us because she had no other place to go. A plus to me, was when she took my two youngest siblings with her, taking the responsibility of big sister and/or auxiliary parent away. Her desire to be an actual mother
to them, may be a direct result as to why they call her “Ma” as opposed to the first
children’s, “Irene.”

Reflections:

As my siblings and I matured we went our separate ways. I, the third child of
Irene’s continued to engage in criminal activity as self-pampering had become apart of
me. I attended Raines High School where high fashion and presentation was everything
and in a need to fit in and be a part, I hustled ways to get my hair and nails treated, and
when Hazell did not send me money for clothes, I made sure I became friends with
anyone who worked in retail, so I could receive “da hook up.”

When those methods failed to please me, I succeeded in obtaining new items by
visiting dressing rooms with extremely old clothes, or clothes, a size or two bigger than
what I would normally wear. In the dressing room, floor clerks and sales associates were
sure to find either old clothes that I had swapped out, or empty hangers, as my new
apparel were sure to be under the oversized garments. I never stuffed the obvious places
like purses, and shopping bags, I was much more clever than the average lifter. For
example, whenever gas stations advertised big drink specials, I succeeded in lifting silk
dresses or accessories, by strategically placing them inside the oversized drinking mug,
pretending to slurp them through a visible straw, protruding outside the mug, and exiting
the store.

In spite of my shop lifting activities, I maintained my academic studies and
became increasingly involved in extra curricular activities. However, when upcoming
events required me nicely dressed, I added to my wardrobe and accessories.
Unlike my siblings, I went from household to household, and during the last two years of high school, I lived with Mama Hazel, then in Jonesboro, Georgia with Hazell, then, back to Jacksonville, with Garcia and Ros, and lastly, at 5839 Briley Avenue, (across the street) with Mama Hazel and company. No one was aware of my stealing habits, for I could not endure further ridicule of my family. After all, I was, already, “just like my mammy,” smart but with an attitude that was unbearable to relatives.

Subsequently, even though I could live with them, it was only a matter of time before they would send me away. Fortunately for me, the Phillips truly indulged in events where they can boast about family success. On June 5, 1996, I graduated from William Marion Raines High School with Honors. Figure 9 illustrates the pleasure the Phillips enjoyed whenever a family member was successful.

Figure 9. Da’Tarvia’s High School Graduation.
With the assistance of Garcia’s wife, Ros, Hazell’s kindness, and the prayers of Mama, former Pastor Reverend John Henry Arrington and Varick Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, I left Jacksonville, Florida to matriculate at Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina. Although I was away from Briley Avenue, and even became an “educated” woman graduating with a Bachelor’s and a Master’s Degree in English, with the inability to find adequate employment, and the reality that I was not making it, I continued to give way to the maladaptive behavior and habits. Then again, many times, I did it to impress others and myself, as to show just how good I was at my craft of shoplifting. Each of us, that is, the children of Irene made decisions about our lives.

The oldest of my siblings, Bardenie, became the high school, proud, promiscuous male that slept with all the girls, but most proudly, with older women. He is married with three children, but is always out for business and promotional purposes, as he aspires to be a rapper. He is often arrested for soliciting, as he illegally sells his music in front of community stores.

Cardennia, the second of the six, became the drug dealer’s girlfriend. This choice led to truancy and her eventually dropping out of high school, after a teenage pregnancy, and a gun incident that led her to the Intensive Care Unit. Today, pieces of a bullet remain on the back right side of her brain. On a brighter note, in middle school at Northwestern, Librarian Massey founded The Just Say No Club. Cardennia and I were members and frequently volunteered at a local “Old Folks Home”. As a fourteen-years-old, Cardennia found her place here. Given the nickname “Poochie” by the elderly residence, she enjoyed our visits and soon began to coordinate them. This activity
“saved” her, as she is a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) who lives with Mama on Briley Avenue with her two daughters and one son.

In the middle, and over protected by Zelda as many family members proclaimed, Jake-the fourth child of Irene-dropped out of high school and followed the promiscuous footsteps of Bardenie. He is homeless, as he moves from woman to woman and house to house, with no stability lasting longer than six months. As a result, he has six children with four different women. Moreover, he often consumes marijuana with Bay Philup, whereas it has even been reported that Jake has experimented with cocaine.

My younger sisters, Har’Rikki, fifth of six and Jon’Quetta, sixth of six, followed in our footsteps as they plundered department and novelty stores with Irene, thereby becoming, studying, and practicing the habits of a “lifter.” Har’Rkki loves this world as it is apart of her today just as much as it was when she was in her primary and adolescent years. A part of a younger “BET Generation”, Har’Rikki and Quetta often participate in public quarrels, alcohol and marijuana use, and brief friendships that come and go whenever the thrill is over.

