

Can I Get A Witness?

African American Mothers, Parenting Networks, and Attachment

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost I honor the spirit of my ancestors and elders who, although deprived of and limited in their access to formal education, carried a vision for centuries that lighted my way to realize the highest degree awarded. I am grateful, humbled, and committed to doing my part in supporting generations to come. *A luta continua!*

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to survivors of sexual abuse who continue to suffer in silence

May your voices be heard

Your wounds healed

Your spirits uplifted

And To

Dr. Kyoko Katayama

Thank you for walking with me for over twenty years

For patiently guiding me to the other side of pain and suffering

For standing as a compassionate unwavering witness in my journey to freedom

Abstract

This qualitative study using a phenomenological constructivist approach examined the meaning African American mothers give to experiences of sexual mistreatment and their perceptions of how those experiences influenced their approach to parenting within extended family structures. I expected that mothers' experiences of trauma management, their use of parenting networks, and their sociocultural environment influence their parenting practices. Additionally, I expected that mothers' experiences of trauma management mediated the quality of parent-child-family relationships. Twenty-one currently parenting African American mothers receiving services for homelessness, substance misuse, and/or recovery from prostitution/domestic sex trafficking participated in an in-depth semi-structured audiotaped face-to-face interview. I used the procedures of multiple case study analysis to modify my expectations based on mothers' narrative accounts of their experiences. Findings suggest that the parenting practices of African American mothers who are survivors of sexual mistreatment are influenced by the intersections of their (a) mental representations of themselves as caregivers and of their attachment relationships across their life course, (b) their trauma management experiences, (c) their utilization of supportive parenting networks, and (d) their accessibility to socioeconomic resources. Implications for practice, policy, and future research are discussed.

Key words – African American mothers, sexual violence, extended family networks, multigenerational/intergenerational parenting

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**CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION**

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While it may take a village to raise a child (African proverb, n.d.), many cultures recognize the role of women as essential to the care and nurturance of children and their future development (Keller, Voelker & Yovsi, 2005). To adequately care for and protect their children, women (and men) must negotiate a complex array of individual, family, community, and societal conditions presenting them with both opportunities and adversities. Among the adversities is sexual assault in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Estimates of reports of childhood and adult sexual assault experienced by women of all races/ethnicities range from 10% to 33% (DiLillo, Tremblay, & Peterson, 2000; Messman-Moore, & Long, 2000). It is estimated that 23.4% of African American women have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime (Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007). Moreover, more than 30% of African American women in community and college settings reported being sexually assaulted (Carmody & Washington, 2001; Molitor, Ruiz, Klausner, & McFarland, 2000).

Sexual violence is a pervasive and complex risk factor in North American society that jeopardizes the quality of African American women's lives and their capacities to provide adequate care for their children. Additionally, trauma associated with class, race, gender, and sexual orientation oppression, as well as domestic and community violence can add to women's experiences of adversities (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2005; Wasco, 2003). While it is critical for women to address the adversities they experience to an extent adequate enough to care for and protect their children sufficiently in collaboration with their partners, family, and community; the responsibility of rearing and protecting children is not borne solely by mothers. Thus, several scholars have conceptualized

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parenting as a complex array of processes shaped by a multitude of factors that span micro-, exo-, and macro-environments as well as specific parental characteristics (McAdoo, 2007; Schuetze & Eiden, 2005). Given the complexity of parenting, in this study while the focus is on African American mothers' perceptions of parenting as survivors of trauma, the parenting experiences of fathers, and other caregivers (grandparents, uncles, aunts, older siblings, close friends) is also relevant and reflected through the narratives of mothers and their perceptions of and experiences with multiple persons who function in the role of caregiver or surrogate parent for their children within the context of extended family or intergenerational family structures.

Problem and Significance

Individual attachment-related and environmental factors intersect in ways that can contribute to mothers' vulnerability and resilience in protecting their children from abuse (Breckenridge, 2006; Leifer, Kilbane, & Kalick, 2004). A maternal history of sexual assault, disruptive and insecure childhood attachments, substance abuse, and an inability to retain detailed and coherent memories of painful childhood experiences, for example, are recognized as intersecting risk factors for parenting practices that place children at risk for abuse (Belsky, 1999; Curtis-Boles & Jenkins-Monroe, 2000; DiLillo, et al., 2000; Leifer, et al., 2004; Main & Goldwyn, 1992; Ricks, 1985). Research on childhood attachment and sexual abuse has suggested that mothers of sexually abused children are more likely to have had problematic child-parent attachments, particularly with their own mother (Leifer, Kilbane, & Grossman, 2001). Additionally, DiLillo, et al. (2000) found that a small percentage of mothers with a childhood history of sexual abuse were at

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increased risk for physically abusing their own children and were more likely to have children who were abused by others.

Resilience literature, however, has supported the theory that the presence of protective factors in a person's life can mitigate the risks of adverse experiences such as sexual abuse and attachment-related trauma (Mancini & Bonanno, 2006). For example, positive resolution or management of childhood and adult sexual victimization and healthy coping mechanisms are known to result in improved parenting skills (Wright, Crawford, & Sabastian, 2007). Moreover, researchers have recognized the importance of assessing mothers' responses to their victimization and their ability to manage trauma as more salient factors than the experience of sexual abuse itself in whether or not women physically abuse or neglect their own children or place them at risk for abuse by others (Mapp, 2006). Lastly, scholars who frame parenting as a system influenced by many conditions have found that several factors mediate the relationship between a maternal history of sexual trauma and parenting including maternal anger, depression, experiences of violence, socioeconomic status, marital status, and stress (Conger, Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Simons, Whitbeck, 1992; DiLillo, et al., 2000; DiLillo, Giuffre, Tremblay, & Peterson, 2001; Erel & Burman, 1995).

Within the context of African American parenting, extended family and kinship networks structures of care are relevant in assessing intergenerational dynamics with respect to sexual trauma, attachment, resilience and factors that place children at risk for abuse and neglect when they have a maternal history of sexual abuse. These family networks of intergenerational care have served the needs of African American families

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for centuries (Waites, 2008). However, the literature on the parenting experiences of sexually traumatized African American women largely ignores the influence of parenting networks on multiple attachment relationships and how these networks shape women's perceptions, responses, and experiences as caregivers.

Purpose

In this qualitative inquiry, I used a phenomenological constructivist approach to investigate the meanings African American mothers give to experiences of sexual mistreatment and how they believe these experiences shape their approach to parenting within the context of an extended family structure. This research paid particular attention to mothers' perceptions of the ways in which they manage their trauma experiences, the degree of intergenerational cohesiveness they experience through parenting networks, the quality and nature of multiple attachment relationships, and the meanings women make of opportunities and adversities in their lives.

Secondarily, the findings generated from this study will hopefully support the creation of policies, programs, and best practices that enable social workers to accurately assess and meet the needs of African American families at risk for sexual violence. A final goal of this study was to identify and develop culturally accessible child abuse preventing strategies and public forums for disseminating pertinent sexual violence prevention education and information within African American families and communities.

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Terminology and Concepts

To provide clarity regarding the remainder of the dissertation, I identify relevant constructs and terms, provide a definition of the terms and include sources I used to operationalize terms in Table 1.1. The terms are listed in alphabetical order and therefore some definitions may include terms that are defined later in the table. I used several terms interchangeably and define them as follows:

- African American/Black - The ethnicity of individuals with ancestral origins in Africa and direct family lineage in North America to the transatlantic slave trade. Any person who self-identifies ethnically as African American and/or Black.
- Domestic Sex Trafficking/Prostitution/Survival Sex - Women's involvement in the commercial industry of sexual exploitation as a consideration of economic survival and/or by control of a third party.
- Sexual Mistreatment - A term used interchangeably with sexual assault, sexual trauma, sexual violence and sexual exploitation representing all forms of violence of a sexual nature including rape by an intimate partner, child sexual abuse, acquaintance and stranger rape, rape in prostitution, community and state-based sexual violence such as rape by soldiers, prison guards, and police officers and sexual harassment in any setting by any person.
- Trauma management - The adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies women use to manage trauma-related experiences.
- Adequate parenting – providing for the basic bio-psycho-social and physical needs of a child.

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The terms in Table 1.1 are defined based on the literature.

Significance

This study paid particular attention to women's perceptions of the opportunities and adversities in their lives, the influence of parenting networks in rearing children, and the quality of multiple attachment relationships. As such, the results of this study are constructed accounts of women's experiences and do not necessarily reflect the experiences of their children or other members of their parental networks. Additionally, as is the case with all research, the results outlined are open-ended and subject to revision and do not represent the experiences of all African American women who are survivors of sexual mistreatment, or care for their children in an extended family system, or who have a similar socioeconomic status as women in this study. Nevertheless, the study results shed light on women's trauma experiences, how they manage them, and how they draw upon (or not) familial and external resources in parenting their children.

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Table 1.1 Definitions of Terms

Construct/Term	Definition	Source
Culture	The dynamic beliefs, values, ways of being, worldview, and life patterns that are typically transmitted through members of a person’s family, kin, clan, group, etc. with the expectation of conformity.	Appleby, 2001; Banks, 1991
Ethnicity	The group mores and practices of one’s culture of origin	American Psychological Association (APA), 2003
Extended Intergenerational Family/Kinship/ Parenting Networks	Interchangeable terms representing interdependent, multigenerational, kin, and non-biological adults, close family friends, and potentially older siblings who are identified as significant or surrogate caregivers of children, and/or providers of adult support and guidance.	Billingsley, 1968; McAdoo, 2007; Stack, 1974; Waites, 2008
Intergenerational Cohesiveness and Solidarity	Social cohesion between generations within an extended family network across time. Exemplified by six elements including (1) the types and frequency of contact between generations (Associational); (2) the expressed closeness, warmth, trust, mutuality, and emotional ties (Affectional); (3) the family values and beliefs (Consensual); (4) the frequency of interpersonal exchanges of assistance and resources (Functional); (5) the roles, responsibilities, and obligations (Normative); (6) opportunity for intergenerational interactions (Structural)	Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Waites, 2008, 2009
Internal Working Models (IWMs)	Mental representations of self and others based, in part, on early patterns of care and responsiveness a child experiences from a caregiver that are then internalized and influence the basis for future expectations of care and responsiveness from other people. Dynamic conscious and unconscious mental representations of self and others and the relational expectations ensuing from interactions with the world. Within the context of multiple attachment relationships, several possibilities are suggested for the organization of IWMs including hierarchical, integrative, and independent.	Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cassidy & Shaver, 2008; Bretherton & Munholland 1999; Howes & Spieker, 2008

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Construct/Term	Definition	Source
Mental representation of parental caregiving	<p>Mother’s working models of themselves as caregivers, their child as a developing care recipient, and the parent-child relationship. Expressed through behaviors during parent-child interactions and influence parents’ expectations, feelings, and actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidant/anxious – self-doubts about parenting, views of children, and parent-child interactions; exaggerated, unrealistic and perfectionist conceptions of parental abilities; ambiguous emotional expression • Secure – confident in judging ability to relate to children and imagining parent-child relationships; sensitive and attuned to children’s needs 	George & Solomon, 2008
Intersectionality	<p>A term first coined by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw to reflect multiple forms of exclusion based on demographic characteristics such as race and gender. Later expanded by Patricia Hill-Collins to include a matrix of domination based on several forms of oppression such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.</p>	Kimberle Crenshaw, 1995 Hill-Collins, 2000
Negative Case	<p>An analytical strategy for revising and fine-tuning preliminary expectations or identified patterns and trends in data collected and analyzed.</p>	Denzin, 1978, 1989
Parenting	<p>Child rearing and family practices based in West African traditions and the social and historical context of African American experiences in North America designed to support children’s growth and development, provide nurturance and protection and preparation of children to survive intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination related to race, class, and gender, age, ability, etc.</p>	Franklin, Franklin, & Draper, 2002; McAdoo, 2002; Murray & Brody, 2002
Protective Factors	<p>Environmental variables that contribute to the prevention of maladaptive or problematic outcomes or lessens the severity of the troubling condition</p>	Davies, 2011
Race	<p>The category to which others assign individuals on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color or hair type, and the generalizations and stereotypes made as a result.</p> <p>----- Race is an important social construct used as a criterion in the distribution of</p>	APA, 2003, p. 380

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Construct/Term	Definition	Source
	power, privilege, and resources in North America.	
Racialized Sexism	Denigrating and discriminatory gendered experiences motivated by racism.	Collins, 2000; Murrell, 1996; Winston, 1991
Resilience	Conceptualized as a transactional process that reflects the relationship of both environmental risks and protective factors that interact at individual, family, community, and societal levels and contribute to adaptive and/or health promoting outcomes.	Davies, 2011
Risk Factors	Hazards or stressors that contribute to the occurrence of maladaptive, problematic or adverse outcomes.	Davies, 2011
Sensitizing Concepts	Salient themes, topics, and words derived from previous research, theory, and personal and professional practice experiences related to the inquiry	Blumer, 1986
Sexual Assault, Sexual Trauma, Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Mistreatment	Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work	Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002
Sociocultural Environment	Environmental opportunities and adversities experienced in relation to intersecting identities such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, appearance, education, age, etc. based on the social stratification of the society	Collins, 2000; Freeman, 2001; Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008
Sociohistorical Context	The U.S. legacy involving the commodification and sexual exploitation of African American women (and men) during the middle passage, slavery and Jim Crow resulting in stigmatizing sexual stereotypes of African Americans that persist in contemporary society.	Tillman, et al. 2010
Survival Sex Sexual Trafficking; Domestic Sex Trafficking	The use of force, threat, coercion, to recruit a person into prostitution as means of economic survival. The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of	Goodey, 2004; Kramer & Berg, 2003; United Nations, 2000

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Construct/Term	Definition	Source
	payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation, including the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.	
Trauma, Complex Trauma, Historical Traumas	A concrete physical, cognitive, affective, and spiritual response by individuals and communities to events and situations that is objectively distressing or disturbing within specific contexts. The insidious distress involved in living everyday life in a sexist, classist, racist, ableist, and homophobic society; the daily obstacles to achieving one's aspirations; the historical events and conditions that arise from identity and shapes identity, and becomes the lens through which current events are understood and current trauma experienced.	Burstow, 2003; Danieli, 1998; Freire, 1970; Root, 1992

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**CHAPTER II:
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

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Overview

The topics that influenced the literature I reviewed included, parenting practices in African American families, multiple attachment relationships, resilience, intergenerational abuse, sexual violence, trauma, and trauma-disclosure. I framed the literature review with an overarching focus on the sociohistorical and cultural experiences of African American families with respect to intergenerational family structures, child rearing practices, the trauma and recovery experiences of African American women and multiple attachment relationships across the life span. Regarding models of African American families, I focused on research related to family structures, functions, and parenting practices, and the strengths and challenges of intergenerational family structures as a factor in intrafamilial child maltreatment.

In my examination of the attachment literature, I limited the review to attachment research focused on multiple caregivers, cross-cultural and life span perspectives as these areas of scholarship were relevant to my study. I also searched the literature that explored the links between maternal sexual trauma, attachment, parenting, and intergenerational abuse and resilience with specific attention to protective and risk factors that may place children at risk for abuse when they have a maternal history of sexual trauma. Within the scope of the field of sexual violence and African American women specifically, I focused my attention on scholarship related to the sociohistorical context of African American women's experiences with sexual violence and its influence on disclosure, coping, and resilience. This body of knowledge along with my social work practice and personal

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experiences shaped the research question, and the general expectations I formulated to test emerging findings from women's narrative accounts in this study.

In addition to the literature review, I provide a reflexivity overview of the research process as I accounted for my social identities, professional and personal identities vis-à-vis that of study participants and other stakeholders including my advisors and the agencies from which I recruited participants for the study during each stage of the study. Finally, I conclude the conceptual framework section by describing the multidimensional theoretical framework I used as a guide to design the study, formulate the research question and analyze data.

Literature Review

Models of African American Families And Parenting

This section reviews Black family structures, parenting, socializing, and rearing of children. I traced Black family structures and functions historically from the period of slavery to contemporary life in North America exclusively. I paid specific attention to research on extended family and kinship networks and the roles, functions, and influences of this family structure on parenting and child rearing practices within African American communities and child outcomes, I reviewed topics of child development and socialization of African American children generally and looked at scholarship on the conditions and ways parents (men and women) socialize their children for success and protection from environmental risk factors generally the growing evidence of African American fathers as significant caregivers and socializers of African American children (Livingston & McAdoo, 2007). The literature on multiple and cross-cultural attachments

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studies is relevant as is the interface of adult attachment, sexual trauma, and intergenerational abuse literature. A review of the literature on African American women and sexual assault completes the literature review section of my dissertation.

Historical Origins of Extended Family Care

African Americans are a diverse group with a shared history that serves as a common thread in understanding the complexity of the extended and kinship family system and its intersections with individual, family, community, and societal life patterns. Some scholars trace the historical origins of the extended family and kinship model to the institution of slavery while others locate this family structure within the traditions of African culture prior to the enslavement of Africans in the United States (Gibson, 2007; Nobles, 2007; Staples, 1976). Both starting points are relevant in recognizing the innate and adaptive resilience of Black family life and the value of extended families and kinship networks in what is often described by social scientists as, a hostile social, political, and economic environment (sustaining system) (Billingsley, 1968, 1988; Manns, 2007; McAdoo, 2007; Staples, 1976,1994).

Scholars have offered several theoretical frameworks, classification schemes, and definitions to describe the structure, functions, and effects of the extended family and kinship model of Black family life. Recognizing the diversity of the Black experience, many scholars often framed African American families as entities within a larger nested social system or network of mutually interdependent and dynamic interpersonal relationships encompassing individuals, communities and the wider mainstream European-dominant society (Billingsley, 1968; Logan, Denby, & Gibson, 2007; McAdoo,

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2007; Staples, 1976, 1994). This ecological -cultural perspective provides for a better understanding of the demographic, economic, and geographic diversity that can exist within an extended family and kinship network. Additionally, economic, social, and political circumstances, cultural patterns, and socialization practices and experiences African American families face living with the duality of navigating the expectations of their own cultural norms and those of a White-dominant society are more apparent (Norton, 1978).

Functional and structural models delineate who lives in the house, the relational connections of the members (kin, fictive kin, parents, children, etc.) and how members of the household contribute to meet basic survival needs of the extended family and kinship network (Billingsley, 1968). Some of the functional descriptions of the extended family structure outlined in the literature include family preservation (Danzy & Jackson, 1997), social support system (Hill, 1999), mental health (Gibson, 2007), modeling and validating (Manns, 2007). Structurally, extended families are classified with great variability regarding membership, household composition, and the nature of familial relationships.

Billingsley (1968), for example, identifies 27 categories of family household compositions and relational connections. His classification of extended families includes incipient extended families (a married couple with no children of their own who take in relatives), simple extended families (a married couple with children who take in relatives), and accentuated extended families (a single, divorced, abandoned, legally separated, or widowed mother or father who takes in other relatives). Billingsley's (1968)

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classification of relatives include minor relatives (children under 18-years-old), peers of the primary parents, elders of the primary parents, and parents of the primary family head. Any combination of these extended family and relational classifications can yield myriad patterns of family structures, roles, norms, functions, and interpersonal dynamics.

On the other hand, Kellam, Adams, Brown, and Ensminger (1977, 1982) classify families into 10 different structures including, “mother alone, mother/father, mother/grandmother, mother/aunt, mother/step-father all with or without others” (p. 542), and Manns (2007) provides a classification scheme based on the degree and nature of influence different significant members of the extended kinship network have on its members. The life cycle model provides a measure of how the extended family or kinship network changes over time and deviates from its typical family transitions and transactions providing social workers with information that can be useful in determining appropriate family interventions (Ashford & LeCroy, 2010).

Diverse schemas of African American extended and kinship networks address a major gap in conceptualizations of what constitutes a family and the relative nature of its structure in contrast to the more commonly dichotomized and limited depiction of family as either, for example, a nuclear heterosexual male-headed two parent family or a female-headed single parent family.