Many say Har’Rikki’s life was over before it started as she completed high school with a General Education Diploma, and a baby on the way. A year behind graduation schedule, eighteen-year-old Quetta is a shadow of twenty-year-old Har’Rikki who is currently her caregiver. With no family stability, Quetta pretty much lives from house to house. In February of 2007, Cardennia secretly informed me that Har’Rikki and Quetta make visit stores with Har’Rikki’s baby’s stroller engaging in Irene related behavior. May the circle be unbroken?
For all of the reasons discussed, my reactions to Irene are not the same as some of my siblings. I strive to consider her at Mother’s Day and call her on my birthday to tell her thank you for giving me life. Although I am like Sofia’s children in *The Color Purple*, I do not know her. I do not dislike her even though I have not fully developed a relationship with her or any other family relative for that matter.

Irene has been the “black sheep” of the family for so long. Although she does possess positive qualities, just as the angry mother in Dunye’s film, her life is dominated by one failure, her inability to be a mother to her six children.

In the opinion of family members, Irene attempts to show interest in her grandchildren, in efforts to redeem her role as a mother, by being a successful grandmother, or “Nana” as my nieces and nephews affectionately call her. In reality, the seventh of nine children needed to belong. All her life she was in search of belonging. She committed criminal acts to belong, and, she had babies to belong.

Like many women, Irene longs for a husband as she constantly and repeatedly puts her trust in her mates, and disregards herself and her children, in order to please them. In doing so, she often resorts to criminal activity, striving to display independence and bring something to the table. It is not that she does not care for her children; she simply does not possess that mother instinct that society has so defined women should possess.

The question confronting some incarcerated mothers especially Irene, appears to be more psychological than his dissertation addresses. Questions that do address Irene’s relationship with her children are: Was she taught how to be a mother? Was Mama Hazel
a mother to her? Was she too young to begin motherhood? Perhaps what Irene needed was rehabilitation. This narrative seems to indicate that the family was aware of this need, although they forced us on her and encouraged, at their convenience that we were in her presence and her responsibility. It cannot be overlooked that Irene made the choices she did because she desired immediate gratification. Shoplifting, regardless of its results, fulfilled the gratification need without responsibility for working for it. My siblings and I are apart of every statistical report on children with imprisoned mothers. We have repeated our mother’s crime, engaged in other criminal activity, some of us dropped out of high school, experienced teenage pregnancy, experimented with drugs, shifted caregivers, have not build long-term relationships, exhibited aggressive behavior, and most of all, we have insecure relationships with our mother. The behavior exhibited by my siblings and me are similar to those demonstrated in the earlier statistics, literature, and film referred to in this research.

It may indeed be beneficial for the child to maintain contact with the parent, but when I reflect on my prison visits they are horrific. The prison exposed me to many things I never knew. It told me I was ugly and not good enough, as the words echoed in my heart many years, “fat, loose weight, don’t look good.” I attribute these words to the “prison” not my “mother.” In a prison atmosphere and mentality, how could she see my beauty? How would she have known all the feelings I had inside of me that I wanted to give to her, were filled with love and me, just me? But too, there was something about my environment that did not allow me to show this. Wanting to know her, silently insinuated, I did not appreciate my caregivers. I did appreciate them, but I wanted to
know her and I could not have both.

I hated the prison visits with Ne-Ci to see Irene mainly because I was concerned about my caregivers’ reactions. They looked down on us for visiting Irene, but we went anyway. However, once we reached our destination, we felt used. She convinced us to smuggle goods to her and her friends. What mother would jeopardize their children’s freedom, especially when they know how it feels to lose it? As I became older, I became aware of Irene’s behavior. I suspiciously read her letters as they were always introduced with her extending loving thoughts and ended, with us, extending love offerings to her by bringing her some desired object. Even her envelopes were filled with love as displayed in Figure 10. I had two problems with the documents: (1) she never told me she loved me when she was out of prison and (2) she knew I did not have a job or money with which to purchase the requested objects. So she was indirectly telling me to steal them. I did not have a problem with stealing. The problem was I felt she never stole anything for me, so why should I risk my freedom for her?

Figure 10. Back of envelope mailed to Da’Tarvia from Irene while in prison.
As studies suggests, it may be beneficial to the child for the caregiver to attain information on how to deal with the incarcerated parent. Realizing and confronting the fatal statistics of children with imprisoned mothers is a vital component of the child’s growing process. Nonetheless, considering that many caregivers, particularly African-American, are not as financially stable, have other children, and/or are third-generation parents, the time and efforts this process of providing the needed education takes, does not afford many to engage in it. A more grim reality is that many Blacks do not seek psychological health care.

As much as I acted out in school and even more how Bardenie, Cardennia, and Jake, repeatedly failed grades, and Cardennia and Jake, eventually dropping out, our caregivers should have initiated some type of counseling services. In opposition, they ridiculed us with name calling and punished us by playing favorites. “Stupid” and “dumb” were often names that described Bardenie and Cardennia as “big” and “fat” belonged to me.

Bardenie left the house soon after graduating, and Zelda and Cardennia acted like sisters. The closeness of their relationship was challenged when Cardennia was in the hospital and in an innocent voice cried, “Mama.” Exiting the room were Irene and Zelda, as Cardennia’s cry and eyes gazed upon Irene. Zelda, who repeatedly exclaims “I have been so good to Cardennia” was deeply hurt, as she cried to Hazell for several hours on the telephone about the incident. At times our caregivers sent conflicting messages. It seemed they did not allow us to love our mother. They felt betrayed if the act is to ever transpire. Nevertheless, when we became too much, we were Irene’s children.
The caregiver’s role is most important when considering the success of children with imprisoned parents. The interactions between the child and the parent, as well as the things the child learns about the parent, are primarily based on the caregiver’s choices and decisions. The caregiver’s nurturing spirit and habits can help shape the child’s future, as well as the income and education levels.

Why did Hazell send me to Jacksonville in an unstable environment? Why did Mama Hazel not prevent us from going places with Irene? Awkwardly and unlike my siblings, I have distantly withdrawn from my caregivers, in recognition that I never received the unconditional love they claimed to have given. In the same treatment, I extend to Irene, I do not have a relationship with them, and only on holidays and birthdays, are they likely to hear or receive a visit from me.

Torn between two forces, it is more beneficial to the child that they have knowledge of self, and more importantly, love and understand themselves. That way, if the parent returns with permanent malfunctions, or, if the caregiver’s care is not unconditional, or the child is bounced from caregiver to caregiver, no matter what the child experiences, they will maintain sanity, self-appreciation, and the power break the psychological chains of incarceration.

As the statistics reflects, the issues of children with parents, particularly mothers in prison, must be addressed. Moreover, considering the literary works, *Scarlet Letter* and *The Color Purple*, the film *Stranger Inside*, and the researcher’s narrative, the works share similar themes, and echo the statistics that are revealed with this understudied population. As stated previously in Heather Richmond’s work, the approach to
understanding narratives relies on three dimensions- temporal, personal, and experiential. A table is developed to depict the analysis of the literature as it is compared to what is found to be true of children with imprisoned mothers. The analysis follows Richmond’s suggested framework and focuses on the subject through four categories: Orientation (the setting and character); Abstract (summarizes the events or incidents of the story); Complicating Action (offers an evaluative commentary on events, conflicts and themes); and Resolution (describes the outcomes of the story or conflict).