Studies of Extended Family Support

Studies within African American communities have traditionally focused on assessing the benefits and risks of extended family support in low-income, single mothers, or teenage mothers and grandmothers assuming the role of parent with their

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grandchildren (Flaherty, Facticeau, & Garver, 1994; Gibson & Lum, 2003; Gibson, 2005; McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994; Pearson, Hunter, Ensminger, & Kellman, 1990; Ruiz & Carlton-LaNey, 1999). More recent research recognizes the informal kin networks of care comprising African American adult children as caregivers of older African Americans (Brodie & Gadling-Cole, 2008; Chavis & Waites, 2004). The importance of the filial legacy rooted in African American families of adult children caring for their aged parents is framed in the literature as filial obligation and/or an ethic of responsibility given its importance to family life (Bonner, Gorelick, & Prohaska, 1999; Davis & Waites, 2008). Research demonstrates that within the extended family structures, it is not uncommon for teenage mothers and grandmothers, and adult children to naturally rely on support from and utilize extended family and kin in the care of their children, grandchildren, and elders (Colleta, 1981; Furstenberg & Crawford, 1978; Gibson, 2005; Waites, 2008). Positive child outcomes attributed to extended family care in these populations include improved educational achievement, enhanced parenting, and educational and emotional well being in youth (Colleta, 1981; Furstenberg & Crawford, 1978).

The extended family and kinship network literature is sparse as it relates to populations other than the aforementioned within African American communities. For example, few studies exist examining the impact of kinship care in middle-class African American families. However, there is increasing evidence that even within upwardly mobile and middle-class African American families, extended family and kin play a significant positive role in providing modeling, validation, emotional support, and

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achievement socialization for children and youth (Hill, 1997a; Lamborn & Nguyen, 2004; McAdoo, 1997, 2007; Manns, 2007). Earlier research also credits the extended family system with lower incidents of child physical abuse and neglect in Black families relative to their White counterparts of similar socioeconomic levels (Billingsley, 1973; Cazenave & Straus, 1979; Garbarino & Ebata, 1983; Giovannoni & Billingsley, 1970; Hill, 1977, 1981; Korbin, 1981).

Studies examining the extended family and kinship structure and sexual abuse are virtually nonexistent. However, survivors cite the extended family system as both a barrier and protective system regarding disclosure, and healing from sexual violence (Robin, 2004; Valandra, 2005, 2007; Washington, 2001; Wilson, 1999; Wyatt, 1990a). In a study of factors influencing Black women's disclosure of sexual violence, survivors suggested that a lack of knowledge and sexuality socialization (receiving inadequate or incomplete information about sex) within their family systems contributed to decisions not to disclose sexual violence they experienced (Washington, 2001). African American women also identified kinship support as a protective factor in their decisions to leave, and remain free of the grip of sexual violence within the industry of prostitution, but they also named extended family members as a contributing factor in their entry to the world of survival sex (Valandra, 2007). Research is needed to examine the specific factors and mechanisms within this family structure that contribute to protections and barriers for children with a maternal history of sexual violence.

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African American Families, Parenting, and Socialization Practices

Historically, slave narratives and the early work of social scientists (Johnson, 1934, 1941) provide a backdrop for understanding African American family childrearing and socialization practices (Peters, 2007). Within the context of slavery, children were raised to be independent contributing members of the family and plantation at an early age, while simultaneously being prepared to encounter separation from their parents, racial degradation within the plantation system, and treatment from slave owners that could result in physical harm or death (Johnson, 1934, 1941; Peters, 2007). The current literature suggests that child rearing in African American families continues to occur within a complex web of dynamic and significant environmental adaptations and across diverse cultural values, economic and social class designations (Hill, 1999; Nobles, 2007; Peters, 2007).

Prior to the Black consciousness movement in the 1960's, research focused on pathology within African American families and parent-child relationships. Research was often methodologically, conceptually, and comparatively flawed with inappropriate comparisons between Black and White families of different socioeconomic backgrounds (Peters, 2007). More recent research takes an ecological and intersectional view that emphasizes strengths, resilience, and the risks of parenting in the face of environmental stressors such as poverty and discrimination in major sectors of society including housing, education, and employment (Hill, 1999; Logan, Denby, & Gibson, 2007; Norton, 2007; Peters, 2007). Ecologically-based research approaches to family

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assessment recognize history, culture, and environment as relevant factors. (Hill, 1999, Nobles, 2007; Peters, 2007).

A recurring theme throughout the literature on socialization strategies is an emphasis on racial socialization as an essential component in child rearing by Black parents (Billingsley, 1968; Staples, 1976; Hill, 1999; Nobles, 2007; McAdoo, 2007; Peters, 2007). Racial socialization and socialization are differentiated in the literature. Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley (2004) define socialization broadly as “the process by which parents shape a child’s behaviors, attitudes, and social skills so that the child will be able to function as a member of society” (p.163). Racial socialization on the other hand is defined as parents’ “attempts to prepare their children for the realities of being Black in America” (Taylor, Chatters, Tucker, & Lewis, 1990, p. 994). Examining the role of parenting within Black families, noted sociologist Andrew Billingsley (1968) observed that “socialization is doubly challenging, for the family must teach its young members not only how to be human, but also how to be black in a white society. The requirements are not the same” (p. 28). Researchers are recognizing that assessing child rearing in these potentially hostile environments requires a more discerning lens on their part in understanding the diverse parenting practices Black parents employ to emphasize care and concern simultaneously with strict authority (Hill, 1999; Young, 1970). Such parenting can potentially result in both protections and risks for children. Within the last two decades studies have expanded to examine academic and achievement socialization patterns in African American families (Attaway & Bry, 2004; Hill, 1997(a); Maton & Harbowski, 1998; Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004). Generally, these studies suggests

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that parental attitudes, expectations, and experiences are significant influencers of child success even when controlling for other demographic variables such as race, gender, and social class. Further research is needed to determine the role of parental socialization as a protective mechanism in the prevention of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) within African American family life.

A number of scholars explore the intersections of race, gender, and class in socialization practices of African American parents. Ickes (1999) defined gender socialization as the idea that “individuals observe, imitate, and eventually internalize the specific attitudes and behaviors that the culture defines as gender appropriate by using other males and females as role models” (p.79). Many scholars embrace the notion that African American families typically ascribe to more egalitarian or gender neutral roles in their family construction and child rearing practices (Hill, 1999). In a review of studies on the intersections of race and gender socialization, Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, and Spicer (2006) found mixed results in that, in some studies racial socialization patterns were different for sons than for daughters, and in other instances, there were no differences. Several other studies, however, report no significant difference (Thompson, Anderson & Bakeman, 2000; Scott, 2003, Penha-Lopes, 2006) or found that boys were more likely to receive messages regarding egalitarianism, negative stereotypes, racial barriers and strategies for coping with racism, while girls were more likely to hear messages that emphasized achievement and racial pride (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Hill (1999) found minor gender distinctions in African American parental expectations of their children that increased with social class. He

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concluded that while not statistically significant, African American parents do ascribe to white middle-class nuclear family gender norms particularly as they move up the social and economic ladder of success.

There is a dearth of literature that examines what gender norms parents ascribe to in protecting children from sexual victimization or minimizing their risks for sexual violence. However, it is suggested by some scholars that given the legacy of sexual victimization African American women and girls endured during slavery, it is conceivable that mothers found ways to help prepare their female children to deal with the abuse in a way that minimized their pain and maximized their lives (Brice, 2007). Limited empirical research on the disclosure patterns of Black female survivors of sexual assault, on the other hand, suggests that girls receive inadequate or inappropriate sexuality socialization in their families and communities that hinder their disclosure of sexual mistreatment (Washington, 2001). Furthermore, current literature identified unsupportive responses to African American sexual assault survivors' initial disclosure of experiences of sexual trauma as a critical barrier to help seeking following sexual victimization (Tillman, Bryant-Davis, Smith, & Marks, 2010).

Research is needed to understand the protective strategies and risks that might be transmitted generationally by African American mothers, who are survivors of sexual mistreatment themselves, in socializing their children to the risks of sexual victimization in their homes, communities, and the larger society. Moreover, women's help-seeking and trauma-management efforts may be linked with their ability to safely disclose experiences of sexual mistreatment within supportive environments. In my study, I

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expected that women's ability to manage their trauma experiences is one factor mediating their approach to parenting and the quality of their attachment relationships with their children within intergenerational family structures.

Summary

The body of literature on the extended family and kin networks and parenting practices in African American families highlight the importance of culturally-specific, ecological and interlocking perspectives. These frameworks are necessary to understand the diversity of intergenerational caregiver interactions and approaches needed to create and maintain supportive environments for the development and well being of African American children. The literature abundantly demonstrates the value of the extended, kinship, and intergenerational family model, as well as its challenges regarding child outcomes. This trend toward a more strengths-based approach in scholarship challenges the earlier research legacy of pathological assessments of Black family life as disparaging, deficient, and dysfunctional; perhaps a natural consequence of using a White middle class nuclear family model as the standard with which to measure African American family life.

In this study I continue the trend toward strengths-based culturally responsive scholarship by using a strength-based multidimensional theoretical framework (Afrocentric Intergenerational Solidarity Perspective, Womanist/Black feminist theory, Post-traumatic Slave Syndrome), I conceptualized based on the sociohistorical and contemporary experiences of African American families in North America. I privilege the voices of African American mothers perceptions of their lived experiences through first

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person case narratives and solicit women's perceptions of ways of disseminating study results and creating culturally responsive interventions to reduce the risks of sexual mistreatment in African American families at risk for sexual mistreatment.

Another trend noted in the literature is the recognition of African American families as a richly diverse and heterogeneous group with similarities and unique experiences, values, and beliefs all of which influence family structures, functions, and child outcomes within the extended family models. As extended family structures become more prevalent as a unit of analysis in research, scholars are more apt to recognize its value, diversity and importance as a cornerstone of African American family and community life as well as its contributions to the larger North American society. Further research is needed that explores the role of extended family models in addressing the needs of children at risk for sexual violence via their maternal history.

Attachment, Trauma, And Sexual Violence

I framed the scope of the attachment literature review to an examination of the research trends that are of relevance to my study including theories and studies on multiple attachment relationships within a life span or developmental perspective encompassing a broader psycho-social-cross-cultural context, and the intersections of attachment and trauma theory within the field of sexual violence.

Grounded in the seminal joint work of John Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980, 1988) and Mary Ainsworth (1967, 1978), attachment theory fundamentally is defined by Bowlby as a evolutionary phenomenon in which mother-child innate and learned behaviors interact to meet the survival and protection needs of the child. The mother is typically identified

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in this dyad as the primary attachment figure, although Bowlby (1969) acknowledges that children can have multiple attachment figures despite a propensity to prefer a specific one, suggesting a hierarchy of attachment relationships (Cassidy, 1999; Howes, 1999). Ainsworth's research with Ganda mothers in Uganda and her 'stranger situation' experimental procedures with mothers in North America became the basis for the development of a classification scheme to understand how children adapt to different styles of care and to describe the quality of attachment between a mother and child (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Ainsworth identified three types of infant attachment: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-ambivalent/resistant (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall).

Mary Main and her contemporaries expanded understandings of attachment theory to include adult mental representations of attachment and their correlation with infant behaviors found in Ainsworth's research (Hesse, 1999; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). The semi structured interview for adults known as the "Adult Attachment Interview" (AAI), was developed and used by Main, et al., (1985) to understand adults' general mental representations of the relationship with parents, the ordinary attachment-related experiences with parents such as upset, illness, injury, and/or separation, the meaning given to these experiences by the adult, and the adult's personality development and mental representation of themselves as parents (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 2008, p.604). Main identified three significant conditions bearing upon an adult care provider's ability to attach with a child including the caregiver's own early childhood experiences of

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care, adulthood risks and protections, and the care provider's network of support (Main, et al., 1985).

In her research of adult attachment, Main and her colleagues identified a fourth type of insecure attachment labeled *insecure-disorganized/disoriented* (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Main & Solomon, 1990). These classifications of adult and child attachment patterns became the standard for mother-child and adult assessments for decades in the fields of clinical, developmental, and social psychology, physiology, and clinical social work (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008; Davies, 2011), and have shaped the literature on the effects of sexual violence on mother-child attachments (DiLillo, et al., 2001; Leifer, 2001).

Adult Attachment

According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2007), narrative and interview measures of adult attachments, such as the AAI recognize the variability of both mental and behavioral processes and suggest that language can reflect representational processes. The authors explained that the AAI reflects Main and her colleagues' interest in adult's mental representations of their childhood attachment relationships and how their internal working models (IWMs) allow access to attachment-related information in memory or not (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). IWMs can be defined as early patterns of care and responsiveness a child experiences from a caregiver that are then internalized and influence representations of self and others and become the basis for future expectations of care and responsiveness from other people (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). Bretherton and Munholland (1999), construct IWMs as dynamic conscious and

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unconscious mental representations of self and others and the relational expectations ensuing from interactions with the world.

Howes and Spieker (2008) noted that within the context of multiple attachment relationships, several possibilities are suggested for the organization of IWMs including hierarchical, integrative, and independent. Children with hierarchical representations of self and others are more often influenced by the most salient caregiver, typically the mother (Bretherton, 1985). Children with an integrative mental model of self and others typically integrate all of their attachment relationships into a single representation (van IJzendoorn, Sagi, & Lambermon, 1992); and children with independent IWMs experience attachment relationships independently in relation to quality and influence on development (Howes, 1999).

Multiple Caregiver and Life Span Attachment Frameworks

Previous research suggests that within the extended and kin network family structure, non-maternal caregiver-child interactions can play a role in the resilience and/or vulnerability of a child through the quality of attachment with different attachment figures (Jackson, 1993).

Recognizing the significance of the extended family system, Howes (1999) proposed to construct attachment as a “network of attachment” (p.671) to capture and understand the nature of child development within extended family systems and other non-maternal systems of care. Research on multiple/alternative attachment caregiving highlights the importance of including a child’s social network and network members’ perceptions in assessments of attachment relationships (Howes, 1999). Additionally, Howes and

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Spieker (2008), offer several practical reasons for considering multiple/alternative attachment relationships including changing economic conditions and parental roles requiring the use of multiple and non-parental caregivers for children.

Multiple/alternative caregiving assessments also hold relevance for children within the child welfare system involved in processes related to foster care, adoption, and/or reunification. Examining a series of Africa-based studies conducted subsequent to Ainsworth's research, scholars van Ijzendoorn and Sagi-Schwartz (2008) also constructed child development as "a network of [child and adult] caregivers" (p. 882). The authors noted that multiple-caregiver attachment relationships are the norm or frequent cross-culturally.

Research focused on understanding how attachments are formed within multiple-caregiver attachment relationships explored, the influence of attachments on subsequent development, the context in which attachment relationships are formed, and the internal working models of attachment (Howes & Spieker, 2008). Relevant questions attachment researchers addressed within the context of multiple caregivers included what criteria are appropriate to assess which adults in a child's social network are attachment figures? What circumstances influence which adults become attachment figures for a child? Do the criteria for determining attachment figures change over the child's development? And, how consistent over time does the alternative attachment figure need to be? (Howes, 1999).

Criteria for categorizing multiple/alternative attachment figures have included: assessments of attachment security, factors leading to and consequences of attachment

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security, the extent of physical and emotional care provided, the level of consistency and continuity of care in a child's life, and the level or degree of emotional investment in the child's life (Howes, et al. in press, van IJzendoorn et al., 1992). Categories of alternative attachment figures have included fathers, grandparents, older siblings, other relatives, childcare providers, teachers, foster and adoptive parents, and residential treatment staff, and therapeutic service providers (Ahnert, Pinquart, & Lamb, 2006; Howes, 1999).

Researchers explored the nature and importance of social relationships to individual well-being and development within the field of infant attachment. They recognized that multiple/alternative attachment relationships are typically formed within a different developmental period of a child's life than the infant-mother attachment construct and suggested different pathways to attachment formation; thus providing more support for the value of documenting social network relations and social support throughout the life span with attention to developmental considerations and the nature of previous attachment connections (Howes, 1999; Howes & Spieker, 2008; Levitt, 1991). The life span attachment framework (Antonucci, 1976; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980) recognized the intersections of attachment and social support concepts functioning within a network of close relationships and offered attachment scholars a model for understanding the formation of multiple attachment figures in a child's life (Levitt, 1991). Research developed within the life span attachment field focused on three specific areas: "(a) the issue of continuity of care, (b) the processes accounting for attachment formation, maintenance, and dissolution across the life span, and (c) the link between attachment and personal well-being" (Levitt, 1991, p.184).

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Scholars found the power of attachment relationships in multiple-caregiver environments to be more predictive of later advanced functioning in infants than individual attachment relationships (Howes, Rodning, Galluzzo, & Myers, 1988; Sagi & van IJzendoorn, 1996; Tavecchio & van IJzendoorn, 1987). Studies of attachment within the context of multiple care providers reveal an array of significant attachment figures including fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, nonrelatives, day care providers, and teachers (Belsky, Gilstrap, & Rovine, 1984; Cox, Owen, Henderson, & Margand, 1992; Howes et al., 1988; Stewart & Marvin, 1984; Teti & Ablard, 1989). Attachment scholars distinguished alternative attachment figures beyond the mother-child dyad as relevant to the attachment security of children within the family system and non-relative adult relationships (Howes, Hamilton, & Althusen, in press; Howes & Smith, 1995a, 1995b; Pianta & Walch, 1995; van IJzendoorn, Sagi, & Lambermon, 1992). These studies found child-alternative attachment figures to be significant to child development and independent of parental attachments and suggested that in multiple attachment environments secure attachments may directly counteract insecure attachments (van IJzendoorn et al., 1992). Additionally, researchers found distinctions in the quality of the attachment on the basis of the caregiver's role, responsibilities, and behaviors as well as the quality of the relationship between adults. For example, researchers found that in two-parent heterosexual families, although attachment relationships often occur simultaneously with both parents, each attachment relationship is shaped by: (1) specific interactions with each caregiver; (2) caregiving responsibilities and behaviors; (3) and the nature of the relationship between the parents (Grossman, Grossman, Fremmer-Bombik,

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Kindler, Scheuerer-Englisch, & Zimmermann, 2002; Lamb 1977; Parke & Asher, 1983).

Steele, Steele, & Fonagy (2005) found that when parents do not share caregiving responsibilities, the mother's own attachment security mediates the father's attachment relationship with the child, not fathers' attachment security. Solomon and George (1999) found that dissonance between parents resulted in disorganized attachment relationships with children regardless of the parents' marital status. Exploring extended family attachment relationships, Spieker & Bensley, (1994) assessed that in some instances, support from a grandmother was linked with more secure infant attachment for adolescent mothers living with a partner. Assessing attachment relationships between children and their mothers and childcare providers in a study of low-income Mexican immigrant parents utilizing kith and kin child care for their children (n=24) by 2 months of age, Howes (2006) found that by 14 months of age, half of the children were securely attached with both their mothers and the childcare providers. The other half of the children was equally likely to be securely attached with only their mothers or only with the childcare providers suggesting separate mother-child and caregiver-child relationships. These findings expand the notion of the mother-child dyad as the primary attachment relationship within multiple caregiver settings (Howes & Smith, 1995a; 1995b; Morelli & Tronick, 1991) and have implications for understanding the specific circumstances in which fathers and extended family caregivers can contribute to the attachment security of children with an insecure attachment with a mother, for example (Howes & Ritchie, 1998; Howes & Spieker, 2008). Little research has examined the nature of multiple attachment networks as an influencing factor on the resilience or

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vulnerability of children to sexual abuse when they have a maternal history of sexual assault.

Adult Attachment and Intergenerational Abuse

Intergenerational attachment research suggests that mothers with a problematic mother-daughter history are at risk for transmitting difficult attachment behaviors and relationships to their own children through the internal working models (Davies, 2011) of the mother's early attachment experiences, which influence her responsiveness to her child's attachment behaviors (Davies, 2011; Main & Goldwyn, 1998; 1984; Ricks, 1985). However, other research recognized the importance of environmental contexts, such as specific child-rearing practices on the intergenerational transmission of attachment model (Sagi, van IJzendoorn, Scharf, Joels, Koren-Karie, Mayseless, & Aviezer, 1997) and the internal working models individuals construct from experiences with their attachment figures.

The intergenerational transmission expectations is prevalent in studies examining child abuse in families with a maternal history of physical and/or sexual violence (e.g., Cohen, 1995, 1998; Leifer, et .al; Martsof & Draucker, 2008; Lev-Wiesel, 2006) and studies drawing correlations between adult attachment and sexual violence (e.g., Alexander, 1992; Alexander, Anderson, Brand, Schaeffer, Grelling & Kretz, 1998; Edwards & Alexander, 1992; Friedrich, Beilke, & Urquiza, 1987). This expectations suggests that in the absence of protective processes, a small percentage of mothers with a history of sexual violence are at greater risk of poor parenting behaviors and skills that place their children at risk for physical and sexual harm.

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Scholars noted that findings from studies examining adult attachment, intergenerational transmission and sexual abuse are inconclusive, and/or contradictory in their conclusions as well as methodologically diverse making comparisons somewhat fruitless (Breckenridge, 2006; DiLillo, 2001; Reid-Cunningham, 2009). In a thematic literature review of how mothers are portrayed in the intergenerational literature, Breckenridge (2006) suggested the tendency of research, to reflect women with a history of CSA in a negative light, to focus almost exclusively on CSA history without regard for other relevant childhood experiences and challenges, and to strongly suggest support for the intergenerational expectations despite methodological limitations, flawed assumptions, and little empirical support for the intergenerational expectations.

Prior studies suggested for a small percentage of women, a maternal history of childhood can be a risk factor for sexual and/or physical violence and the recurrence of abuse in the children of survivors, including exposure of children to sexual perpetrators, physical abuse of children, role reversal, abandonment and neglect (Alexander, Teti, & Anderson, 2000; Faller, 1988; Goodwin, McCarthy, & DiVasto, 1981; James & Nasjleti, 1983; Lev-Wiesel, Martsolf & Draucker, Steele & Alexander, 1981). Findings from a more recent study (N=324) of Latina (34.3%), Caucasian (27.6%), African American (20.0%), and Asian, mixed, or other (15.3%) showed no correlation between the mother's history of childhood sexual assault or rape and parent-child relationships, but found a significant reduction in the quality of parent-child interactions when the mother has experienced sexual assault during adulthood (Reid-Cunningham, 2009). Scholars observed that less research is devoted to examining the effect of adulthood sexual

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violence on parent-child attachment (Campbell & Wasco, 2005; DiLillo & Damashek, 2003).

A few studies suggested that mothers with a sexual abuse history experience can have positive overall interactions with their children comparable to those of non-abused mothers despite problematic attachments with their own mothers in childhood and challenging psychological adjustments and self-perceptions of parental competence (Fitzgerald, Shipman, Jackson, McMahon, & Hanley, 2005; Wright, Fopma-Loy, Fischer, 2005). A growing body of research recognized several intersecting intrapersonal, environmental/contextual, and historical factors influence, parent-child relationships for child abusing parent survivors, and those who do not become abusive parents (Leifer, et .al, 2004, Lieberman & Van Horn, 2005; McCloskey & Bailey, 2000, Page, 1999; Plummer & Eastin, 2007).

Finally, research recognized the potential mediating effects of coping strategies, parental mental health, partner support and violence, and sociocultural identity on parent-child outcomes of children of sexual abuse survivors (Campbell & Wasco, 2005; Wright; Fopma-Loy, & Fischer, 2005; Reid-Cunningham, 2009, Schuetze & Eiden, 2005).

Overall research consistently maintains that a family history of sexual violence has an impact on the quality of caregiver-child relationships and sometimes the impact is direct and clear and sometimes it is indirect and confounded and mediated by other demographic factors, intra- and interpersonal relations, as well as environmental risks and opportunities influencing a mother's ability to cope with her history (Schuetze & Eiden, 2005; Reid-Cunningham, 2009).

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The variability in study findings examining the relationship between sexual abuse history and parenting outcomes is attributed in part to methodological differences in studies (Breckenridge, 2006; DiLillo, 2007; Wright, et, al.2005), including diverse and inconsistent conceptualizations and definitions of what constitutes CSA (DiLillo, 2007), limited research clearly delineating distinctions between CSA and adult sexual assault (DiLillo, 2007; Reid-Cunningham, 2009), limitations of attachment theory in understanding the complexity of trauma (Bolen, 2000), and variability in sampling techniques (DiLillo, 2007). Studies rely more heavily on regression analysis of women's responses to standardized instruments and self-report questionnaires of retrospective accounts of sexual abuse experiences by small convenient samples of women in college, community, and clinical settings. Comparative studies of women without abuse in their background to survivors and/or non-abusive and abusive parents are common in the literature.

Demographically, studies assessing intergenerational sexual abuse focus almost exclusively on the experiences of women however; a few studies also include men (Ferrari, 2002; Martsof & Draucker, 2008). While other demographic variables such as ethnicity, level of income and education are reported in only a few recent studies (Ferrari, 2002; Kilbane & Kalick, 2004; Martsof & Draucker, 2008; Reid-Cunningham, 2009), more often demographic variables beyond sexual abuse and parenting experience are not reported in study findings making comparisons across populations inappropriate and impossible. Additionally, family and interpersonal functioning is constructed exclusively within the context of coupled heterosexual relationships, nuclear family structures, and

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dyadic interactions in studies with attention to the impact of variables such as drug use, physical violence in the home, and other disparaging/dysfunctional family phenomena on survivors parenting, interpersonal functioning, and adult symptomology (DiLilo, 2007).

Summary

While intergenerational attachment and sexual abuse literature demonstrate the importance of recognizing the complexity of the relationships between an array of multidimensional factors influencing a mother's ability to care for and protect her children, among the limitations of the intergenerational literature is the nuclear family model and a focus primarily on mother-child interactions in testing the intergenerational transmission theory.

Survivors living within extended family and kinship networks need research that explores parenting with multiple family caregivers. This requires the conceptualization of parenting within a network structure and reliance on more than standardized instruments in measuring parent-child outcomes. Such measures while statistically reliable and viable, often times are culturally biased in assuming the universality of dominant European, nuclear-family, middle-class models of care and interpersonal functioning which may not encompass the relational dynamics and nuances found within African American intergenerational extended family structures.

Sexual Violence, Race, and Motherhood

Sociohistorical Context

The sociohistorical context surrounding African American women's experiences with and recovery from sexual mistreatment holds relevance for my research as it

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provides a culturally-specific lens for viewing and understanding the intersections of sexual trauma, race, gender, class, and child rearing as experienced by African American mothers within their own communities and families and as members of a dominant society. For the safety and development of African American children, it is critical to understand the historical and contemporary environmental risk factors that place African American women at risk for sexual mistreatment. It is also important to understand environmental opportunities and protections that support resilience and influence recovery as it relates to trauma management, multigenerational parenting, and the quality and cohesiveness of attachment relationships.

The first sexual violence research specifically acknowledging the centrality of ethnicity and race in its conceptualization, design, and findings is linked to the work of Robert and Lois Pierce and Gail Elizabeth Wyatt (Pierce & Pierce, 1984, 1987; Wyatt, 1985, 1990, 1992). These researchers specifically designed studies to explore racial differences in experiences of sexual violence among African American and White American female survivors. They reported race-specific findings related to African American children's experiences of CSA and adult sexual violence. Wyatt's research identified relevant historical and sociocultural factors including victim credibility associated with race and ethnic group membership, historical stereotypes, and living conditions as relevant for consideration by researchers in assessing survivor's nondisclosure of a rape incident and perceptions of safety. The research of Pierce and Pierce (1984) and Wyatt (1985, 1990, 1992) is recognized as groundbreaking in

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examining the role of ethnicity on CSA and adult sexual assault (Russell, Schurman, & Trocki 1988; Neville, Heppner, Oh, Spanierman, & Clark, 2004).

This previous research established the importance of understanding the sociohistorical context as an influencing factor on African American women's experiences of sexual trauma and their responses. An examination of sexual trauma within a specific sociohistorical context foregrounds other intersecting trauma-related experiences associated with salient demographics including race, gender, and class (Collins, 1998, 2000, 2005; Tillman, et al., 2010). Scholars recognized the intersections of race, gender, and class barriers as an influencing factor on how African American women disclose experiences of sexual mistreatment and seek services related to healing (Tillman, et al., 2010; Washington, 2001). Within the trauma literature, terms such as racist incident-based trauma (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005), race-based traumatic stress (Carter, 2007), and political and racial terror (Tummala-Narra, 2005) may be relevant when considering the meanings women give to experiences of sexual mistreatment and their perceptions of how they manage those experiences and their influence in parenting their children. A related theme bearing on African American mother's trauma management and parenting efforts are factors influencing women's disclosure patterns.

Disclosure

Research examining the disclosure patterns of sexual assault survivors attends to factors influencing survivor's decisions to disclose, expectations and reactions to disclosure, to whom disclosures are made, and the impact of disclosure on recovery

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(Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Tillman, Bryant-Davis, Smith, & Marks, 2010; Washington, 2001). Numerous studies have documented both negative and supportive reactions to disclosure from informal and formal supports with varied consequences for survivors (Davis, Brickman, & Baker, 1991; Sudderth, 1998; Ullman, 2000). Many of these studies include, in some instances, a significant percentage of African American participants however, some studies fail to report ethnic-specific findings or provide limited discussion of race-based variables (Arhens, 2006; Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Cullen, Wasco, Sefi, 2007).

Methodological practices such as lumping African American and other participants of color together under one category “ethnic minority” (Ullman & Brecklin, 2003) make it difficult to fully assess the disclosure processes of African American survivors of sexual assault. Despite these limitations, research has found that culturally-specific barriers related to the strong Black woman myth (Singleton, 2003; Wilson, 1994) and cultural mandates regarding the protection of African American men, compound disclosure considerations and African American women’s sense of racial loyalty as they face the threat of being ostracized by members of their community for identifying Black men as assailants in a racially biased legal and judicial system (Roberson, 2003; Rose, 2003; Bryant-Davis, 2009; Pierce-Baker, 1998; Tillman, et al., 2010). While scant, the disclosure literature provides some understanding about the influence of interlocking forces of race, class, and gender oppression as well as cultural pressures on survivor’s decisions to speak out about their experiences (Tillman, et .al, 2010; Tyagi, 2001).

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Furthermore, the disclosure literature provides an additional context for understanding factors that may weigh on African American mothers perceptions of the risks and benefits of disclosing experiences of sexual mistreatment, and their perceptions of how they manage trauma within the sociocultural environments of their lived experiences which is relevant to my expectations.

Resilience and Recovery

The literature regarding factors that contribute to resilience and recovery from sexual mistreatment experiences sheds light on the adaptive coping strategies African American women draw upon to manage their trauma and support the identification of protective factors within multigenerational family systems that can aid women in protecting the safety of their children. Additionally, examining resilience and recovery within the sociocultural context of African American community and family traditions and customs recognized as strengths in the literature such as flexibility in family roles with strong intergenerational ties (Hill, 1999), the importance of extended family and fictive kin connections (Hill, 1999), respect for and special care of children and elders (Billingsley, 1992; Sudarkasa, 2007) and reciprocity and family solidarity (Hall & King, 1982; Pinderhughes, 1989) and the primacy of spirituality and religion (Billingsley, 1999; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Dunn & Dawes, 1999, Hill 1999) can help identify and understand protective influencing factors in rearing of children at risk for sexual mistreatment within African American families with a maternal history of sexual abuse (Christian & Barbarin, 2001; Cooper-Lewter, 2007; Spencer, Fegley, & Harplani, 2003).

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Historically, African Americans have relied on mutual aid, extended family and kin, spirituality, cultural pride, activism, and informal support systems in addressing adversities (Christian & Barbarin, 2001; Cooper-Lewter, 2007; Spencer, Fegley, & Harplani, 2003). While these coping strategies continue to be documented in the sexual assault literature regarding African American women's resilience (Logan, et .al, 2007; West, 2002), additional proactive coping strategies are identified as relevant protective factors for African Americans experiencing violence (Kliewer, Lepore, Oskin, & Johnson, 1998; Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990). For example, a stable home environment, graduation from high school, and receiving support from someone identified as significant are protective processes within extended family networks found in the literature (Hyman & Williams, 2001). Moreover, Siegel (2000) found women reporting a strong attachment to their mothers were less likely to be in abusive relationships. Finally, research suggested that social support in the form of disclosure to informal supports such as family and friends is a protective factor against depression for many African American trauma survivors (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Hage, 2006; Lincoln, Chatters, & Taylor, 2005; Ulmman, 1999). These findings provide additional insight into previous studies in which African American women did not disclose experiences of sexual mistreatment to family (Washington, 2001; Wyatt, 1990c, 1992) and illustrate how important supportive extended family networks are to women's trauma management experiences, as well as sources of support in parenting children.

Other protective factors employed by African American survivors of sexual mistreatment broaden the scope of culturally-specific healing modalities available for

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consideration and include spirituality, community support of family members or friends to problem solve trauma-related concerns, creativity and artistic expression through dance, music, and writing, and engagement in activism expressed through both formal and informal work in support of other survivors and/or people of African descent (Bryant-Davis, 2005). Additional forms of activism identified in the literature by survivors aimed at breaking the silence surrounding sexual violence, raising awareness, and preventing future violence in Black communities include filmmaking, personal testimony and witnessing, scholarship, photography, and community programming (Nichols, 2002; Simmons, 2002; Tillet, 2002). Research itself is purported to provide therapeutic and empowering qualities for some survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Taylor, 2002).

The importance of acknowledging and promoting health-enhancing strategies and strengths of African American survivors of sexual assault cannot be overstated as an integral part of the recovery process. As research findings suggests, African American survivors employ a diverse array of positive coping strategies to resist, heal, and otherwise recover from sexual assault and other forms of violence in their lives. These findings support the importance of understanding the intersections of women's trauma management, the protective components of family networks, and the accessibility of culturally responsive resources potentially available to mothers.

Summary

Scholarship on African American women's experiences of sexual mistreatment stresses the importance of understanding the sociohistorical and cultural contexts that

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influence systemic barriers and opportunities women face in responding to trauma, including adversities and supports experienced with disclosure, race and class-based trauma, and racial loyalty. In addition to examining these macro-level factors, research about African American survivors of sexual assault provide insight into diverse coping strategies women employ in addressing sexual and other trauma-related experiences. Women have employed health promoting and health hindering strategies resulting in positive and negative outcomes for themselves and their children. Individual, familial, community, and societal protective and risk factors are salient considerations in understanding mother's perceptions of how they account for their parenting experiences as trauma survivors and how they utilize extended family networks given their trauma-management experiences.

Conceptual Framework

Reflexivity Process

In this study, my personal and professional experiences influenced the design, implementation, analysis, and writing of the research. I combined reflexive research and social work practice principles, values, and ethics, and the professional use of self as guides during the design and implementation of the study. During the design, recruitment and interviewing phases of the research process, I drew upon multiple identities to respond, in the moment, to methodological issues related to recruitment, to address relational dynamics between myself, my advisors, study participants and to communicate with agencies about recruitment-related discrepancies communicated to potential study participants. I also made protocol changes in the study to adapt to the life experiences of

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study participants, to assess and explore women's motivations for participating in the study and, finally, to analyze and write study results. The results of accounting for the research process are reported in the discussion section of the dissertation.

Overview

Several sources served as the basis for the multidimensional theoretical lens I used to guide the design of the study. I used the relevant body of literature regarding African American women's experiences with extended family networks, sexual mistreatment, intergenerational parenting, and intersecting systems of oppression, as well as my professional social work practice and personal lived experiences. I used a multidimensional theoretical lens to illuminate sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1986) (See Table 2.1) with which to formulate preliminary expectations for testing the data I collected. The two macro-level theories that aided me in understanding the sociohistorical context for the study are Post-traumatic Slave Syndrome (DeGruy-Leary, 2005) and the Dual Perspective (Norton, 1978). The exo-level theory that offered a sociocultural frame of reference is Womanist/Black Feminist theory (Collins, 1990, 2000). Meso-level theories that shaped the analysis of extended family networks and attachment relationships were the Afrocentric Intergenerational Solidarity Perspective (Waites, 2008 2009) and Attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Main & Solomon, 1990). Finally, CSDT (McCann & Pearlman, 1993) served as a micro-level lens for understanding the individual meanings women give to their experiences of trauma over time and their perceptions of how they experience themselves as parents (See Figure 2.1).

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Table 2.1 Sensitizing Concepts

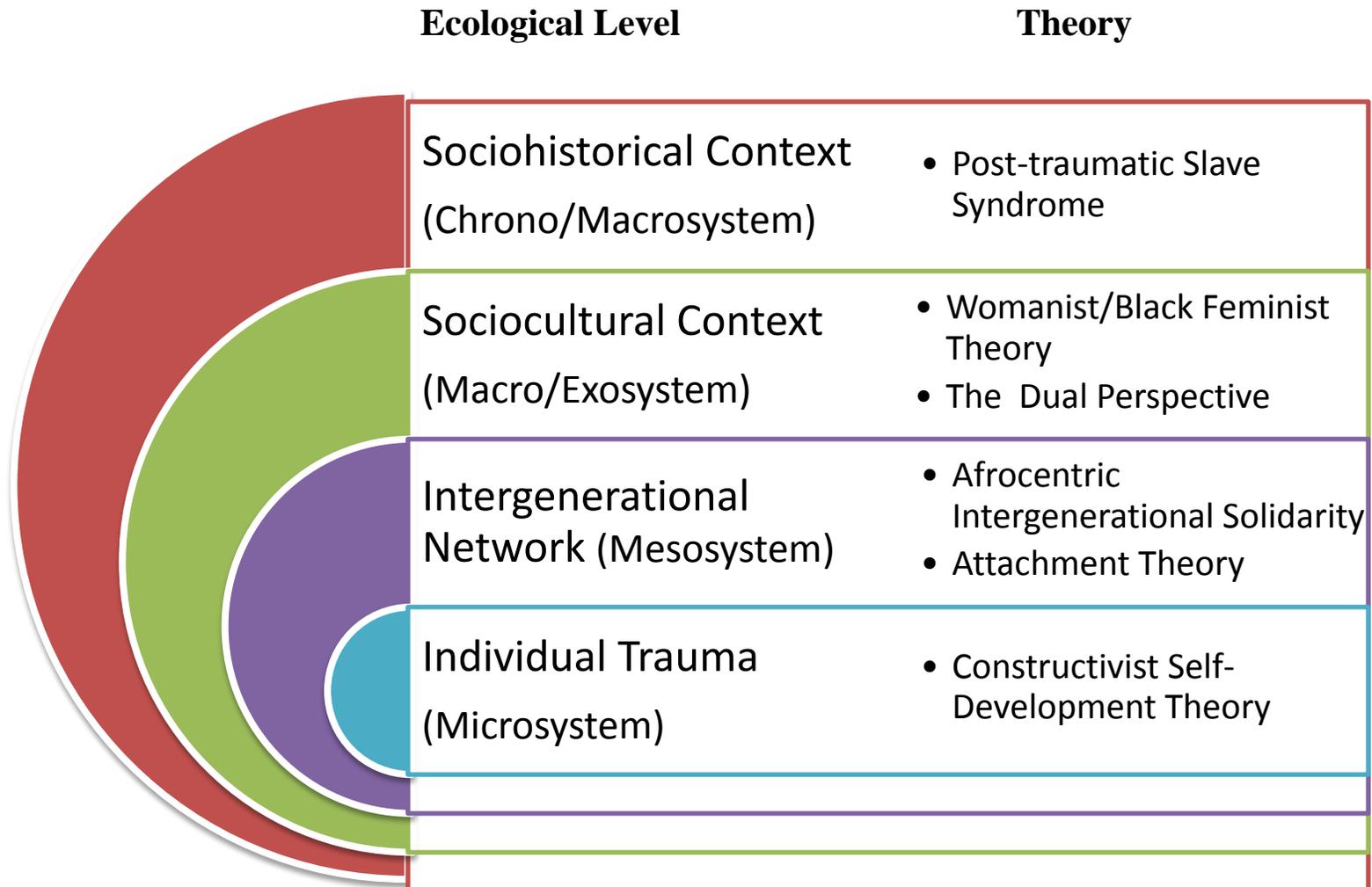
Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (DeGruy-Leary, 2005)	Womanist/Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 1990); Dual Perspective (Norton, 1978)	Afrocentric Intergenerational Solidarity Perspective (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Schiele, 2000; Waites, 2008)	Attachment Theory (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1951/1988; Howes & Spieker, 2008; Main & Goldwyn, 1998)	Constructivist Self-Development Theory (McCann & Pearlman, 1993)	Reflexivity (Finlay, 2002; Gibson & Abrams, 2003; Gilgun, 2010, Valandra, 2012)
1. Stigmatizing racialized sexual stereotypes; sexual trauma	1. Knowledge construction anchored in lived experiences	1. Interdependent-collective Spiritual identity Social cohesion between generations Family life cycles Reciprocity	1. Multiple attachment relationships	1. Personality development as the interaction between core self-capacities and constructed beliefs and schema	1. Silence Power differentials Social locations Insider/Outsider Status
2. Race-Gender-Class-based trauma	2. Interlocking systems of oppression	2. Associational Solidarity Type and frequency of contact; Family traditions Special events Celebrations	2. Attachment networks – multiple caregivers making up a child’s social network	2. Meaning Making Experience of self Bio-psycho-social resources Sociocultural factors	2. Love and Forgiveness
3. Untreated Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome	3. Self Empowerment	3. Affectional Solidarity Expressed closeness, warmth, and trust Close family members Honored relationships Significant connections	3. Internal Working Models (IWM) – mental representations of self and others influenced by early patterns of care	3. Trauma as a complex experience involving both devastation and resilience	3. Co-creating Role clarification
4. Intergenerational Transmission	4. Political, economic, and social	4. Consensual Solidarity Transmission of values	4. Discourse Coherence Idealization; Lack of	4. Frame of reference The usual way a	4. Ethical and transparent research practice

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5. Coping Responses Adaptive and Maladaptive	transformation	and beliefs; Family history; Significant community cultural	recall; Active anger Derogation; Fear of loss; Passivity	person understands self and the world	
	1. Dual System Bicultural reality of lived experience	5. Functional Solidarity Frequency of exchanges of assistance & resources Family resource exchanges Responses to needs		5. Self-capacities Ability to recognize, tolerate, and integrate affect and maintain a kind disposition toward self and other	5. Methodological Shifting
	2. Sustaining System White dominant society	6. Normative Solidarity Responsibilities and obligations; Role functions Adaptability to role shifts		6. Ego Resources Ability to be self-observing, use cognitive & social skills to maintain relationships and protect self	
	3. Nurturing System Immediate family and community	7. Structural Solidarity Opportunities for interaction; Proximity of family; Accessibility of family		7. Psychological needs – cognitive schemas about safety, trust, control, esteem, and intimacy 8. Perceptual & memory system Biological adaptations & sensory experience	

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Figure 2.1 Theoretical Lenses



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Trauma Theory Core Assumptions and Key Concepts

Recognizing the limitations of the dominant trauma discourse with its emphasis on individual pathology, many scholar/activists conceptualized and embraced a more “radical trauma practice...based on an awareness of the centrality of oppression in the traumatizing of human beings, communities, and the earth itself “ (Burstow, 2003, p. 1310). Scholar/activists promoted the use of broader conceptualizations of trauma and trauma responses that acknowledge the history, strengths, and lived experiences of marginalized communities. For example, historical trauma (Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004), post-traumatic slave syndrome (De Gruy Leary, 2005), racist incident-based trauma (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005, 2006), race-based traumatic stress (Carter, 2007), and political and racial terror (Tummala-Narra, 2005) are more ecologically-based conceptualizations of trauma proliferating across research, practice, and academic settings. In my study both traditional and expanded conceptualizations of trauma are relevant in understanding the lived experiences of African American mothers and their perceptions and responses to the traumas they may experience based on the intersections of their specific sociocultural identities. It is conceivable that historical trauma is a relevant concept to consider in research with African American survivors. Brice (2007) expected:

For more than four centuries, African women and girls learned to adapt to [the] constant threat of sexual victimization by developing protective processes for enduring this atrocity. It is plausible that mothers would prepare their young,

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often pre-or early pubescent daughters for the impending thievery of their sexual innocence by instructing them not to resist (p. 157).