Table 1. Analysis of Experiences of Incarcerated Mothers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis of Mothers</th>
<th>Scarlet Letter</th>
<th>The Color Purple</th>
<th>Stranger Inside</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Abstract (summarizes events/incidents)** | - Moves to a new town  
- Assumes husband is dead  
- Has a child w/o marriage  
- Sent to prison  
- Forced to wear an “A” for Adultery (moral crime)  
- Births a daughter  
- Husband returns  
- Refuses to tell husband who the father is  
- Feels guilt of daughter’s existence  
- Allows daughter to run wild  
- Husband tortures wife | - Meets Harpo  
- Gets pregnant without marriage  
- Verbal quarrel with Mr.  
- Marries Harpo  
- Physical quarrels with Harpo  
- Verbal quarrels with Celie (past sexual abuse)  
- Moves away with children  
- Dates prizefighter  
- Physical quarrel with Squeak  
- Physical quarrel with the law  
- Sent to Prison  
- Forced to be a maid  
- Reunites with family and Harpo | - Juvenile Delinquent  
- Has child without marriage  
- Gang involvement  
- Goes to prison  
- Loses touch with family | - Juvenile delinquent  
- Gang  
- Multiple jail sentences  
- Has 2 children without marriage  
- Prison sentence  
- Has 3rd child in prison without marriage  
- Returns home  
- Has 4th child without marriage  
- Returns to prison  
- Returns from prison pregnant with 5th child without marriage  
- Shoplifting crimes with children  
- Physical quarrels |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action (evaluative on events, conflicts, and themes)</th>
<th>Resolution (outcomes of the story)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Adultery · Prison · Does not address child's needs or problem · Protects mate · Disregards society rules · Un-rehabilitated · Spirit dies in metaphorical prison</td>
<td>· Pearl continues disruptive behavior · Hester suffers (preacher) dies · Dimmesdale leaves town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Sexually Abused · Physically Abused · Prison · Disregards society rules · Aggressive Behavior · Loves children · Does not address children's needs · No contact with children while in prison · Un-rehabilitated · Spirit dies in prison</td>
<td>· Older children live with Odessa · Children do not care for Sofia and move away · Sofia reunites with Harpo · Sofia strives to raise Henrietta (prizefighter's daughter) · Eleanor agrees to look after Henrietta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Prison · No contact with daughter · Un-rehabilitated · Recidivists · Dies in prison</td>
<td>· Brownie never meets/reunites daughter · Killed in prison · Another inmate poses as Brownie · Daughter Treasure is intensely scarred emotionally · Daughter Treasure repeats mother's delinquent life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Sexually Abused · Minimum contact with children · Prison · Disregards society rules · Does not address children's needs · Aggressive Behavior · Recidivists · Un-rehabilitated</td>
<td>· Children disregard parental role as mother · Children repeat mother's delinquent lifestyle · Never marries · Homeless · Recidivists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When considering the patterns of the children with mothers in prison, the literary works are even more consistent with the personal narrative data as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes Related to Children and Incarcerated Mothers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children Analysis</th>
<th>Scarlet Letter</th>
<th>The Color Purple</th>
<th>Stranger Inside</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation (Setting and character)</td>
<td>17th Century Puritan Society/Pearl</td>
<td>20th Century segregated south/older children and Henrietta</td>
<td>21st Century (US Prison system)/ Treasure Lee</td>
<td>20th and 21st Century/ Six Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract (events and incidents)</td>
<td>-Mother commits adultery -Born w/o father -Discovers mother's &quot;A&quot; -Disregards adults -Disregards graveyard -Disregards rules of society</td>
<td>-Experience mother/father quarrels -Experience mother quarrel with law -Lives with maternal relative Mother comes home from prison on Xmas -Rejoice in seeing mother -Mother forced to another prison (maid) -Oldest son walks around upset and corrects mother on diction while conversing with Celie -Children literally and physically distance themselves from Sofia -Rename Sofia &quot;Miss&quot; -Henrietta lives with Sofia -Henrietta constantly acts out</td>
<td>-taunted by kids because of mother's imprisonment -consistently acts out -experiments with drugs (use and sell) -lives with maternal relative juvenile delinquent -homosexual -strives to be like mother -disregards caregiver (grandmother) -never builds a relationship with mother</td>
<td>-All born w/o fathers -3rd child born in penal system -5th child conceived in prison -All live with maternal relatives -Mother in and out of prison system -Disruptive school behaviors (all) -Constant physical quarrels (3) -Repeated classroom failure (1, 2, 4, 5) -Arrested for theft (2 &amp; 3) -Experiment with drugs use and/or sell (all but 3) -Some type of other arrest (all, but 6) -High School drop out (2&amp;4) -Birth children w/o marriage (2,4,5) -Delinquent behavior as an adult (all) -Current delinquent behavior (1,4,5,6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complicating Action (commentary on events, conflicts, themes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>· Absence of father figure</th>
<th>· Absence of biological mother/father (consistent basis)</th>
<th>· Absence of father figure</th>
<th>· Absence of father figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· No developed relationship with mother</td>
<td>· No developed relationship with mother</td>
<td>· No developed relationship with mother</td>
<td>· No developed relationship with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Follows mother's pattern and disregards &quot;moral&quot; rules of society</td>
<td>· Reared by maternal lineage</td>
<td>· Reared by maternal lineage</td>
<td>· Reared by maternal lineage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Jealous of relationship with other children</td>
<td>· Juvenile delinquent</td>
<td>· No contact with mother</td>
<td>· Follows mother's delinquent behavior patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Angry</td>
<td>· Fantasizes of mother's hardcore life</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Disconnects from mother</td>
<td>· No developed relationship with mother</td>
<td>· Strives to be like mother</td>
<td>· No developed relationship with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Follows mother's pattern of acting out (Henrietta)</td>
<td>· Longs to be with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Committed crime to reunite</td>
<td>· Committed crimes for and with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resolution (outcome)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Child disregards all adults and continues to act out</th>
<th>Children disregard mother and move away other child continues to act out</th>
<th>Child follows pattern of delinquent behavior to go to prison with mother-child</th>
<th>Children follow patterns of mother's delinquent lifestyle-others disregard mother's role and have moved away</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
<td>· Engages in criminal activity with mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interpretation:

Paulo Freire in his groundbreaking text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as well as bell hooks in her work, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* review the lives of people who have marginalized voices. The unsilencing of the marginalized voice that allowed for the empowerment of the speaker, the actor, the creator. For this research, voice is the spoken language, the action taken by the speaker or receiver of the message because of
spoken or unspoken words, or physical prowess. In essence, it has referenced to all things people engage as they struggle for survival and self-definition in the society of which they are located. In this study, the focus was on the impact of the incarceration of mothers on the lived experiences of their children. However, as demonstrated in the texts, film and personal narrative investigated, the study also focused on gender (both males and females, but specifically women), law, human rights, and the criminal justice system.

Both the literary components and the personal narrative demonstrated the continuous struggle of all the characters involved for self-definition or identity given both internal and external forces that influenced their lived experiences. The external forces included race, gender, class, sexism, and community, while internal forces related to the individuals within their lives space. Specifically, the internal forces included the family, the individual, and to some degree, the community as well. Tables 1 and 2 reinforce the impact of the mothers' incarceration on the individuals, and the mothers well as the families. The research revealed two important facts: (1) the notion that researchers through the deficit model consistently view black life, especially family life, and (2) the notion that even though families are experiencing forms of society's concept of dysfunctional, they also demonstrate Robert Hill's philosophy of strengths of black families.

Hence, Patricia Hill Collins in the essay, "Mammies, Matriarchs and Other Controlling Images" emphasizes the three controlling images of black women which she concludes are major instruments of power as: the mammy, the matriarch and the welfare
mother. All three of these images are in the texts, the film and the personal narrative. For example, Sofia emerged as the mammy figure as she was instrumental in the growth and development of the children of Miss Millie. For Sofia, the physical imprisonment has been replaced with another form of imprisonment – Miss Millie. Both forms of incarceration for Sofia have led to the alienation and isolation from her own children. In the film and the personal narrative, two images emerge, that of the matriarch and the welfare mother. The grandmother (Hazel) took on the role of the matriarch. Hazel is definitely portrayed as this figure as she makes the final decisions and in that she has to work to support her children as well as her grandchildren. The other caregivers Hazell, Zelda, and even Brownie (who plays the role of mother in prison to Treasure and others) take on secondary mothering roles. Irene portrayed as the welfare mother who misuses the benefits to take care of her needs and those of the men in her life. She did this at the expense of her children. Irene did not care if the children went hungry as long as her gratification needs were fulfilled.

Consequently, these mothers, regardless of their status in life, struggled with the notion of motherhood. Adrienne Rich in the essay, “Anger and Tenderness” voices the feelings of the incarcerated mothers when she writes:

... It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alteration between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness. Sometimes I seem to myself, a monster of selfishness and intolerance. Their voices wear away my nerves, their constant needs, above all their need for simplicity and patience, fill me with despair at my own failures, despair at my fate, which is to

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serve a function for which I was not fitted. And I am weak sometimes from held-in rage.\textsuperscript{30}

This behavior seen in the actions of Brownie with Treasure and the other women, Irene with the researcher, Hester with her daughter and Sofia with her children became the mode of operation for mothers. These raw feelings of uncertainty, which are not spoken, even though they are seen in the actions of the mothers, led them to engage in behavior that leads to repeated incarceration and withdrawal from the realities of motherhood. Again, Tables 1 and 2 detail this phenomenon. The mothers do not address the needs of their children either due to their incarceration or their uncertainty of how to mother once they are out of prison or their inability to economically take care of their families.

On the other hand, there are certain self-definition strategies provoked by the actions of the children: controller/manipulator, accepting child, and punisher. For example, Sofia’s oldest son walks around upset and corrects his mother on her diction; and all her adult children remove themselves from Sofia. The researcher found it necessary to fight her mother (even though there were times she imitates not only her mother’s deviant behavior, but her mother’s beauty practices) and was not satisfied until she had won the fight. Treasure and the researcher both engaged in behavior demonstrating the controller/manipulator roles. They found it necessary to fight others, determine how people should act in various situations, and how to make everyone pay for their status in life. However, several of the children became accepting of the behavior of the mother and engaged in similar activities. They had internalized that the behavior was

the most effective means of obtaining what they could not afford otherwise. This accepting behavior showed in the behavior of the researcher, as well as some of her siblings, even though she and one other sibling managed to breakout of the deviant lifestyle. Treasure pursues the behavior of her mother so she can have an ongoing relationship with her mother. Henrietta, Sofia’s daughter also acted out. Overall, there are many commonalities amongst the incarcerated mothers whether fictional or real: they have children out of wedlock; they have negative relationships with the men in their lives, especially men in authority-the minister, the guards at the prisons, and husbands. Further, the children also demonstrated aggressive behavior similar to that of the mothers; and the children are reared in homes which there are absentee fathers.