Post-traumatic slave syndrome – PTSS. Brice's contention parallels the sentiments and research of Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary, a 20- year veteran of social work practice and research who posited that centuries of slavery followed by systemic racism and oppression in the lives of African Americans have resulted in both positive resilient strategies of resisting oppression and destructive and detrimental adaptive behaviors both of which are transmitted generationally within families, communities, and society (DeGruy Leary, 2005; Crawford, Nobles, & DeGruy Leary, 2003). The underlining assumption of Dr. DeGruy Leary's theory purported that African Americans as descendants of an enslaved people likely experienced untreated post-traumatic stress conditions that may be transmitted through cultural and racial socialization of children. PTSS theory provided an overarching culturally specific historical guide that sensitized me to potential sociocultural constraints and opportunities affecting the lives of African American survivors of sexual assault in my study. This framework offered me a mechanism for tracing possible generational strategies African American women may have employed in resisting and challenging sexual violence in their families, communities, and society and in raising their children.

The dual perspective. Dolores G. Norton is credited with developing the dual perspective with a group of social work educators in search for models that would do justice to the experiences of people of color in social work curriculum (Anderson & Carter, 2003). A principle feature of the dual perspective relevant to the experiences of

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African Americans is its emphasis on the duality of living within two distinct but potentially overlapping environments – that of the larger dominant White society (task/sustaining system) as well as within the immediate family and community (nurturing system) (Chesteng, 1979; Freeman, 2004). Within this paradigm it is conceivable that persons can experience the values, norms, attitudes, behaviors of one system in relation to the other assessing “the degree of incongruence...congruence” (Norton, p. 1) between them. Thus this perspective allowed for the recognition of the adaptive abilities many African Americans must foster living in a society (task/sustaining system) that often rejects the values, and culture of their immediate environment (nurturing system) and what it costs to co-exist in, both systems simultaneously. In essence, the dual perspective conceptualized the bi-cultural nature of living as an African American in the United States. Regarding my research, this model helped me understand the ways in which survivors perceive and experience the various environments in which they live and rear their children and how these environments influence the quality of parent-child-family interactions within the context of extended family networks.

Womanist/Black feminist theory. Womanist/Black feminist theory is anchored in attention to and the centrality of the lived reality of Black women’s experiences and empowerment. Several tenets of Black feminist theory are relevant to the lives of sexually abused African American women. Tenets articulated through the scholarship of Collins (1990) and others relevant to my research include: (a) the centrality of Black women’s experiences as defined and validated by them in the construction of knowledge; (b) the reconceptualization of race, gender, and class as interlocking systems of

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oppression; and (c) the importance of Black women's empowerment and social transformation of political and economic structures as essential to social change (Collins, 2004, 1991, 1990; Griffin, 1996; hooks, 1981; West, 2002).

Traditionally Black women's experiences have been marginalized within many segments of society including research and scholarship as irrelevant to the production of knowledge (Freeman & Logan, 2004). Intersecting experiences of racism, sexism, and sexual violence provide both historical and contemporary reference points for the development and promotion of a collective identity from which to challenge dominant standpoints and explore Black women's agency in resisting and negotiating the sociopolitical relations that influence their experiences with sexual violence. It was important in my study to identify what interlocking systems of opportunity and risks were common and varied in the experiences of mothers who are also survivors and what strategies they employ in naming, resisting, challenging sexual violence within the subjective realities of their lived experiences as they rear children and support families and communities. Womanist/Black feminist theory offered an essential focus in my research as an epistemology "that reflects black women's ways of knowing, doing, and being in the world" (Freeman & Logan, 2004, p.194).

Afrocentric intergenerational solidarity perspective. The Afrocentric intergenerational solidarity (AIS) perspective provided a context for understanding the degree of social cohesion among members of multigenerational kinship and extended parenting networks in African American families. Multigenerational families reflect three or more generations and intergenerational relationships are defined as interactions between two or

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more generations (Waites, 2008). Social work scholar Cheryl Waites (2009) recognized the AIS framework as relevant to social work research and practice in understanding the complexities, strengths, and challenges of multigenerational and intergenerational African American families across time. Waites (2009) derives key concepts of this perspective from the Afrocentric paradigm (Schiele, 2000) and the intergenerational solidarity framework (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982). Based in African philosophy, the Afrocentric paradigm honors a holistic, interdependent/collective identity, and spiritual worldview of persons in their environments (Schiele, 2000). The intergenerational solidarity framework assesses the degree of social cohesion or quality and character of relationships between generations and provides a classification system of six solidarity indicators of intergenerational cohesion including (a) associational - interactions, (b) affectional - sentiments, (c) consensual – values and beliefs, (d) functional – resource exchange, (e) normative – familial roles and obligations, and (f) structural – intergenerational opportunities (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991).

Waites (2009) expanded the intergenerational solidarity framework by incorporating culturally relevant elements from an Afrocentric worldview. This model provided me with a culturally specific context and culturally relevant questions for understanding the patterns of cohesiveness and solidarity in the interactions, the degree and quality of closeness among kin, non-kin, and extended family, relevant family history, traditions, and the roles and accessibility of extended families in my study. In my study the six domains of social cohesion provided sensitizing concepts with which to assess the nature, function, structure, shared values, and interpersonal sensitivities of

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mother's experiences across their life course and with their own children. Findings from this analysis provided a broader context for understanding specific multiple attachment bonds assessed through attachment theory typologies.

Attachment theory. Several overlapping principles converge from the adult attachment literature are relevant to my research including adult mental representations of attachment relationships with their caregivers and their own children and the meaning they assign to attachment-related experiences. The relevant assumptions reflected in the adult attachment interview (AAI) protocol and its scoring system that served as sensitizing concepts for my research are articulated by Crowell et .al, (2008, pp. 603 - 604) and including:

1. Working models operate at least partially outside of awareness and are based on attachment-relevant experiences;
2. Infants begin to develop working models that guide behavior in attachment relationships in the first year of life;
3. Mental representations provide guidelines for behavior and affective appraisal of experience;
4. Formal operational thought allows individuals to observe and assess a given relationship system, and hence the model of that relationship can be altered without an actual change in the experiences in the relationship; and
5. Working models are not templates, but are processes that serve to gain, limit, or block access to attachment-related information.

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Elaborating on the central construct of internal working models (IWM) in attachment theory, Bretherton and Munholland (2008), offered that despite its attention to an adult's family of origin attachment relationships, the AAI does not assess the IWM of the interviewee, or ongoing relationships but instead focuses on the interviewee's "state of mind with respect to attachment" to symbolize the way an individual organizes or habitually regulates attachment-related information whether in response to interview questions or the course of everyday interpersonal interactions and reflections.

Main and her colleagues make the scoring system of the AAI available only through their intensive training program; however, several scholars have explained the classification scheme in relation to its two groups of scales; (a) the parental behavior scales, and (b) the state-of-mind scales (Main & Goldwyn, 1988). For purposes of my study, the state-of-mind scale and resulting profiles served as sensitizing concepts. The state-of-mind scale assesses the interviewees' "discourse coherence" - intended to reflect "the content of what the interviewee says - for example, that the mother was loving, neglectful, or abusive - and the unintended qualities of the persons' discourse such as incoherence, inconsistency, and emotional disorganization" (Mikulinger & Shaver, 2007, p. 102). The state-of-mind scales are labeled: idealization, insistence on lack of recall, active anger, derogation of parents or of attachment, fear of loss, metacognitive monitoring, and passivity of speech. Main et al (1988) derived five classifications of adult attachment from the discourse coherence profiles as identified in Table 2.2.

These key ideas of attachment-related constructs served a sensitizing purpose in my study that paralleled the affectional solidarity element of the AIS perspective in

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illuminating the scope of possible attachment-relationships within an extended family structure, the context in which attachment-related experiences might occur, and mother's mental representations or state of mind with respect to attachment-related information. I wanted to understand who functioned as a secure base for the mothers in my study with a history of sexual victimization and how the mother's mental representation of her attachment-related experiences in childhood and mental representations of her parental caregiving influenced her actual parenting practices within an extended family network. Additionally, I wanted to know how, when distressed, a woman sought out comfort (or not) based on her mental representations of her parenting networks.

Relevant sensitizing concepts as reflected in the literature describing the ways transcribed responses of the AAI are analyzed include secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent/resistant, and insecure-disorganized/disoriented (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Main & Solomon, 1990) and unresolved and cannot classify (Hesse, 1996; Hesse & Main, 2000). Although these narrative and interview measures of attachment were designed for scoring adult responses with a nuclear, heterosexual model of parenting, they were applied to a multiple attachment family structure and therefore their goodness-of-fit may be limited.

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Table 2.2 Adult Attachment Discourse Coherence Classifications

Classification	Description
Secure – free and autonomous attachment	Maintains a balanced view of early relationships, values attachment relationships and views attachment-related experiences as influential in their development. Open, direct, and cooperative interview style; coherent believable reports of behavior by parents are reported.
Insecure – dismissing/enmeshed attachment	Uncomfortable talking about their childhood relationships; typically deny the influence of early attachment relationships on their current personality, have difficulty recalling specific events (often hesitating before answering), and often idealize or attempt to put a positive spin on....negative experiences...[may] have been rejected by one or both parents or pushed away, despite his or her claim that the parents were loving.
Insecure – preoccupied Ambivalent	Anxious and/or angry when discussing childhood relationships with parents and still enmeshed in these experiences, and they tend to give long-winded answers marked by confusion or inconsistency....[may] have had intrusive parents, including ones who demanded to be taken care of instead of providing good care themselves.
Unresolved/ Disorganized	Report attachment-related traumas of loss and/or abuse, manifest confusion and disorganization in the discussion of trauma-related experiences, and tend to suffer from severe attachment insecurities.
Cannot Classify	People whose...profiles do not resemble any of the standard profiles (e.g., they might be incoherent to different degrees, or in different ways, when discussing mother and father or show signs of otherwise distinct patterns during different parts of the interview
Source: Hesse, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, pp.102 – 103	

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Constructivist Self-Development Theory- CSDT. Drawing on the extensive clinical research of clinical psychologist McCann and Pearlman (1993) and their colleagues at the Traumatic Stress Institute and Center, this theory offers a possible explanation for why survivors of similar traumatic events may manifest different post-trauma symptoms, why some individuals exposed to different events react similarly, and why some survivors cope relatively well in response to traumatic events while others suffer immensely (McCann & Pearlman). The main crux of CSDT asserts that individuals construct the meaning that a particular trauma has for them based on their frame of reference or worldview which is shaped by person's, self concept, personal history, and the sociocultural context in which they live their lives over time (McCann & Pearlman; Pearlman, 1998; Saakvitne, 1998). An underlying assumption of CSDT is that individuals construct and construe their own realities. This theoretical framework offered me the opportunity to explore the meaning each woman gives to her experiences of sexual violence overtime, how her basic beliefs about self and others are shaped by her experiences overtime, and the meaning she places on cultural context in defining, understanding, and resisting experiences of sexual violence and parenting her children over time.

Summary

I provide a critical assessment of what is known regarding the parenting experiences of African American mothers who are survivors of sexual mistreatment raising their children within extended family parenting networks and the theoretical

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perspective guiding this research. The scholarship regarding my topic is not neatly packaged in the literature as a cohesive body of knowledge, but is instead, somewhat segmented by different fields of study or bodies of knowledge broadly categorized in the fields of child development and psychology, sociology, child welfare, traumatology and sexual violence, and social work. Therefore, I attempted to synthesize my literature review by structuring it topically to include models of African American families and parenting emphasizing the roles and functions of kinship support, and parents' patterns of protection, nurturance, and socialization of their children; the quality and nature of multiple attachment relationships, and the intersections of attachment, intergenerational abuse and resilience; and finally, the sociohistorical and sociocultural context of African American women's experiences with sexual violence and its impact on disclosure, and protective factors and resilience.

Research Question and General Expectations

Based on a review of the literature, my professional social work practice experience, previous education and research conducted, I designed this study to answer the following two research questions: (a) What meaning do African American women give to experiences of sexual violence? (b) How do those experiences influence their perceptions of parenting within the context of intergenerational family structures?

I used a multiple case study approach with general expectations that shaped the framework for analysis in my study. The general expectations were derived from my practice and personal experiences, the literature, existing theory related to

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intergenerational relationships in African American families, multiple attachment relationships, sociocultural location, and historical and individual trauma.

General and Specific Expectations

I generally expected the parenting practices of African American mothers who are survivors of sexual violence to be influenced by several interrelated factors including (a) their experiences managing trauma, (b) their use of supportive parenting networks, and (c) their experiences of the sociocultural environment. The statements related to each factor are outlined:

1. Trauma Management - I specifically expected the quality and nature of parent-child-family relationships to be influenced by women's ability to manage their trauma experiences such that:

- Women who adequately manage their trauma are likely to have adequate parenting practices.
- Women who partially manage their trauma are likely to have mixed parenting practices.
- Women who have unmanaged trauma are likely to have inadequate parenting practices.

2. Parental Network - I specifically expected the quality and nature of parent-child-family relationships to be influenced by mothers use of supportive parenting networks such that:

- Women that have access to and use supportive parenting networks are likely to have adequate parenting practices.

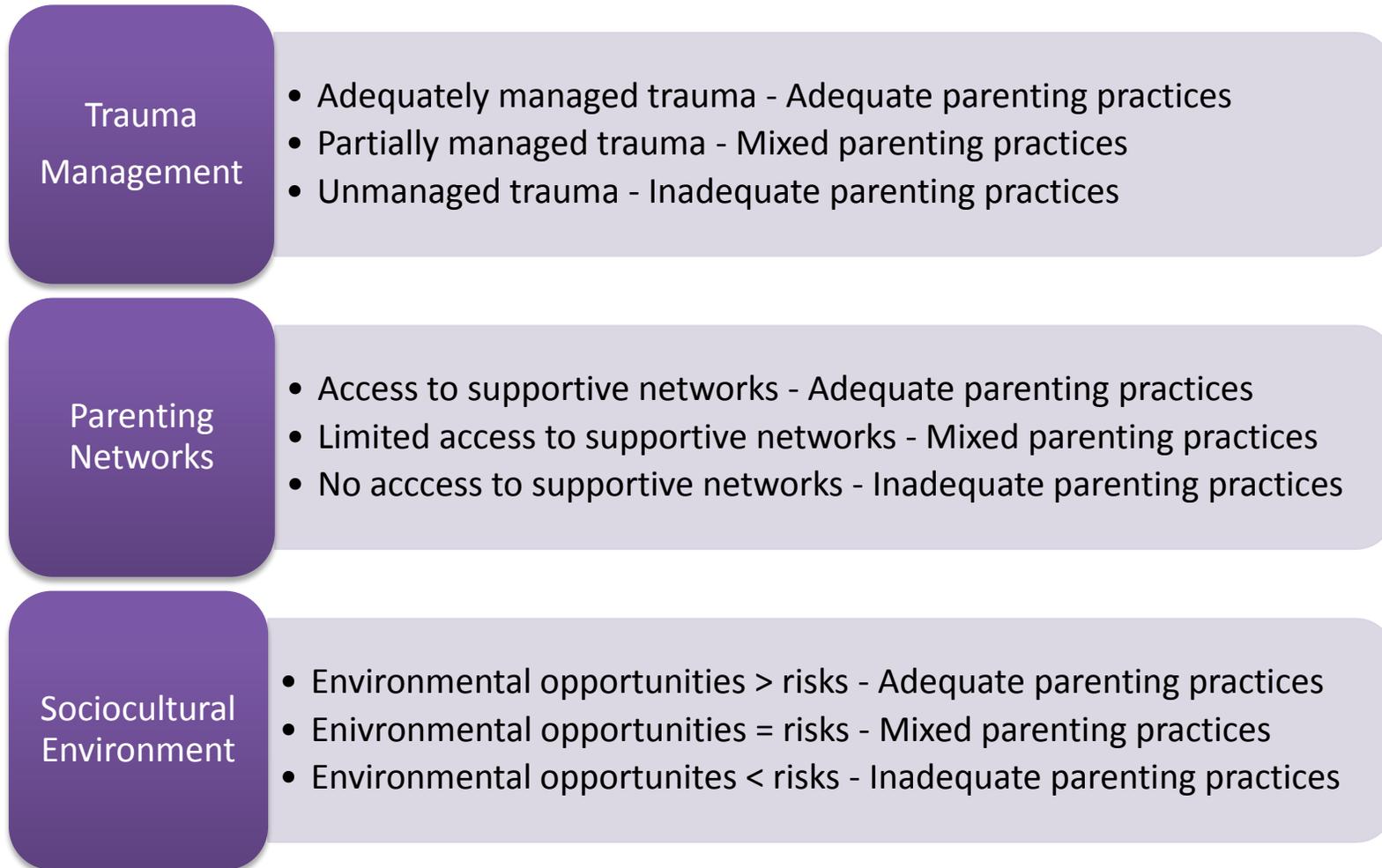
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- Women that have limited access to supportive parenting networks are likely to have mixed parenting practices.
 - Women that have no access to supportive parenting networks are likely to have inadequate parenting practices.
3. **Sociocultural Environment** – I specifically expected mother’s parenting practices to be influenced by their access to sociocultural resources such that:
- Women experiencing more environmental opportunities than risks are likely to have adequate parenting practices.
 - Women experiencing a balance of environmental opportunities and risks are likely to have mixed parenting practices.
 - Women experiencing more environmental risks are more likely to have inadequate parenting practices.

The general expectations are visually diagramed in Figures 2.2.

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Figure 2.2. General Expectations



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CHAPTER III:

METHOD

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Overview

In this section of the dissertation, I identify general principles, ideas, and sensitizing concepts that influenced my decision to choose qualitative inquiry methods generally and more specifically a phenomenological constructivist approach for my study. I discuss the content and process of my research approach drawing on Berg's (2009) "spiraling research approach" (p. 26) as an organizing concept for the discussion. The content covered here includes a discussion of my research approach and how it was derived, a description of the sample and recruitment procedures, my interviewing protocol, how participant information was collected, the structure and use of my field notes, the construction of detailed case studies and typologies and the analysis process for testing my expectations. Additionally, I identify the sensitizing codes derived from my conceptual framework, other pre-planned codes and discuss my coding scheme.

Spiraling Research Approach

Berg (2009) described a spiraling progression of steps forward and backward in designing research, that closely resembles my experience in narrowing the focus of my topic, constructing a research question, and designing my study. Instead of the linear step-by-step sequence of completing each stage of the research process as a separate and independent step from an idea to theory, then to design, followed by data collection and analysis, and finally findings; I used what Berg (2009) described as a more fluid, interdependent process. In this "spiraling approach to research" (p.26)

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several stages overlap along the way and inform each other requiring reformulations of earlier stages, in more of a one-step forward, two steps back kind of process. This nonlinear, somewhat organic process of continually revisiting ideas, re-conceptualizing theoretical assumptions, and refining my design, over time, was guided by my previously discussed professional work in social services and child protection, my personal lived experiences, my academic experiences in a child abuse prevention program, and previous research I conducted concerning what helps African American women heal from the sexual violence of prostitution (Valandra, 2007). After admission to graduate school, my advisors, the parameters prescribed for my dissertation as an IV-E Child Welfare scholar, and existing scholarship also informed this spiraling process for me.

Why Qualitative Inquiry

During the idea stage of the spiraling process I asked myself the question “what do I really want to know?” I wrote out my responses to this question in 2007 and reflected on them off and on for the next three years while reading literature and writing conceptual papers about African American women and children, sexual violence and public policy, and healing modalities for class assignments. At that time, I wanted to know:

1. What contributes to the risks of sexual violence for African American girls?
2. What influences African American girls’ decisions to disclose experiences of sexual violence to caregivers, other family members, and community and public agencies.

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3. How does the thinking process and life experiences prevent African American families from acknowledging that sexual violence occurs?
4. What do African American families think the risks associated with sexual violence are and how can they be reduced?
5. What influences the way sexual violence is treated in African American families and communities?
6. What specific ways do African American families prevent sexual violence?
7. What ways do African American families and communities support survivors of sexual violence?

These questions were concerned with process, meaning making, and subjective understanding or *verstehen* (Weber, 1925/1957) and require the collection of descriptive, thick, rich data; all trademark characteristics of qualitative inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Monette, Sullivan, DeJong, 2011; Patton, 2002). Monette (2011) and his colleagues asserted that with qualitative research methods “researchers cannot adequately capture this ‘meaning,’ or ‘feeling,’ or ‘interpretive’ dimension through objective, quantitative measurement techniques; they need to view and experience the situation from the perspective of the people themselves...to talk to these people at length...” (p. 225).

My choice to use qualitative research methods also meant that I must account for my insider/outsider status (Gibson & Abrams, 2003) as researcher, the research process itself, and the theoretical assumptions underpinning my research approach. Thus the spiraling process continued.

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Phenomenological Constructivist Approach

Creswell (2007) offered that “the research design process in qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions that the inquirers make in deciding to undertake a qualitative study” (p. 15). It was clear to me after continually reflecting on ways to create space, through research, for women to share their experiences as parents and survivors based on the interpretations and meanings they give to these labels, that the underlying principles guiding my thoughts were phenomenological and constructivist. However, just like the term *qualitative research*, the word *phenomenology* is another umbrella term that reflects several different paradigms or worldviews.

Patton (2002) pointed out that there are many ways of describing and categorizing various frameworks within the field of qualitative research and no one way is better or more or less definitive than another but there are distinctions between them. There are myriad arrays of epistemological stances or ways of knowing in qualitative inquiry which influence and justify the methodologies qualitative researchers utilize to study phenomenon (Patton, 2002; Schwandt , 2001). Creswell (2007, p. 20-21) offered that the purpose of research, when using a social constructivist lens, “is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ view of the situation...[and] ‘processes’ of interaction among individuals...to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants.” My approach to researching the lived experiences of African American women, as socially constructed by them, within the relational contexts of their extended and kinship networks, and the their

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interactions with their sociocultural environment is consistent with a phenomenological constructivist epistemology.

Phenomenology is also used to reflect theoretical perspectives as well. Bogden and Biklen (2007) asserted that regardless of whether it is stated or written, “all research is guided by some theoretical orientation” (p. 24). The phenomenological orientation supports my aim to represent the voices of African American mothers as authentically as possible based on their interpretations of their embodied experiences as survivors and parents interpersonally connected with their families, communities, and society. As such, phenomenology guided me to pay particular attention to the ways African American mothers perceive their multilayered realities, and the variability of their lived experiences required of a phenomenological stance to inquiry (Bogden & Biklen). I was not only interested in women’s perception of themselves individually but also their experiences associated with intergenerational parenting. To achieve this purpose, I designed my study to include persons whom women see as relevant in carrying out the day-to-day activities associated with parenting. Thus the unit of analysis included interviews with network members and children 10 years and older who were defined in this study as members of a woman’s parenting network. Each unit of analysis was intended to serve as a case study for analysis and theory testing. However, during the recruitment and interviewing phases of the implementation process, I became painfully aware that my attempts to recruit network members, and children within the parameters of IRB approved guidelines was not

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yielding network participants. Therefore, following the concept of an emerging design,

I requested and received a protocol change by the IRB to interview only mothers.

Recruitment Process

The Social and Behavioral Sciences Review Committee of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Minnesota approved the study and all participants demonstrated their informed consent to participate in the study by voluntarily signing a consent form approved by the IRB (See Appendix C). I recruited women from the general public and secondarily through community-based agencies providing emergency housing, recovery from prostitution, chemical misuse treatment, and parenting programs in an urban center in the Midwest. Potential participants learned about the study in five possible ways:

1. Flyers in public settings and professional social work organizations.
2. Agency staff sharing information about the study.
3. Study participants participating in a one-time presentation given at the agencies contacted for the study.
4. Notices on bulletin boards, and in waiting areas at the agencies contacted for the study.
5. Study participants sharing their experiences with other women.

I posted flyers (See Appendix D) in coffee shops, co-ops, and local neighborhood cafes and distributed them through the local chapter of the National Association of Black Social Workers' listserv. I also sent flyers through email to personal and professional contacts involved with community programs as well. I planned to advertise the study in

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local newspapers serving African American and women's communities; however, the costs rendered this recruitment strategy prohibitive. I also contacted six social service agencies through email about the study. I chose five of the six agencies based on my prior professional relationship with each agency as a social work practitioner, board member, and researcher. I had no previous connection with the sixth agency, but was aware that it provides a parenting program specifically for African American parents. Of the five agencies, I previously worked at the emergency and transitional housing organizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, respectively, in case management roles. In 2004, I conducted a qualitative study at a third organization providing services to women in recovery from prostitution, and served on its board in 2005 and 2006. The transitional housing program declined to participate in the study based on its longstanding agency policy. I previously worked in a collaborative and referral role with the chemical health and treatment agency as a child protection social worker between 1996 and 2001.

The agencies that agreed to participate in the study allowed me to: (a) make fliers available to potential clients, (b) talk to agency staff about the study, and (c) talk to women (with their consent) receiving agency services. Two agencies also provided private space for me to interview participants. Potential participants expressed an interest in the research through contact with me by phone, e-mail, mail, or in person when I was present at an agency participating in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

I interviewed each participant one time for about 90 minutes to 180 minutes using a semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix D). Women were encouraged to

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respond with as much brevity or detail with which they felt comfortable and to respond only to questions that were relevant to their lived experiences. I interviewed some women in private rooms at an agency, and other women in their homes and apartments depending on the woman's preference. Each participant signed a consent form and upon completion of the interview I gave each participant \$10.00 in cash and a copy of a music CD "Rhythms of My Heart: Healing from within" (Valandra, 2001) as a token of appreciation. I digitally audiotaped the interviews, which were all professionally transcribed verbatim. I checked each transcribed interview for accuracy at the time I coded them to construct descriptive first person case narratives of each participant. I wrote field notes after each interview and kept a personal journal as well. I shared and discussed my experiences during the recruitment and interviewing stages of the study with one of my advisors through email correspondence regularly. We also read and discussed one interview transcript. I collected and transcribed all of the data before applying the sensitizing concepts derived from the multidimensional framework.

Interview Guide

I developed the interview guide (See Appendix E) based on a modification of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (Main & Goldwyn, 1988) and questions from the Afrocentric Intergenerational Solidarity Model (Waites, 2009). Additionally, I created questions to gain information about the sexual history and demographic information about study participants. The AAI attempts to assess adults' mental representations of their internal working models as well as their state of mind and ability to provide a believable and integrated account of their attachment-related experiences with parents

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(Main et al., 1985; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). For purposes of my study, I substituted the word “parents” for “caregivers” to reflect the nature of a network of attachment figures and I did not attempt to identify a primary attachment figure as guided in the AAI protocol. I asked women to identify caregivers they perceived to play a critical or meaningful role in their upbringing and/or that of their children. I interviewed mothers about their attachment relationships with their caregivers and their children using questions from the AAI protocol with these modifications.

Research examining the relationship between attachment styles and parental caregiving suggest that adults preparing for parenthood as well as current parents, construct affective-cognitive structures of themselves as parents, their children, and the parent-child relationship (George & Solomon, 2008; Slade & Cohen, 1996). According to George and Solomon (2008) parents mental representations of themselves as caregivers, can guide their behaviors in parent-child interactions, and influence parents’ expectations, feelings, and actions.

In an attempt to understand women’s perceptions of themselves as mothers, I also included questions on the interview guide to assess their mental representations of themselves as caregivers pertaining to their own children. Finally, the questions included in the interview guide reflecting the Afrocentric Intergenerational Solidarity Model covered the six elements of solidarity identified in the discussion of my conceptual framework earlier.

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Field Notes

I used field notes as a source of data for the study. I wrote field notes immediately after each interview. My field notes included a descriptions of relevant settings and contexts, nonverbal observations (N.O.) of the participants, descriptive text about what happened and the sequence of events, theoretical notes (T.N.) in which I noted my initial expectations about emerging patterns and themes and the research process, methodological notes (M.N.) and observer comments (O.C.) in which I recorded my emotional reactions, doubts, fears, concerns, and distractions of which I was aware (Jarrett, 2008). I also stayed in regular communication with one of my advisors during the recruitment and interviewing stages of the process and used the email correspondence as a reflexive guide and part of my field notes. I also discussed one completed interview transcript with one of my advisors. Additionally, I used field notes to document my recruitment efforts throughout the data collection process.

Study Participants

I interviewed 25 women for the study between January and May 2011, and wrote case studies for and analyzed 21 of the interviews. Of the four women excluded from the study, two women informed me at the end of the interview that they were not survivors of sexual mistreatment, the third mother had to leave the interview before it was completed because of a pre-scheduled meeting with her case manager at the shelter. The fourth woman excluded from the study was European American but raises her daughters in her African American extended family care. After an email dialogue with one of my advisors about the appropriateness of including the European participant in the study, I decided

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not to include her information in the study. Six of the mothers were residing at the shelter at the time of the interview, two mothers were not receiving any social services and 13 mothers were receiving services related to recovery from domestic sex trafficking at the time of the interview.

Many women experienced more than one type of abuse and offender. Women's experiences of sexual mistreatment included, sexual molestation in childhood (n=19), intimate partner rape (n=2), rape by a stranger (n=1), acquaintance rape (n=1), and rape in prostitution (n=13). Of the women sexually mistreated as children within their family system, the offenders were all male and included fathers (n=2), a stepfather (n=1), grandfathers (n=2), uncles (n=7), siblings (n=4), and cousins (n=3). Intergenerational experiences of sexual mistreatment were reported by 13 women in the study. Five mothers had children (n= 5) that experienced sexual abuse and eight mothers had a parent (n=1), aunt (n=2), niece (n=1), sibling or cousin (n=4) that survived sexual abuse in childhood. An older cousin, the ex-husband of the child's grandmother (not the child's grandfather), a female family friend, and an undisclosed person sexually abused the children (three girls and two boys) of the five mothers who reported intergenerational sexual abuse. In the other cases of intergenerational sexual abuse, fathers (n=3), brothers (n=3), and a grandfather (n=1) were the offenders.

Women ranged in age from 20 to 57 years old with an average age of 37 years old. One woman in the study was pregnant with a male child during the interview process. Women parented their children within an extended family structure and collectively had 65 children, including 30 males and 35 females ranging in age between

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10 days old and 39 years old. On average, women in the study had 3 children with an average age of 16 for female children and 20 years old for male children. All of the women in the study had either attended and/or completed high school and two women also completed some college. Several of the women were employed while others received public assistance. The majority of the women identified romantic relationships with men (n=18) and five women identified females as romantic partners including one co-parenting same-sex married couple. Half of the women (n=12) reported the existence of intergenerational sexual mistreatment in their family structure. One woman had a parent who is a survivor of sexual mistreatment and another woman shared that the same person who abused her, sexually mistreated her cousin. Five women reported children who had been sexually mistreated; four women reported siblings who had been sexually abused, two women had aunts who reported sexual mistreatment by a family member, and one woman shared that her niece was sexually harmed by the woman's younger brother. A profile summary of study participants is included in Table 3.1. The language I used in the table reflects descriptions used by study participants to describe their experiences of sexual mistreatment and the person(s) responsible. There is great variability in the ways study participants named what they experienced and the relationship of the offender to themselves and others in their family network.

I used pseudonyms of famous African American women who spoke the truth about African American women's experiences through their lives as writers, activists, singers, political activists, scholars, actors, etc. to amplify the voices of women in this study as their voices are what is most critical here given the silence surrounding sexual

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victimization in this society particularly as it is experienced by African American

women. A list of the African American leaders and activist and their accomplishments

can be found in Appendix G. I also used first person narratives for the same reason.

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Table 3.1 Profile Summary of Participants

Participant	1 Ida	2 Billie	3 Rosa	4 Harriet	5 Angela	6 Shirley	7 Barbara
Typology Classification	New	New	New	Established	Established	Established	New
Age	20	28	23	39	44	45	26
Number/Gender (m/f/i) of Children	1 m 3 1f 10 days	1 m 5	2 f 3, 4	3 m 19, 14, 4 1 f 23	2 m 24, 20	3 f 24, 19, 15 2 m 25, 21	1 f 4 2 m 2, pregnant
Grandchildren	0	0	0	0	1	5	0
Number of Sibling(s)	3	4	4	3	2	5	7
Education	Less than High school	Attending 2-year college	Less than High school	Completed High School	Completed High School	Less than High School	Completed High School
Employment	Unemployed	Unemployed	Job interview scheduled	Unemployed	Employed	Employed	Unemployed
Income	Financial Assistance	Husband, family	Public Assistance	Public Assistance	Employment	Employment	Public Assistance
Type of Sexual Abuse/Age of Onset	Molestation/ 6 or 7 yrs. old	Rape 5 yrs. old 13 yrs. old	Rape, physical, emotional abuse	Molestation 13 yrs. old	Fondled; oral sex/ 7 yrs old	Raped/16 yrs old	Sexually molested; 12 yrs old
Offender (s)	Grand dad	Sister's father Mom's husband	Boyfriend	Mother's boyfriend	Extended family friend	Two male strangers	Aunt's boyfriend
Intergenerational Sexual Abuse	Yes; cousin by grand dad	No	No	No	Yes; fondling of son by his older cousin	No	No

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Table 3.1 Profile Summary of Participants

Participant	8 Nina	9 Mary	10 Aretha	11 Henrietta	12 Josephine	13 Sojourner	14 Cicely
Typology Classification	Established	Established	New	Established	Established	Established	Established
Age	41	42	28	34	40	38	49
Number/Gender (m/f/i) age of children	2 f 25, 20 1 m 23	3 f 26, 22, 21 1 m 23	2 f 13, 6	2 f 15, 1 1 m 3	1 m 19 1 f 12	2 f 22, 18	2 f 25, 20
Grandchildren	7	4	0	0	1	0	1
Number of Siblings	1	0	0	3	2	19	3
Education	Undisclosed	Less than High school	GED In college	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Completed High School	Completed High School
Employment	Undisclosed	Unemployed	Employed	Undisclosed	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed
Income	Undisclosed	Public Assistance	Employment	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Employment	Undisclosed
Type of Sexual Abuse/Age of Onset	Molestation/ Between 8 & 12 yrs old	Raped/toddler; 11 yrs old	Physical, verbal, sexual abuse/adult	Raped/ 7yrs old	Sex at 15 yrs old	Molestation/ Between 9 and 14/15 yrs old	Sexual advances/18 yrs old
Offender (s)	Uncle and two cousins	Uncle & grandfather	Child's father	Familiar adult male	Cousins, uncle	Father	Brother-in-law
Intergenerational Sexual Abuse	Yes. Daughter by mother's ex-boyfriend	Yes. Mother and two aunts by their brother	No	Yes. Daughter By Person Undisclosed	Yes Older Sister by family	Yes Older Sister By Father	No

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Table 3.1 Profile Summary of Participants

Participant	15 Maya	16 Octavia	17 Michelle	18 Toni	19 Diane	20 Audre	21 Mahalia
Typology Classification	Established	Established	Established	New	Established	Established	Established
Age	42	50	57	20	44	44	44
Number/Gender (m/f/i) Age of children	4 m 25, 23, 22, 19 1 f 5	2 m 30, 22 2 f 28, 27	1 f 39 4 m 35, 32, 28, 25	1 f 2	3 m 25, 23, 21 1 f 20	1 m 26 2 f 28, 24	3 f 26, 18, 11 1 m 19
Grandchildren	1	4	Undisclosed	0		5	1
Number of Siblings	22	6		2	1	2	1
Education	In College	Some High School	Some College	Some High School	Some High School	Some High School	Completed High School
Employment	Full-time Employment	Disability Benefits	Full-time Employment	Unemployed	Unemployed	Unemployed	Undisclosed
Income	Full-time Employment	Undisclosed	Full-time Employment	Undisclosed	MFIP	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
Type of Sexual Abuse/Age of Onset	Molestation-child; rape-adulthood	Molestation - childhood	Rape Childhood 6 – 11 yrs old	Molestation-Child/8 and 12 yrs old	Molestation – childhood	Molestation-child	Molestation – child/ 3 or 4 yrs old
Offender (s)	Mom’s boyfriend’s family; strangers	Paternal Uncle	Step brothers	Step brothers; Older uncle in car	Dad – gave her weed at 3 yrs old	Stepfather and his 3 sons	Baby sitter
Intergenerational Sexual Abuse	Yes Aunties by their brother	Yes Niece by brother	Yes Son by his father	Yes Older sister by step-father	Yes Older sister by father	No	Oldest Daughter by cousin

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Data Analysis and Interpretations

Phenomenology is the overarching approach that shaped my study design. In this section of my dissertation I discuss the coding and case study procedures I used to construct the case studies and my approach to data analysis using analytic induction. Within the qualitative research arena, analytic induction offers scholars a strategy for examining preconceived expectations through comparisons of case studies for the purpose of illuminating patterns, trends, or specific characteristics of the phenomena (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002).

I used sensitizing concepts (Table 2.1) derived from the conceptual framework that guided the study. An initial step I took to prepare the data for analysis was to organize mothers' narrative accounts of their experiences around the three dimensions of my expectations and demographic characteristics of the study participants using Patton's (2002) logical analysis procedures (See Table 3.2). I revised and reformulated my expectations continually through a systematic step-by-step case study analysis (See Figure 3.1) of 21 tape-recorded, verbatim transcripts of mothers' accounts of their lived experiences as survivors of sexual trauma and as parents. As a check and balance against simply fitting concepts to the emerging findings, I purposely looked for cases that did not fit within patterns or trends anticipated in the original expectations. This process of deliberately revising and fine-tuning expectations and conclusions is known as negative case analysis (Denzin, 1989). Additionally, in some instances I was not clear whether case findings sufficiently refuted or broadened the concepts of the expectations. Therefore, I used Patton's (2002, p. 467) "substantive significance" criteria for

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determining whether or not to modify the expectations. As such, I assessed the strength of the findings in relation to the evidence from which it was derived (women's narratives), its ability to further illuminate women's lived experiences, its consistency with current literature, and its usefulness in advancing theory, practice, policy, and future research.