However, even though these negative forces, both internal and external, were in progress in the loves of the children, the researcher as did the children of Sofia, manage to have a caregiver relationship that demonstrated the strength of black families. According to Robert Hill, black families demonstrate five strengths: strong work orientation, strong religions orientation, strong kinship bonds, and strong achievement orientation. In the life of the researcher and Sofia in *The Color Purple*, the strengths of a strong work orientation, and strong kinship bonds were present. These strengths reinforce the humanities qualities of families. The researcher also had a strong religious orientation and the church provided the strong achievement orientation as well as community resources. Much of the response can be perceived as part of the black extended family concept that does not always mean it is blood relationships that constitute family. While it appears, especially in the life of the researcher that the

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immediate caregivers in Florida did not teach her to respect herself, or teach her how to be happy, she did have access to the needs through her stay in Atlanta and with the dance company leader. Even though the grandmother spoke negative words such as, you are just like your mother, it is clear that the grandmother used them to change her behavior.

Also, there is a drive by some of the children to combat marginality by their families, to develop their own identity and to give themselves voice. There is a call and response model that occurs. The mothers, especially Irene, engage in the call behavior—she as well as Hester, Sofia and Brownie, attempted to control the behavior of the children. The children responded by achieving, acting like the mothers, alienating themselves from the mothers and caregivers or by being intolerant of the mothers. The pain from societal demands and internal demands are so overpowering for many of the children, that it is impossible for them to see any positives in their lives. They find themselves constantly in a fight against invisibility and acceptance of themselves.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Summary:

The problem is clear. The increase of mothers in the United States of America’s prison system affects society as a whole. The number of women in prison is consistently on the rise, so much so, that it is the fastest growing segment of the prison population. In addition, over 75% of these women are mothers, who each, attest to having at least two minor children ages ten and under.

As well, there are few reliable statistics on these children who are affected by parental incarceration, particularly mothers. Much of its reasoning is because law enforcement does not obtain information about children of arrested adults, and correctional-facilities do not question inmates for specific information about their children. Besides, it appears that these children are not the primary focus of children advocates.

Further, there are several types of programs reviewed that service prisoners and their children. All of the four program types enhance communication between the mothers and their children, but the most progressive of the categories appears to be the Community-based and Child Welfare Programs. In addition to improving the communication between mothers and their children, the mothers are also engaged in support groups and parenting programs.
Hence, the solutions agencies have formed for children with imprisoned parents are productive, but there is a need for research which evaluates the strengths that can then be shared throughout the criminal justice system. There is a need for caregivers to know how to interact with their family additions, and there is certainly a need for a child to know their parents. Nevertheless, it is simply best for the overall health of the child to engage in programs that primarily instill self-love and self-reliance. For many of the children, the parent-child bond period passes while the mother is in prison and once it is gone, it is gone. If these children learn to face their challenges and know that caregivers and community members and organizations are extra help, they will quickly realize their stance, and assert the necessary actions that will eventually determine their outcome.

Thus, the research indicates programs that specifically and primarily target the children and embrace themes of love, self-worth, and understanding; provide the foundation needed for the child’s behavior to change from delinquent to productive. In addition, educational and recreational agendas must be in alliance with the theme of change, and the children who have successfully overcome the statistics of the children with incarcerated parents, must be involved. All children of imprisoned mothers must join the fight to save themselves.

From a humanistic standpoint, when determining the role of the mother in these works, one can recognize the similar themes and commonalities of the texts. The repeated patterns of behavior and repeated storylines are important in understanding the human qualities of incarcerated parents and their children and how they interact with society-at-larger, their communities and their kinship systems. The mother, in each work, no matter the temporal status, was a woman who was single, had a child out of wedlock, and was in
a relationship ‘gone wrong’ with a masculine source. With this masculine influence, the women engaged in behavior that ultimately determined their fate and the fate of their children. Moreover, the women all experienced some type of abuse prior to their initial crimes. As the statistics reveal, most women who enter a prison system have reported some type of abuse. The texts identified with this data as well as the fact that many of them exhibited physically aggressive behavior after they were sexually abused. In this study, all women except Hester Prynne exhibited physically aggressive behavior and all the women’s character except Hester Prynne’s dealt with the theme of sexual abuse.