Coding Scheme

In the first stage of coding the verbatim transcripts I used a combination of pre-established preliminary codes (See Appendix F) and codes emerging from the analysis. Pre-established or a priori codes are distinguished from codes that emerge during the analysis in that they are typically derived from existing theory, research, or practice (Creswell, 2007). The source of my pre-established codes included the sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1986) from my multidimensional theoretical framework (See Table 2.1), the literature, my general knowledge of research and theory, and my personal and professional experiences and values. I coded each transcript and its related field notes using a combination of pre-established codes and open, axial, and selective coding (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) open coding is used first to generate initial categories and dimensions of the data, axial coding is employed next with the intent being to make connections between categories and selective coding, the last step of the coding process, is used to integrate and refine categories and main codes into theoretical constructs (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I deviated from the open-axial-selective coding scheme somewhat by using a spiraling approach to coding. During the open coding process, I identified some new and

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different codes than the pre-established codes discussed earlier. These emergent codes came from the transcripts and emerged from the analysis (Creswell, 2007). In the next step of the coding process (axial coding) I looked at the relationships and links between the new and existing concepts for similar and divergent patterns and themes related to the theoretical framework I used. In the third step or selective coding process, I reread each transcript to integrate and refine categories and dimensions or aspects of codes in constructing the case studies. I followed these steps for each transcript and then re-categorized some of the themes in previously constructed case studies based on new refined themes. In essence, I used the spiraling approach working back and forth between the conceptual framework's sensitizing concepts, verbatim transcripts and constructed case studies using open, axial, and selective coding in more of a simultaneous or circular fashion rather than sequential or linear fashion to code the transcript and construct the case study narratives from which my analysis stemmed. The spiraling approach to coding is not much different conceptually from what scholars describe as the "spiraling research approach (Berg, 2009; p.26) or the "data analysis spiral" (Creswell, 2007, p.150) in that instead of a fixed, linear or sequential step-by-step process, the researchers efforts are more aptly described as "moving in analytic circles," (Creswell, 2007, p.150) or a process in which several stages of the process overlap in a nonlinear, organic process involving revisions of original ideas, re-conceptualizing, and refining previous codes.

Case Study Schema

I constructed case studies (See Appendix B) from the in-depth verbatim transcripts that reflect women's responses to questions from the interview guide. I

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developed related to the sensitizing concepts I derived from the multidimensional framework, literature, and purpose of the study. The case studies start with demographic information including women's age, number and gender of children, number and gender of siblings, educational background, and relationship status. Regarding women's experiences with sexual mistreatment, the case studies include the age, longevity, and nature of the abuse; the offender(s) and his/her relationship to the survivor; the woman's disclosure process; her response to the experience, and the strategies she used to cope with and manage the experience as well as other trauma-related life experiences; and her perceptions of how such experiences influenced her individually and as a parent. The case studies also depict women's perceptions of intergenerational attachment relationships with their caregivers, children, siblings, kin, and network of support. The last segment of the case study includes women's perception of how to address sexual mistreatment and protect women and children in families, communities, and society and hold offenders accountable. There is some variability in this schema because, although a topical outline was used to interview women, some questions were asked based on a woman's responses and her desire to elaborate beyond the scope of the initial question.

Constructed Case Studies

To reflect the authentic voices of study participants as much as possible, I decided to use first person to narrate each woman's story. This is fitting given the legacies of silence that surround experiences of sexual mistreatment in general (Alaggia, 2004; Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003), and the race-based stereotypes that can further alienate, stigmatize, and/or silence Black women specifically

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(Bryant-Davis, 2009; McNair & Neville, 1996; Pierce-Baker, 1998; Roberson, 2003; Rose, 2003). Additionally, as a part of the womanist/Black feminist conceptual framework guiding my research, it is important, when possible, to reflect women's experiences in the style and manner in which they articulate them (Collins, 1990).

Some "construction" was still necessary, however, for purposes of providing the reader with an organized narrative that flows from women's responses to the semi-structured, in-depth interview guide. At times, portions of a question are included in the narrative to provide context surrounding a woman's reply. Using first person descriptions of women's experiences entailed identifying women by name as well. Additionally, the names of women's family members, friends, supporters, and geographic locations were changed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of their identities. The case study deviates from the multidimensional framework guiding the analysis regarding women's perceptions about effective ways to address sexual victimization within families, communities, and society and their perceptions of what helping professionals should know to support parents. Instead of using the sensitizing concepts, women's verbatim responses to questions related to intervention and prevention of sexual victimization, community education, and parenting were used as part of the constructed case studies. I also used my field notes, written after each interview, as a source of data to construct the case studies.

Typology

I created the classification scheme developed in this study using a method described by Patton (2002) as logical analysis. This "analyst-generated construction"

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(p.468), allowed me to categorize patterns emerging from the data with respect to mother's longevity and consistency of parenting and then cross-classify these patterns with the dimensions of my expectations to logically construct a typology matrix. The dimensions of my expectations included the degree or level of mothers' parental support, the mothers' experiences with trauma management, and the mother's assessment of her sociocultural environment.

Broadly, the mothers fell into two primary categories with respect to their parenting experiences; those who provided parenting for their children consistently and those who provided intermittent parenting because they were unavailable to parent due, for example, to problems with chemical dependency, incarceration, involvement in domestic sex trafficking, and/or involvement with inpatient and/or residential treatment programs. The mothers who consistently provided parenting for their children were younger, between 20 and 28 years old. The mothers who provided intermittent parenting were older between the ages of 34 and 57 years old. Therefore, I referred to the younger mothers as "new" mothers and the older mothers as "established" mothers.

Working back and forth between the data and these cross-classifications yielded a matrix of different possibilities of meaningful patterns some of which are and some of which are not reflected in the data I collected. For example, although logical analysis of cross classifications suggests that new mothers with intermittent parenting practices are a possible classification, all of the new mothers in this study continuously parented their children therefore the intermittent parenting column was eliminated for new mothers.

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The new mothers used relocation as a proactive coping strategy for addressing experiences of sexual mistreatment and the established mothers in the study coped through more maladaptive strategies. They had extensive histories of substance abuse, incarceration, and/or involvement in domestic sex trafficking. New mothers relied less on extended family for parental support and were more vulnerable regarding their access to sociocultural resources than established mothers. Table 3.2 shows the typology matrix of mothers' experiences represented by data.

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Table 3.2 Typology of Mothers Lived Experiences

Logical Analysis (Patton, 2002)	Parenting Experiences Across Life Course		
General Expectations	New	Established	
	Continuous	Continuous	Intermittent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adequately managed ○ Partially managed ○ Unmanaged 			
	Rosa	Michelle	Harriet, Maya, Diane, Mahalia
	Ida, Barbara		Angela, Nina, Josephine, Sojourner, Cicely, Audre
	Billie, Aretha, Toni	Shirley	Henrietta, Octavia, Mary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting Network <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Little ○ Adequate ○ Extensive 			
	Ida, Rosa, Aretha, Toni, Barbara	Shirley	Henrietta
	Billie		Angela, Nina, Mary, Octavia, Audre, Mahalia
		Michelle	Harriet, Josephine, Sojourner, Cicely, Maya, Diane
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sociocultural Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Little ○ Adequate ○ Extensive 			
	Ida, Rosa, Aretha, Toni, Barbara		Harriet, Henrietta, Mary, Cicely, Diane, Audre
	Billie		Angela, Nina, Mahalia Josephine, Sojourner, Octavia
		Shirley, Michelle	Maya

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Case Analysis Procedures

I compared the conceptual definitions and original general expectations (Figure 2.2) with concrete indicators in the data. I used the five areas of self-affected by traumatic events emphasized in CSDT as sensitizers to analyze women's perceptions of trauma management. The six elements of the AIS perspective served as a sensitizing lens to understanding the level of solidarity/cohesiveness and degree of intergenerational cohesion in each mother's extended family of origin across her life course. I assessed the presence and strength of all six elements to identify the supportiveness of each mother's extended family network and its impact on her role as a parent. I also examined the attachment history of each mother with her caregivers throughout her life course using her mental representations of herself as a caregiver, and her internal working models of herself and others based on the classifications of attachment provided through the AAI. Finally, I analyzed the sociocultural opportunities and barriers impacting each mothers' ability to provide for the needs of her children using sensitizing concepts of womanist/Black feminist theory as a guidepost. This within case analysis allowed me to examine how each case was similar and divergent from what I expected based on the conceptual framework and my general expectations. I identified unexpected findings from this process and modified my expectations according to the emergent findings from the data analyzed.

After examining each individual case, I conducted a comparative cross case analysis continuing to utilize the sensitizing concepts as a guide to explore how women's

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experiences were similar and dissimilar from one another and what might account for some of the differences. This process also helped me in deciding on which case to analyze next as I purposely looked for cases that refuted, conflicted, or broadened my emerging understanding of women's experiences with trauma management, parenting networks and attachment relationships, and their sociocultural environment. This negative case analysis (Patton, 2002) helped me to fine tune and revise my original set of expectations. Modification of generalizations requires the analyst to make an informed judgment, based on study findings, about the significance of evidence for modifying the original expectations (Patton, 2002). In determining when to modify my original expectations, once a negative case was identified, I used four questions Patton (2002, p.467) offered that can help qualitative researchers determine the *substantive significance* of findings:

- How solid, coherent, and consistent is the evidence in support of the findings?
- To what extent and in what ways do the findings increase and deepen understanding of the phenomenon studied?
- To what extent are the findings consistent with other knowledge?
- To what extent are the findings useful for contributing to theory, practice, policy, and/or future research?

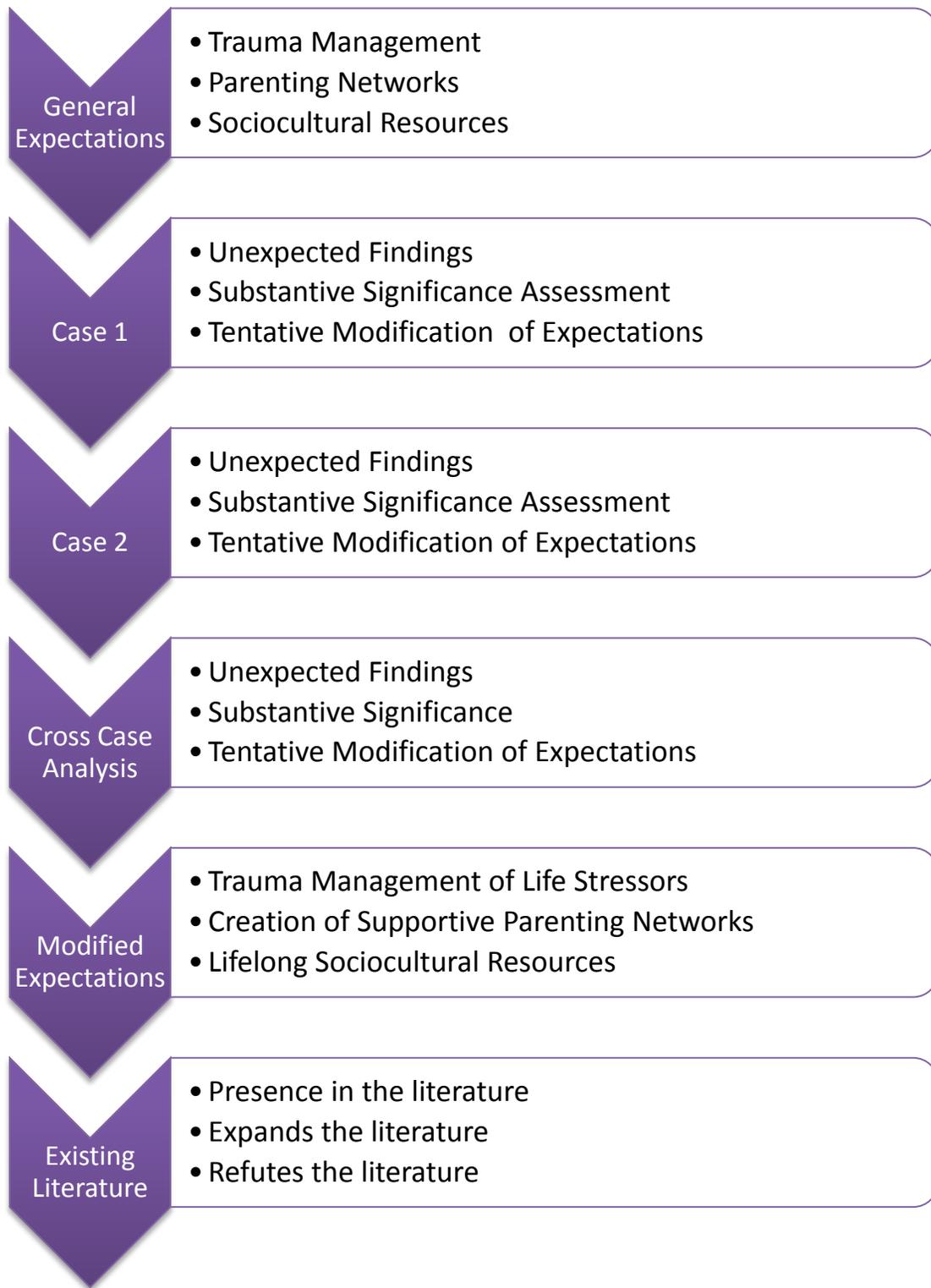
Based on the analysis, I modified my expectations to reflect the emerging findings from each within and across case study assessment, if found to be substantively significant. Through this systematic replicative process I revised and reexamined my original set of propositions with each case, that confirmed, expanded, or refuted the initial

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general expectations (Yin, 2003). This interpretative analytical process required continuous reflection and self-scrutiny of my interpretations in the absence of additional researchers. A visual representation of the multiple case study process is provided in Figure 3.1. I kept track of my feelings, thoughts, and revisions and reasons for the modifications as well as my interpretations through the use of field notes and a personal journal during the analysis stage of the research.

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FIGURE 3.1 MULTIPLE CASE STUDY PROCESS



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CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

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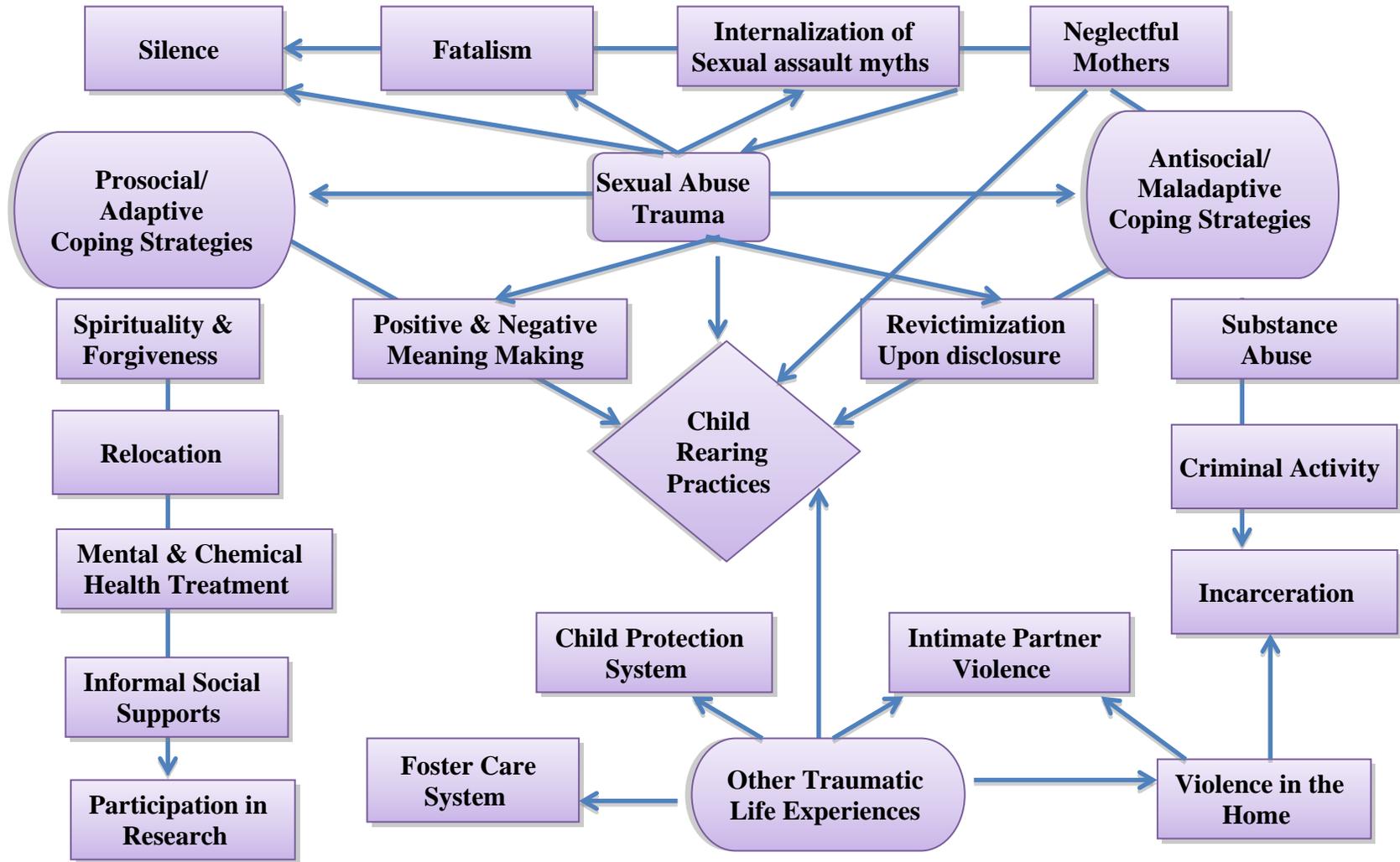
Overview

In this section, I report the findings of the study including the results of reflexively accounting for the research process. Multiple case studies are the foundation of my research and I organized the results to illustrate how the findings support, refine, expand or refute the initial set of general expectations outlined in Figure 2.2. The findings are organized sequentially based on the three major initial generalizations (a) trauma management, (b) parental networks, and (c) sociocultural environment. Within each of the major initial generalizations, related subthemes are identified and these subthemes are further delineated to reflect the findings supporting each subtheme. The findings supporting each subtheme are discussed as evidence for supporting the set of initial generalizations or counter evidence for modifying the original expectations. Finally, I discuss each subtheme in relation to its presence in, expansion or refutation of the current literature.

Graphic representations of each of the three major sets of generalizations (trauma management, parental networks, sociocultural environment) and their associated subthemes are reflected in Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3. I conclude the findings with a summary of the major findings, which are also represented in Table 4.

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Figure 4.1 Graphic of Trauma Management Experiences



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Trauma Management Experiences

The first set of general expectations is related to women's experiences with trauma management. I expected that women's parenting practices would be influenced by the strategies they used to manage trauma related to experiences of sexual mistreatment. The findings support and expand this proposition in that women also identified responses to other trauma-related experiences that influenced their parenting practices. I identified several overlapping subthemes related to women's experiences of trauma management and its influence on their parenting practices including (a) protection of children, (b) neglectful mothers, (c) the child welfare system, (d) domestic/intimate partner violence, (e) revictimization associated with disclosure (f) internalization of sexual abuse myths, (g) prosocial/adaptive coping strategies, and (h) antisocial/maladaptive coping strategies, (i) relocation, (j) positive meaning making, (k) prosocial/adaptive coping strategies, and (l) antisocial/ maladaptive coping strategies. I illustrate these themes with quotes that exemplify the subthemes.

The expectation that adequate trauma management strategies directly corresponded with adequate parenting practices was not supported. The majority of the mothers reported that their experiences with sexual mistreatment whether in childhood or adulthood were traumatic and made them feel more protective of their children regardless of how they managed their trauma-related experiences. These mothers employed several strategies to protect their children from sexual harm.

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Following are examples of mothers' perceptions of how their experiences with sexual mistreatment influenced their approach to parenting and the strategies they employed in an effort to protect their own children from sexual harm. Mother's narratives regarding the protection of their children provided consistent substantive evidence to support the modification of the original expectations.

Protection of Children

Two-thirds (n = 14) of the mothers in the study reported that their experiences with sexual mistreatment resulted in feelings of, *more protective, overprotective, paranoid, strict*, or otherwise concerned regarding their children's safety from sexual exploitation by family members, friends, and strangers regardless of the child's gender. Some mothers shared gender-specific risks concerns regarding their children and sexual molestation. Mothers who expressed concerns about their children's safety set limits behaviorally regarding who cared for their children, instructed their children to tell them or some other adult if someone attempted to harm them sexually, and/or limited their children's access to individuals deemed at-risk by the mother. In a few instances, despite the mothers' due diligence, her child/children experienced sexually molestation. In other instances, although the children were not sexually molested, they experienced neglect associated with their mothers chemical dependency, incarceration, and/or involvement with domestic sex trafficking.