Another commonality found in the texts were the behavior patterns of the women. Hester Prynne continued to allow her mourning for a man she loves to alter her life; as Sofia continued to act out aggressively, and Brownie and Irene are recidivists to their crimes-making their home the US prison system. Prynne left a town to satisfy the aspirations of her husband, and after she believed him to be dead and laments to the pastor, she commits the immoral crime of adultery with Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale. Moreover, she stayed true to her love as she is imprisoned and never reveals who the father of her child is. Although in the end, Dimmesdale died of a guilty conscience, and she publicly received the punishment for the crime alone. Sofia and her sisters developed a fighting strategy as children against their uncles and brothers, and as an adult, this strategy continued. She stayed true to her love (herself and family) as she was consistently defensive verbally and physically to any violator of her space. This pattern lands her in prison. She lost her parental role to her older children and lost faith and confidence in herself. Brownie Lee’s behavior was not vividly seen through her actions, but only through images of stories her daughter described in flashbacks. Still, the
audience learned that she was a juvenile delinquent and because she ended up in prison years later where she was murdered, it is obvious that her crimes of delinquency continued into adulthood. Lastly, living a life that involved repetitive jail/prison time is Irene Phillips. She continued to reenter the US prison system as a habitual offender of fraudulent crimes therefore displaying the patterns of her behavior and her life.

The ultimate factor was the relationship the women had with their children. It is clear that prison had affected the mother-child relationships which in these cases, seem beyond repair. As Hester viewed her daughter Pearl as a reminder of her shameful past, she did not address many of the concerns pertaining to Pearl’s behavior. In fact, since the child’s birth, she failed to treat her as a child, but as an “it” that she must not be ashamed of. In the market place, she proudly shows her “A” but not her child, the product of the “A.” Her role as a mother in the text was never fully developed but her parenting skills were criticized. She allowed her child to run wild and never disciplined her for engaging in inappropriate behaviors. Sofia’s children have simply denounced her role as a mother. They called Sofia’s sister, Mama; their father Harpo’s girlfriend (Squeak) Lil’ Mama; as they referred to Sofia as “Miss.” In contrast, the beginning of the novel revealed Sofia as a proud mother of many young children, but as her prison time went by, and as she was forced to rear Miss Millie’s children, particularly Eleanor, her oldest children did not like her, did not know her, and moved away from her. Her last and youngest child Henrietta did live with her, but, is too, following a delinquent pattern as she was often regarded as “crazy.” Brownie Lee lost contact with her daughter, and as a result, left the opportunity for the woman who physically killed her, to emotionally kill her only child, Treasure. Brownie never developed a relationship with Treasure, and while in prison, she did not
correspond with her daughter. As result, Treasure cannot physically identify her mother, nor can she recognize the sound of her voice. Nevertheless, Treasure’s relationship with her mother is not a bitter one. Treasure longed to see her mother and as a result, followed her pattern of a delinquent life, and even committed a crime to be sentenced to a more severe prison system in hopes of being reunited with her mother. Irene Phillips’ relationship with her children is similar to both Sofia and Brownie. As her children grew older, the oldest set, moved away from home and disregarded Irene’s role as mother in their lives. Although all of her children engaged in some type of crime affiliated with her lifestyle, the youngest children have holistically adapted these delinquent patterns as a way of life. Nevertheless, her role as a “mother” in their lives is null and void when it comes to important decision making, as they seek the advice of other relatives, primarily, their adolescent-years caregivers.

All of these works state one important fact. With imprisoned mothers, the child was not better off with the parent. Oftentimes, the mothers were so engulfed in their own affairs that they rarely had time to attend to the needs of their children. Moreover, when the child was in the presence of the mother, or simply learns about the behaviors of the mother, he or she too wore the shame of the parents’ crime and in many cases, reenacted the criminal and/or delinquent habits of the parent. The children may engage in behavior similar to the mothers for different reasons. They engage in such behavior for attention, from anger with the mother for being absent, from not having a normal family life, and the absence of love.

Further, the research reveals that initially in the works, the children do behave as children. Naturally, they loved their mothers and wanted to be reunited with them. It is
this child who researchers and other specialists make their vested interests and often echo their voices. Nevertheless, once the child reached a certain level of maturity and realized that what the mother’s life consisted of was causing the both of them pain, the children simply closed their eyes to the situation and attempted to start a life of their own. On the other hand, many others adapt the lifestyle of the parent, and as rehabilitation has not occurred in the prison system, the child’s plight is no different than that of the mother.

In the works, all the children, except Sofia’s in a limited manner, are without a biological father who lived with the mother prior to incarceration. This occurrence may be a contributing factor to the success of the child. The children clearly adapted to the behaviors of the mother by replicating the mother’s delinquent behavior that led her to imprisonment. The mothers, who freely committed their crimes in the presence of the children, and in some cases, involved the children in their crimes, did not understand the total effect their behavior had or may have on their children. As stated previously, the children soon lived their own delinquent lives, or spent much of their new life, getting over their past miseries.

Another consistent trait in the works was the fate of the young children while the mother is in prison. This does not apply to The Scarlet Letter because Hester was not in a physical prison while Pearl is a child. However, the other works mirror the data on mothers of incarcerated children who find it necessary to place the children with relatives, primarily maternal relatives. Moreover, the role of the caregiver was examined in these texts as the children are cared for, but there is still no direct contact between the mother and her children. Although some characters in The Color Purple visit Sofia while in prison, her sister Odessa and her husband, the primary caregiver of her children, did
not. In addition, they did not take her children to visit her, and there was no mention of any letter correspondence amongst them. Thus, when Sofia finally came home for good, she did not have much of a relationship with her children. As she tried to build a relationship with them, and they recognized how much she cared for Eleanor, they soon dismissed her as their parent altogether. As well, Brownie Lee failed to develop a relationship with her daughter Treasure. As a result, Treasure lived a life of crime in hopes and aspiration to be like her mother. Although there is some type of correspondence between Brownie and her mother as seen in the prison photos in Grandma’s Bible - Grandma, Treasure’s primary caregiver, did not make efforts to bridge the gap between her daughter and granddaughter - although she often criticized Treasure and proclaimed that she will be just like her mother. This same behavior is exhibited in the narrative as the children of Irene Phillips were all placed with different maternal relatives. As most of them do not know their fathers, the only other option would have been foster care. Similar to the other works, the Phillips children do know their mother as mother, but rather a frequent visitor. They have some knowledge about the behaviors of their mother. Nevertheless, the primary caregivers’ efforts to engage in visits and correspondence were limited – sometimes due to the location of the prisons and where the caregivers lived. Subsequently the caregivers rebelled because habitual behavior became too much for them, and as a result, the caregivers simply ignored her requests for visits and desired items. Nonetheless, Irene did not strive to build a rapport with her children through a continuous letter correspondence, but as portrayed in the texts, the prisoner failed to initiate sincere communication, so did the caregiver. Ultimately, the children never built the bond with the mother, especially since in most cases, the mothers
were incarcerated throughout the primary stages of the children’s lives – which is reflected in the works and the personal narrative.

Jealousy, anger, confusion, and the inability to build and maintain relationships are what the children in these works have in common. As each story unfolds, there is a relationship between the developments of the child’s voice, as an important factor in the development of the child’s sense of self. As the children grew, they reflected a process of self-discovery which eventually determined how they organized and made sense of their lives and themselves.

Recommendations:

In order to successfully make recommendations for the theme, the voices of children with mothers in prison, the story must be told, as the issue must be examined, from the children’s point of view. As these children undergo multiple risks to their cognitive and behavioral development and attachment relationships, they are often only afforded remedies to their problematic situations. In addition, the little attention this understudied area receives must be accurate and noteworthy. Thus, the voice of the child, not the parents, caregivers, or specialists, must be highly considered, and in most cases, the authority. Thus, more detailed studies which involve the narratives of more children need to be undertaken.

This research aims to suggest further quality examinations in the understudied area, the muted voices of children with imprisoned mothers. As this research is limited to a daughter’s perspective, it is recommended that researchers gather information on the perspective of sons. Another area needing investigation is the effect of the father’s
incarceration on children. Moreover, studies on the plight of children who enter foster care systems due to a parent’s incarceration should be examined as well.

Lastly, instead of programs focusing on bridging the gap between imprisoned parents and children, the programs should focus on maintaining the child’s spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical needs, rather than focusing on, or examining the inherited maladaptive behaviors and habits engaged in by the parents. The avenues in place that are designed to assist the children are beneficial, but if structured differently, with the child as the primary focus, they can have more productive outcomes – for example, united, functioning families.


Poehlmann, J. “Children of Incarcerated Mothers: Representations of Attachment Relationships in Children of Incarcerated Mothers.” *Child Development* 76, no. 3 (March 2004): 3-29.