When discussing how childhood experiences of sexual abuse influenced their parenting, Sojourner, Billie, and Toni shared that they believe they have become more

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protective and concerned about their children's safety in general and specifically fearful regarding the potential of sexual abuse. Sojourner explained:

I think it got me more protective because when I first got them [her children] back I really didn't want them out of my sight. I didn't want them outside. I always wanted them in the house with the door locked. I would go into a panic mode if they get out, if they're gone too long or, I mean, maybe at school. You know, I'd be sitting there, waiting for them. They a minute late, I'm calling the police, panicking, you know, thinking something done happened to them, somebody done raped them, beat them. You know, it was pretty messed up for awhile.

Billie described her fears about her son being harmed as the most challenging part of being a parent:

You know, what you have went through in life and know that the same thing is going to happen to your child, good or bad. I look at the bad part because I don't know when that might happen, but I know, you know, something bad is going to happen but you just don't know when. I don't want to think about negativity, but at the same time it's kind of hard because I know what life's about...like strangers walking up to him [her child], getting sexually abused, you know, maybe like getting picked on by kids, like the little things I guess. You know.

In response to knowledge about a sex offender living in the house of a friend, Toni shared:

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We went to go see her [friend] when we was down [south] one time and when I found out that her other son had molested a little boy and the fact I didn't know that and had my daughter over there, I was just like, 'Oh, I can't come back over here.'

Aretha explained that the years of suffering physical and sexual intimate partner violence changed her relationship with her two girls and how she parents them: *"It actually made me better in how I discipline them because I try not to whop them anymore but talk instead."*

Both Mary and Barbara stated that their experiences of childhood sexual abuse affected the way they parent their children, particularly their daughters. Barbara shared:

I'm not going to say I'm strict. I'm strict on them [her son and daughter] being around certain people. I don't trust no one around girls period. I don't trust a man, period to watch my daughter, to touch her, to hold her in a certain way. Like my brother? and my uncles?, my mom's brothers?, it's a different feeling towards them than I will have toward any other man... She's [her daughter] a smart little girl and I always tell her to tell me anything, whatever, and...so no, I don't trust her around men, around little boys neither. I let her play with them but to a certain extent.

Mary, who was repeatedly raped by her Uncle Kenneth when she was 11-years old, made a direct link between her experiences and her role in relation to protecting her children.

She illumined:

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I think being abused sharpened my parenting skills because I wanted my kids to have the life that I watched on TV growing up. I was very particular with my girls, you know. Yeah, like around family when I use to go over and visit, like especially around uncle Kenneth. He's always saying, 'Oh, come sit on my lap.' No, she won't be sitting on your lap, you know and my grandson and my granddaughters love him. Oh, they're crazy about their uncle Kenneth. My granddaughter's just a thick little girl, no, it's not going down so I don't see much in letting her stay or talk with him alone but, I mean, I said, I don't care that that's there uncle, he ain't did nothing yet, and he's not going to so, you know, she can even know who he is, as long as he ain't violating her. My mom she was just silent and my uncle Kenneth stayed with her a couple weeks when my oldest daughter was staying there and I told my mom, 'well, Anita can't stay here and you know why.' She said, 'girl, don't nobody do none of that no more.' I said, 'she won't be staying here.'

Ida also expressed concerns about leaving her 10-day old daughter with the baby's father in responding to how her experience of sexual molestation affected her parenting. She said:

My daughter's dad, he come and get her sometime but I try not to let him. I'd rather go with her because I don't really trust him even though he her daddy. So, that kind of affect me right there. I never thought about telling him about my childhood experience.

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Similarly, Josephine, Diane, and Maya explained how their experiences of sexual mistreatment made them hyper vigilant and restrictive in some ways about whom cared for their children. Josephine explained:

It made my parenting a little difficult. I was very overprotective with Kevin. I didn't really like to leave him with people, because I didn't know what they would do to him. He stayed with people, like friends, like my God-sister. I was even a little paranoid around my, at that time, when Kevin was young, my significant other. I don't know. You know, even though I knew that, he would do nothing to Kevin, you know, I was just still paranoid. You know.

Maya reported:

Yea, being molested as a child influenced how I raised my kids, most definitely. When my kids were little, I didn't let nobody watch them. Didn't care who you were. If you weren't my mom or real close family member, my kids would not be watched. Matter of fact, when I started selling drugs, I was on welfare and my kids had a nanny. I paid a nanny. I was so terrified of something bad happening to them as kids, people molesting them, um, that if you weren't my mom and them, you weren't touching my kids. You weren't watching my kids. A stranger never watched my kids and then I finally hired a nanny. My kids was young and had a nanny for all four of them and she had a really clean house. I would give her food stamps, food, and everything needed to really take care of my sons. So, I just didn't trust people with my kids. Like I didn't care, like to this day I'm like that. Like to this day, like when older women try to come at them, I used

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to step in, like, 'No, you ain't fittin' to be molesting my kid.' Like I still had that mentality. Like, 'You're not going to molest my son. You're not going to rape him of his childhood. You're not...' I was getting real indignant.

Describing her hyper vigilance Diane explained:

My experiences being molested turned me into a paranoid she-lion when it came to my kids. You know, I used to ask my daughter like every few months, 'Did anybody touch you? Did anybody touch you in the wrong way, make you come, did anybody make you touch them? Did anybody say something to you?' I mean, she little-bitty, five, six, seven. She looking at me like, 'What in the world?' I said, 'Have your brothers ever touched you?' you know and she's like, 'No, ma'am.' I said, 'Have my nephew ever touched you? [chuckles] you know, your cousin? Anybody?' And she was like, 'No, ma'am.' I said, 'Would you tell me?' 'Yes, ma'am.' I said, 'You make sure you do.' I said, 'Because if anybody ever touch you,' I said, 'I'm going to kill them,' and I think that [chuckles] that might have scared the baby, you know, because she's like, 'Okay, for real?'

Diane shared that she scrutinized her male children similarly in an effort to protect them from sexual harm as children and young adults. Her scrutiny of adults with children extended to the general public as well:

It just had me though, where everything looked like it could be that's what they're doing and it was probably very innocent but you know logically, I know it's probably very innocent but the part of me that's just paranoid and kind of, you know, not all there, 'Uh-uh, no, that don't look right and why a little girl sitting

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on that man's lap like that?' 'Why is he holding her like that?' You know, it might be totally innocent. 'Why he got her, he done picked her up. Why he holding her up under her butt,' or whatever. 'His hand look like it's too close to her crotch.' You know, and to this day, I do that. You know, I control it better now where I don't just blurt out, 'What are you doing?' Because I used to be like, 'Man, what are you doing to that little girl [laughs]?' People be looking [chuckles] at me like, 'What does she, what [laughs]?' You know, and I be serious, 'What are you doing to her?' 'Why are you touching her like that?' They would literally look at me like I have done lost my mind. I used to get embarrassed, you know but I'd feel vindicated because it's like if something was going on, at least I spoke up, you know what I'm saying?

A few mothers in the study responded to their experiences of sexual molestation by encouraging their children to be open with them about everything. For example, Shirley shared that while she feels that she is “a little bit too overprotective” of her children, she raised her children to be open with her:

I think the rape experienced influenced my relationship with my kids by making me a little bit too overprotective of them. My kids were so open with me especially my two oldest, they are so brutally open with me about everything. You know, my daughter came to me when she was 14, like, “Mom, you need to take me to get birth control pills” and I did. Even my 21-year-old son told me, “Yeah, I'm having sex” when he was 14-years-old.

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Harriet shared: *“I instilled it in her [daughter] to be very opinionated, you know and I listen to her so she speaks her mind. To this day she speaks her mind.”* Concerned that little girls get more attention than boys regarding experiences of child sexual abuse, Angela shared that she was more attentive to her sons: *“I always told my son, ‘if somebody touch you in the sauna, somebody touch you in your private area, you tell me!’”* When her son was three-years old, he and Angela’s nephew who was nine or ten at the time, fondled each other and Angela’s son told her about it. Despite Nina’s leerness regarding family members and her children, a family member and a friend of the family sexually abused her oldest daughter and her son. Nina now believes, as a result of their sexual victimization, these two children are more protective of their own children. Nina explained:

I think it [experiences of sexual mistreatment] made me want to be more protective over my kids. I think that I looked at everybody crazy that came in contact with my kids, because my family did this to me, you know so it made me leery about who my kids were around when my kids were with me. I’m very protective over my grandbabies too and I get on my daughter about that, my youngest daughter. When she wants to go, she wants to go, so she’ll just let, I feel like she just lets anybody watch them. Whoever watch them, she’s out of there. You know, and that pisses me off. It really does. My son’s very protective over his daughter already. He ain’t even seen her except pictures that were sent to him. He won’t even allow us to get her until he comes home. You know, he’s just very

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protective over her and then Aretha [oldest daughter] is too with Roy. She's very protective over him too. She don't let anybody watch him.

Studies reporting benefits of surviving sexual assault in childhood included increased protection of children, self-protection, growing stronger as a person, and increased knowledge of sexual abuse (McMillen, Zuravin & Rideout, 1995; Morrow & Smith, 1995).

Regarding other traumatic experiences, women identified experiences associated with their relationships with their own mothers, the child welfare system, and domestic partner violence in the home, silence and secrecy regarding sexual victimization and disclosure experiences, and beliefs about sexual violence. Often times, women's experiences of trauma intersected in ways that make it difficult to illustrate themes as singular and/or episodic events and experiences.

Neglectful Mothers

The women who reported negative and/or neglectful experiences with their mothers indicated that these experiences directly influenced their parenting practices with their own children. As both evidence and counter evidence to the original expectations relating trauma management and parenting experiences, many women made efforts to raise their children differently than their own mothers had reared them. Sometimes they had addressed their own trauma related to negative childhood experiences with their mothers and sometimes they had not. Mother's narratives regarding how their childhood experiences with their own mothers influenced their parenting practices provided

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consistent substantial evidence that supported and refuted the original set of propositions regarding trauma management.

Ida, a new mother of three years, who was abused by her grandfather, reported having a very troublesome relationship with her mother prior to being abused by her grandfather. Ida shared that a significant factor influencing her parenting was her mother who abused drugs and frequently left Ida with the responsibility of caring for herself and her younger siblings:

Nobody took care of me. I took care of myself. And my mom was never there, so. She was always going out, or something, she was never there. Nobody else was there. My mom was always gone...I didn't have a childhood. It was adulthood. My granddad [abuser] and then me having to take care of my sisters like they my kids made my childhood adulthood. My relationship with my mom is not so good. Everything is not so good about it. Like...oh, she's like a scared-type mom, can't talk to her about stuff like that. Then she'll get mad or curse you out, tell you to get out her face or something like that, so I don't...and that's why I really wouldn't open up to her, so it's like, came out as angry when I said it [disclosed being abused] to her. So, we ain't got no good relationship. The first word I can think of for my mother is [long pause] unfit. I don't know what else...I'm not going to be the type of mother that my mom was to me, but I don't want to make them mistakes and, you know, and like mess up, so make her [10 day old daughter] scared like that that she can't come and talk to me because

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that's what my mom did to me. That's why I never came to talk to her because she was like always snappy and stuff like that.

Rosa another new mother who was sexually assaulted in an intimate relationship with her boyfriend as a young adult, described her childhood using terms like “terrible,” “rough,” and “rejection.” When discussing losses in her life, Rosa only relayed childhood experiences including rejection by her mother almost at birth:

Well, my mom, you know, like when she was in her own little thing. We were actually...me and my sister were actually cooking for mom when we were younger. So, you know, with that happening, we have a lot of, I guess you could say hate in our heart because of that. My mom abused drugs and alcohol. She was around the wrong guys. The wrong guys were making her chose between us and them and she would chose them. My relationship with my mother during my childhood was terrible. There really wasn't one. Terrible. There really wasn't one until about when I was, turned sixteen, I think... I guess with my mom I felt some kind of rejection as a child because it's like what did we do so wrong to, you know, get treated like this? Why are we going through all this when we're just kids? Like you're grown and you had kids, so is it that you don't want us or...or maybe we just didn't understand.

Rosa credits her grandmother, with helping her learn how to be a mother and care for her children. Similarly, as a child, 41-year-old Nina, an established mother of three children, shared a troubling relationship with her teenage mother:

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My mother had me when she was 16-years-old. She treated me and my brother different coming up. You know, kids aren't stupid; they know the difference. I think the difference in treatment has something to do with my dad... I won't knock her for taking care of my kids. My mom always gave me material things. I had everything but her time, nurturing, and love, and stuff; no, I didn't feel it.

Nina linked her neglect of her children and struggles maintaining sobriety with the abusive treatment she experienced by her mother as a child and later in adulthood. She stated:

I think my mother influenced how I wanted to be as a parent because she was so abusive to me that I always wanted the best for my kids. I always said I would never be like my mom but I was. I wasn't physically abusive to my kids but I was mentally and emotionally by not being there for them. I ended up still being like her. My mother was very physically, verbally, emotionally, and mentally abusive to me when I was a child and it carried over to my adulthood too except for now I speak up for myself today. I don't allow her to abuse me. My feelings behind her abusive behavior are what would keep me stuck in addiction too.

How women's relationships with their mothers influenced their parenting is discussed more extensively in the "Parenting Networks" section of findings, however, overall, women were more likely to talk about their experiences with their mothers in problematic ways as an influence in parenting their own children. Women's childhood experiences with their teenage, substance abusing, and otherwise neglectful mothers are

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extensively reflected in the literature within the context of the prevalence and impact of substance abuse and teenage pregnancy in African American families and communities and the implications of these risk factors (Brice, 2007; Curtis-Boles & Jenkins-Monroe, 2000; Waggoner & Brinson, 2007). The influence of problematic parent-child relationships associated with trauma is also identified in the attachment and parenting literature (Fitzgerald et al., 2005; Leifer, et al., 2004; Liebrman & Van Horn, 2005; Wright, et al., 2005).

Child Welfare System

Women's experiences with the child welfare system included placement in the foster care system as children and later as adults, having their own children removed. Two women in particular stand out as describing their experiences as traumatic. These experiences also justified the need to modify the original set of expectations relating trauma management and parenting practices. Both women reported negative experiences with the child welfare system. Rosa described her separation from her grandmother and placement in foster care as a child as a trauma-related experience that influenced her life course extensively and her approach to parenting. Rosa's grandmother was an emotional support for her and provided Rosa and her siblings with a safe stable home environment until Rosa's life was disrupted again when she was removed from her ailing grandmother's home and placed in the formal child welfare system where she suffered physical and emotional abuse as well as multiple placements. Rosa described her childhood in the foster home as "rough:"

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We were fighting everyday with the girls that was in the families that we was with. The foster lady, she felt that was like her way to discipline us. Whenever we would get in trouble or she didn't like something we did, she would always call her granddaughter to come over and fight with me or my sister. Sometimes I wouldn't be there and she'll try to call the daughter over while I wasn't there, or sometimes my sister wasn't there and she'll call the girl over for me, or...it was just...it was rough. It was really rough.

The foster parent would not allow Rosa and her sister to contact their grandmother and they were eventually removed from the abusive foster home and placed in a different foster home until she was a teenager and her father took steps to gain legal custody of Rosa and her sister.

Diane described her response to the child protection system when a worker attempted to terminate her parental rights to adopt Diane's daughter after a reunification plan was established:

I had lost my kids to the point where they was trying to terminate all my rights and then some crazy White woman was trying to take my daughter from me and this was after I had gotten clean and was doing okay and she decided she wanted to keep RoAnne, and name her Annie. I'm like, "What?" And, you know, she was the only child that was still in foster care. She was at a foster home with this White lady. My boys was at my momma house. And we was working to reunify, is what they call it, so that me and her could start doing what we was doing. I was, you know, allowed to go over there and visit and all this hear. But

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she decided she wanted the baby and the only way she was going to be able to do that, legally through the courts, was to terminate my rights for all my kids but she didn't want all my kids; she just wanted my daughter. And I'm like, "Okay, you know what..." I called my social worker. I said, "See, you really need to do something because I'm about ready to go over there and whoop her ass, burn her house down, whatever I need to do, and snatch mine up out of there." You see and my social worker, knowing me said, "Well, don't do nothing crazy. Just hold on, okay?" So she goes to get my daughter and this broad is gone... I said, "You know I'm going to fuck you up when we get into Wisconsin, right [laughter]," you know, "Brought me all the way up here to New York, trying to make me look bad." I said, "You don't even want all my kids. You just want my daughter?" I said, "You need to go have you a little Black baby and leave mine alone."

Several other mothers shared stories of their children's removal and placement in foster care. These experiences were conveyed exclusively by established mothers with extensive histories of substance abuse, incarceration and involvement in survival sex. The use of these maladaptive coping strategies to management trauma-related experiences resulted in problematic parenting practices providing significant evidence in support of the original set of expectations regarding trauma management. Research recognized that African American children are not at any greater risk for abuse and neglect than the average White child (Sedlak & Schultz, 2001). However, African American children are twice as likely to be substantiated as abused or neglected and are disproportionately

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overrepresented in the foster care system (CWLA, 2003). Additionally, African

American children typically experience longer stays in the foster care system (CWLA).

Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence

Some women had experiences with domestic violence during childhood, adolescence, and as adults. There appeared to be a more direct relationship between a mother's ability to manage trauma-related experiences associated with domestic violence and the ability to adequately parent her children giving credence to the original expectations regarding trauma management and parenting practices. Shirley, a 45-year-old mother of five children explained that she started smoking weed when she was 13-years-old to deal with the domestic violence she witnessed in her home. Describing her step-dad's abusive behavior toward her mother she shared:

My stepdad came into my life when I was 5 years old. He was a heroin addict and my mom didn't smoke cigarettes, didn't drink, you know, wasn't a shop-a-holic. He would smack her, beat her and take her in the bedroom and they'd be in there for hours on end. He didn't stop beating my mom until the day she died.

Shirley shared that she coped with the violence in her home by shutting down emotionally, isolating herself and smoking weed. Later as an adult, she turned to cocaine and alcohol, which limited her ability to adequately parent her children. She shared:

It's like when I stopped doing the cocaine I just really traded the cocaine for the alcohol. I just got tired. I didn't want my 15-year-old to go through what

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my other kids had to go through so I had to let the cocaine go but I just put the cocaine down and picked up the alcohol more.

Aretha was in a nine-year abusive relationship the father of her youngest daughter. She shared how not only was her life threatened but the lives of her children as well:

I was in the abusive relationships for 9 years and the first 2 -3 years it was okay and then afterward it became abusive but I would rather go through being called out my name than stay with someone who hits me and threatens my kids. We had a four-bedroom apartment. I had moved out of a relationship and into a home with him. He felt that I should send my oldest daughter to be with her dad. I said, "no, I'm not sending my child nowhere". If I send her to Atlanta she going to be even worse off. She is going to stay right [laughs] here with me. He kept wanting to control my kids so we fought about it and when he threw that garbage on that off-white carpet, I lost it. At that point, I thought he was going to kill me, he did it in front of the kids so I had to push the kids away [laughs]. I lifted my kids through the window so they could get out of the house and I eventually got out and went to a shelter. It took a lot of energy. Things were quite messy. I haven't been stable since that household.

Women's experience of domestic violence and its impact on the safety of their children is consistent with the literature on intimate partner violence (Edleson & Williams, 2007; Logan, et al., 2007; West, 2002).

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Revictimization Associated with Disclosure

Women also expressed trauma-related experiences directly related to sexual violence and its aftermath in relation to themselves, their children, and extended family networks. Consistent with the original set of expectations regarding trauma management and parenting practices, women's experiences with disclosure and familial silence regarding sexual abuse suggest that the disclosure process was as traumatic for some women as the victimization itself and influenced their parenting variably.

Women more often disclosed their experiences to someone within their intimate network including, mothers, siblings, grandmothers, adult children, or helping professionals including me during the interview for this study. This finding is consistent with literature reporting informal support sources including family and friends as the most highly utilized disclosure option for women survivors of sexual mistreatment (Ahrens & Cambell, 2000; Filipas & Ullman, 2001). Responses to women's disclosure varied from support, disbelief, to victim blaming. For example, Mary shared, "*You want to know the worst part of being raped by my uncle? The worst part for me is when I told my mom, she was like, 'you probably deserved it.'*" Unfortunately, Mary's experience of coming out to her mother was not unique. Ida shared that she waited until she got older (15-years old) before saying anything about being sexually molested by her grand dad. When she told her mother about her grandfather molesting her, her mother replied, "*You probably liked it.*" At the time of Ida's disclosure, Ida's cousin also reported being sexually abused by the granddad much to Ida's surprise. Ida reported asking her cousin, "*Why you didn't tell my mom so she can believe me?*"

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When Angela told her mother about being fondled by a family friend, her mother confronted the friend and believed him when he said Angela was lying until later when Angela's sister reported a similar experience with the family friend to their mother, then Angela was believed.

Henrietta was raped when she was 7-year-old by a man in her community. Her mother didn't believe her but her grandmother did and took action to support her.

Henrietta stated:

Well, I was raped when I was seven. I had told my mom but she didn't believe it, so I had told my grandma and my grandma took me to the hospital. The person who did it was an adult about 30-years-old and I knew him. The police got him and put him in jail.

I think I started getting more exploited by boys as I was getting older so the rape had a bad influence and I never dealt with it. Henrietta later reported, matter-of-factly, that her own daughter was also raped around the age of seven by a man known to the family while Henrietta was incarcerated.

Harriet was molested and impregnated by her mother's boyfriend when she was 13 years old. Despite the physical evidence and striking resemblance between her daughter and her mother's boyfriend, Harriet shared that:

To this day she [mom] doesn't acknowledge that that's what happened. I mean, I was only 13 years old when it started. How am I old enough to consent to have sex with your [her mother] boyfriend? She don't believe it. She believes if it did happen, I was the one who was being promiscuous.

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When Harriet turned 18 years old, she left her five-year-old daughter with her mother and the mother's boyfriend who was sexually abusive, rationalizing her decision by explaining:

You know, even though I knew things were going on in the house, I just couldn't, I didn't want to have my daughter subjected to the street. I didn't have any concern about my daughter being molested because, like I told you, I instilled it in her to be very opinionated [chuckles], you know. I listen to her so she speaks her mind.

Her youngest sisters' father raped Billie when she was a child but, out of fear, she waited until she was 22-years old before disclosing the experience to her family. She experienced responses that ranged from support by her grandmother, disbelief by her sisters, and denial and victim blaming by her mother. Billie stated:

When I bring it [sexual mistreatment] up, if me and my momma get into an argument and I just bring up something, something like that, she'll avoid everything and switch the subject and try to make it seem like everything is my fault.

Like Billie, Barbara experienced a range of responses including no response to her experience of sexual abuse by her sister's husband at the age of twelve, to full support four years later when she told her cousin. She clarified:

That [sexual mistreatment] affected me, I think like my whole like emotional and mental stage, because I tried to tell someone, but wouldn't nobody listen to me. And it was like, okay, what's the purpose of keep bringing it up. And

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that affected me in my whole life...the first time telling an adult was when I was sixteen. I told my cousin...I wanted somebody to know this is what happened. She burst out in tears and said, "Why you didn't tell me?" I felt supported because my cousin's like a mother to me.

Nina was also afraid to disclose her childhood experiences with sexual molestation to her mother. She feared that her mother would not believe her so she waited several years before telling her mom and aunts. Josephine, Sojourner, and Diane learned after disclosing their experiences with intrafamilial sexual mistreatment, that their older sibling had suffered a similar fate by the same offenders.

Shirley didn't tell her family about being raped as a teenager by strangers when she was in the Job Corp. When she told the officials at the Job Corp, they blamed her for following the men that raped her looking for weed. Many years later, however, she did tell a friend. She explained that she just dealt with it in silence by smoking weed.

Consistent with the literature on disclosure of sexual abuse, many women did not disclose childhood or adult experiences of sexual mistreatment within their families, social services, or legal systems (Donovan & Williams, 2002; Valandra, 2005; Washington, 2001). Literature on assault-specific characteristics and help-seeking suggested that women assaulted in their homes by someone known to the victim are less likely to report the offender or seek treatment than those assaulted outside the home and/or by a stranger (Renner & Wackett, 1987; Stermac, Du Mont & Dunn, 1998). Some women, however, waited many years after the abuse before saying anything to anyone, and a few disclosed within a short period of time after the abuse or sometime during the

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timespan during which it occurred. These findings are consistent with the disclosure literature and the influence of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and culture on disclosure and help-seeking behaviors of African American survivors of sexual mistreatment (Ahrens, 2006; Neville & Pugh, 1997; Ullman, 1996; Wyatt, 1992). When disclosure did occur, it was purposeful except in one case of accidental disclosure.

The literature identifies silencing, victim blaming attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as a form of secondary revictimization for survivors (Ahrens, 2006; Campbell & Raja, 1999; Tillman, et .al, 2010). Additionally, the findings are consistent with research reported by Long, Ullman, Starzynski, Long and Mason (2007) that African American women are less likely to disclose experiences of sexual assault and less likely to receive support when they do disclose. The high level of negative responses by family members, particularly survivor's mothers, to disclosure is inconsistent with previous research identifying family and friends as the most helpful support source for survivors (Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Golding, et al., 1989; Ullman, 1996). However, Ahrens (2006) found that for rape survivors, negative reactions to disclosure from friends and family reinforced feelings of self-blame and uncertainty about whether their experiences qualified as rape.

Internalization of Sexual Abuse Myths

Closely linked with African American women's decision whether to disclose experiences of sexual victimization is the degree to which they subscribe to or internalize rape myths and stereotypes, and attitudes as well as the degree to which they blame themselves (Tillman, et .al, 2010; Tyagi, 2001). Several women in the study expressed beliefs about sexual abuse that suggests some adherence to prevailing myths, and cultural

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attitudes, although it is less clear whether their beliefs influenced their decisions regarding disclosure or feelings of self-blame. Additionally, it is not clear from these findings if women's beliefs about sexual abuse influenced the way they parent their children. Therefore, the findings provide no evidence that can be used to support, expand or refute the original set of expectations regarding trauma management and parenting practices. Nevertheless, the findings shed light on the issue of internalization of stereotypes and its impact on recovery.

In this study, women's beliefs about sexual abuse seemed to provide for them, a rationale for why the experience occurred as well as reinforced myths and stereotypes about sexual violence, cultural scripts regarding respect for elders, race-based survival, and community pride (Tyagi, 2001). For example, when I asked Ida what she believed her community should know in an effort to prevent sexual violence, she had this to say, suggesting that the clothing she wore as a six or seven year old child (the age she recalls as the onset of the abuse) contributed to her grand dad sexually abusing her:

With my granddad, I don't like quite remember like what I was wearing and what I had on but it probably had a part of why it was, why it [sexual molestation] started. I don't know. That's why I just said it. It might have contributed [chuckles] to the story that happened.

Ida does not believe that anything can be done to stop sexual violence, as if it is a normal part of life. She shared this belief when I asked her what she thought would help stop sexual harm of women and children. She stated:

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Honestly, I don't think nothing because they [sexual offenders] just going to do it if they want to anyways. It ain't going to change nothing. If it's there, it's there. If they think of doing it and they do it. I don't know, the devil is powerful, so.

Other women also suggested that either they or members of their extended family network believe that sexual violence is normal. Mary expressed outrage about her perception that her aunts believe sexual violence is normal and she suggests that that belief contributed to her aunts and mother's silence and placed her at risk of being sexually abused by the same person in their family. She lamented:

When I got back here I told my auntie Anita and she was like, "Baby, I believe you because he's done this to all us girls." They never talked about it so the thing was with me, when I was telling my mom, she already knew what he was doing so why the fuck would she send me down there? That's what I don't know. Yeah, all his sisters, all my aunties but they act like it's normal in that family and will not even talk about it. My auntie Anita, she used to talk about it to me all the time. It's like it was normal in that family so that shit ain't normal to me!

Josephine also expressed a belief that there's nothing that can be done to stop sexual violence when she shared her belief that if she had said no to her sex offenders that it would not have made a difference. She said, *"I think that if I had said no they'd a took it anyway. They'd a kept going, yeah. They wouldn't have stopped."* Henrietta shared a similar sentiment when I asked her what she believes is needed to stop women and children from sexual molestation. She said: *"They [sex offenders] will do it [sexually*

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abuse others] if they want.” Diane, on the other hand, explained her father’s molestation of her on the change in his life due to his mother’s death even though she was aware that he also sexually abused her older sister at the time of the interview. She earnestly explained:

You know, and his momma died when I was six years old and I think that’s what changed with him and me and our relationship. My grandma died, so he started molesting me. He had already done stuff to my older sister. I found this out later. You know, so, I guess he figured it was my turn, some kind of initiation.

Women’s beliefs about sexual violence are consistent with the literature regarding disclosure patterns, individual, family, community, and societal attitudes, beliefs, and values related to sexual violence, gender roles, powerlessness, silencing, and race, gender, and class oppression (Ahrens, et al. 2007; Curtis-Boles & Jenkins-Monroe, 2000; Draucker, 2001; Long, et al., 2007; Tillman, et al., 2010; Tyagi, 2001).

Relocation

One of the positive strategies used by several of the mothers was relocation to another state in order to separate themselves from the person who sexually mistreated them or the stressful life circumstances of the family and/or community environment in which they had lived. While some of the mothers moved to states in which they could stay with a relative or a friend, eventually, many ended up utilizing emergency shelter services in caring for themselves and their children. The finding that women relocated to manage trauma related to experiences of sexual violence confirms the original expectation regarding adequate trauma-management and parenting practices. While this

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strategy was helpful in creating a new life for women and their children, it also left them vulnerable economically and socially with little parental support. I modified my original expectations to recognize the influence of socioeconomic opportunities and risks on mothers' ability to cope with experiences of sexual mistreatment and parent their children based on their experiences with relocation. Examples of relocation experiences follow.

Ida stated that she told her aunt about being sexually mistreated and her desire to leave Chicago:

It took me some years for me to leave Chicago. Actually, my auntie, when I called her, she use to stay up here [Midwest]. I had called her and told her about it [sexual molestation] and stuff. Like it took her like two or three years to come get me. Well she came and got me from out there, and I came right here and stayed with her and tried to get my own place. It didn't work out the first time. Now I'm back a second time.

Reflecting on her family's proximity and socioeconomic supports in her life, Rosa stated:

I came here because I heard it was a state the helps women out a lot and I was just struggling, trying to make a better life for me and my kids. Just being here [shelter] has given me a stable place to stay. My kids can sleep in a bed. They don't have to sleep on anybody's couch or take up somebody else's bed...my kids are comfortable. I'm comfortable and I haven't felt like that in a long time.

After suffering years of intimate partner violence (IPV), Aretha decided to move from Georgia:

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I stay in contact with him [former abusive partner] because he's my youngest daughter's father but he'll never live with me again or anything. He offered to help me but I said no. I'm starting to get established with my kids and we get together and travel beyond [this state] and Georgia. I want my children to be happy. I moved here in 2004...because I wanted to get away from my family.

Upon her release from a 10-year prison term for selling drugs, Henrietta decided to relocate. She stated matter-of-factly: *"I had got out of prison and I just wanted to start a new life so I moved here. No I don't visit my family back home."*

Although not widely reflected in the literature, there is some evidence of women using relocation or immigration as a strategy for separating themselves from the perpetrator (Tyagi, 2001).

Positive Meaning Attributed to Traumatic Experiences

The preliminary expectations I formulated assumed a connection between women's ability to manage their own victimization and their ability to care adequately for their children. Based on the analysis, I refined this proposition to incorporate meaning making associated with traumatic experiences and its influence on the quality of parent-child relationships. More specifically, the modified expectations reflect the finding that mothers who found positive meaning in surviving life experiences they perceived to be traumatic were more apt to express explicit concerns about their children's emotional and physical safety and/or take active steps to support and protect their children as well as themselves. Mothers expressed responses to traumatic events in their lives suggest

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attempts to cognitively and affectively integrate and expand their perceptions and beliefs about themselves and others based on the context and consequences of the trauma they experienced. For example, talking about the effects of being sexually victimized by her male partner, Rosa shared:

I realize now that I can say no and I can teach my kids to just know the difference between like who's being genuine with you, like really concerned and caring about you, as opposed to someone who's just caring about you because they want something from you, or they're trying to get some other things, or something like that.

Similarly, Billie, when thinking about the lessons from her childhood and the abuse she experienced, stated that, *"I think it made me even better...You know, so, I think maybe the thing turn into a positive and make you way more of a better person than you normally were as far as like being afraid of things..."*

Angela also recognized the strength that can come from negative experiences and translated her awareness into hope for her son who matured while incarcerated. She offered that:

They say some negative things that happen in your life can bring out a positive result and I think that's what's going to happen. I had to bump my head about four times but finally I got it and the addiction had a lot to do with that. You have to change your thinking. It took me a long time to get it. It took me 22 years to finally get it, and four prison sentences to get it. I'm trying to instill it in him [her oldest son].

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Discussing her parenting philosophy, Harriet observed:

I think other people would describe me as loving parent. My frustration is with trying not to let my circumstances sabotage me or define who I am as a person. So, instead of me looking at myself as a victim, you know, I look at myself as a survivor. I look at myself as a kaleidoscope because there's more to me than meets the eye, you know...You don't know my struggle or what I've been through in order to get here today.

Women's experiences with meaning making were consistent with literature on ways women find meaning in experiences of sexual violence (Draucker, 2001). Making positive meaning out of traumatic experiences, although touted as a positive coping strategy in the literature (Wright, Crawford, Sebastian, 2007), did not consistently or exclusively translate in to protective, supportive, or nurturing parenting behaviors and parent-child relationships for mothers in this study. Some mothers attributed positive meaning to their trauma experiences at a later stage of their life course after years of relying on negative coping strategies that placed their children at risk for neglect by the mother's absence, substance abuse, involvement in sex trafficking, and/or the distribution of drugs. Other equally salient coping strategies and responses (negative and positive) as well as sociocultural factors influenced women's relationships with their children as did the parenting networks on which some women relied.

Prosocial/Adaptive Coping Strategies

I originally proposed that women who have access to and use supportive parenting networks are likely to have adequate parenting practices. Mothers employed

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both prosocial and helpful as well as antisocial and harmful coping strategies. However, based on the results of the analysis, I modified the expectation to account for the influence of women's positive coping strategies as a factor contributing to an adequate parenting practices. In addition to relocation, mothers used a variety of prosocial coping strategies to manage experiences they perceived to be traumatic in their lives, such as, spirituality, forgiveness, formal social services, and participation in research. Next, I examine each of these themes independently.

Spirituality and Forgiveness

Some women offered that their spiritual beliefs, particularly the act of forgiveness, in relation to themselves, their aggressor(s), or significant person's in their lives was a key factor in moving on, improving their interpersonal relationships, and helping them embrace their own lives more fully. Recognizing her regret and experiences of self-blame regarding her daughter's molestation at the age of three and pregnancy at 12-years old, Nina stated:

You know, I blame myself for that a lot because if I'd been there, things would have played out different and so, you know [sighs] so I had to do a lot of self-forgiveness with myself. In order to forgive these other people and things like that, I had to do a lot man; that was tough work, real tough work. I worked hard to get to where I am today, to be a better person, you know, for myself and society, a better mother for my kids, a grandmother for my grandkids, a better daughter, a sister, you know, auntie, and whatever else. I had a lot of hard work, and I still got a lot to do.

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Harriet associated her battery charge and felony for hitting a police officer to being touched by the officer in a way that triggered a flashback to her childhood experiences of sexual molestation and impregnation by her mother's boyfriend when she was 13-years-old. She shared the importance of forgiving her mother's boyfriend in helping her move on with her life:

I had always been a loving person and I started having this anger and resentment showing up in all areas of my life, and actually got a charge of a battery to a police officer because the officer touched me in a way that made me flashback to what was going on with me and I lost it. I do have a felony because of that. It was something I learned. I'm like, "I, you know, can't go on this way. I've got to forgive this man, so that I can move on. Otherwise I'm going to stay sick, " you know. I didn't do it for him; I did it for me.

For Mary, who described her faith, going to Church and talking to God, as well as reading her Bible and daily word as sources of strength, *not forgiving* and *remembering* served as a powerful life force in coping with being raped repeatedly by her uncle when she was 11-years old, pimped by her mother at age 13, and raped by a stranger when she was a young adult:

Not forgiving helps me continue. Maybe I'm thankful for the way things was because I don't know if I would, maybe I'm here for something that somebody, one day going to meet the reader, or hear something that's going to help them, you know. If I didn't experience it, how could I write about it, you know? That's the only good thing about it. Remembering use to keep me sad a lot,

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it doesn't do that no more for me. I will never forget and I try to forget. I don't know why I have to keep remembering. Maybe I keep remembering for a reason... Remembering keeps me alive. It keeps me going.

Audrey, on the other hand credits, her belief in God and regular church attendance with helping her stay sober but she does not believe anything good came from her experiences of sexual victimization by her step-father and his sons. She explained:

Didn't nothing good come out of it. So I got up here and I got me, some recovery up under my belt, and I'm still going. Ain't found it necessary to use [drugs] at all. Ain't had no desire to use. Pray, go to church every Sunday. Now, I don't go to too many AA or NA meetings, but I do go to church every Sunday. I ain't going to miss it.

Women's decisions to forgive their abusers for the sake of their own healing is reflective of what Logan (2007) and her colleagues refer to as "therapy for the soul" (p. 228). Spiritual resilience in the face of individual, family, and community trauma and violence is rooted in the sociohistorical experiences of African Americans in the United States (Logan, et .al, 2007; Martin & Martin, 2002; Tillman, 2010). Additionally, studies examining spirituality among African American women and substance abuse found that women who self-reported high spiritual involvement expressed more positive self-concepts, active coping styles, more positive mental health outcomes, and positive attitudes about their families and parenting (Brome, Owens, Allen, Vevaina, 2000).

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Mental and Chemical Health Treatment Services

Very few women received treatment services related to childhood trauma experiences during their childhood. Those that did varied in their perceptions of its usefulness to them as children. However, many of the established mothers sought out mental health and chemical health services later in adulthood after many failed attempts at recovery.

Diane's experience with therapy and treatment services as a child was not as helpful in her assessment. She said:

I've been going to treatment on and off since I was 13 years old. My mom had me in chemical abuse services, and I completed that program but I didn't graduate because I was getting high the whole time I was in there. So they sent me to [intensive treatment]. So I was there eight hours a day...then my mom took me out of that because I was still getting high and she figured it wasn't doing no good. I was everywhere. You know, and then by the time I was 15, I was in the shelter...You know, I was tired of going around the shelter, and all these different group homes, and all these different treatments and all they would do is put me out [laughs]. It didn't make no sense.

Diane started getting high when her father, the person who also started sexually abusing her when she was six years old, gave her weed (marijuana) when she was seven years old.

Many more women expressed individual and familial benefits from attending individual, group, and/or family counseling and chemical dependency treatment as adults.

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Sexually abused as a teenager by her uncle and his two sons, Josephine explained that she didn't tell anyone about the abuse because she didn't think it was abuse because she was "a little older". She had this to say about her experiences in treatment:

I go to therapy now. I've talked about it in therapy. I think the hardest part of surviving the abuse was holding it in and not sharing the shame and guilt. I think it played a part in my addiction. Well being out on the street, I say, and prostitution, you know, was a part of my addiction too but going through some of those classes that was offered at [agency] that I've done before, you know, it taught me to start believing in myself and loving myself more and looking at myself differently, that I am worthwhile, and I do deserve to be okay, that I am worth more than 20 dollars, you know. Even though my addiction has went up and down, I haven't had to turn a date in about three years, four years, I haven't prostituted myself. I've been sexually abused but I haven't abused no one sexually.

Sojourner started attending family therapy after her children were returned to her as teenagers. During the extensive period of her drug use, her sister cared for Sojourner's children. She had this to say:

When I first got my kids back it was really stressful. It was hard because I'd been on drugs for a long time and I didn't raise them. It was like, "You can't tell me what to do. You wasn't there for me." There was a lot of talking back and, you know, they thought they can just do anything because I was on drugs, and had just got them back. "You ain't my momma. You don't tell me what to do." Yeah, it was stressful at first but I got a case manager, and then we went to family therapy

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and everything's got pretty good. We graduated from family therapy and we got along good.

While in prison Maya availed herself of extensive parenting, treatment, and therapy services that she continued upon her release. She attributes her sobriety, healing, and parenting, in part, to the services she received. She stated:

I utilized everything that they had, every program, every bible class, every book, everything that I had. I knew I had to relearn and learn new things. I was still parenting them [her children] in prison, um, by means of using, uh, parenting classes. So I've always tried to reach out from a parenting to them, um, as much as I could over the phone, through letters. Um, like I never stopped trying to be a parent. Um, and it was hard.

Harriet shared that she came from a family with alcoholism, mental illness and depression but “they didn’t believe in medication because you’re supposed to be a strong Black woman.” However Harriet believes “you have to be able to allow yourself to be weak in order to be made strong.” She had this to say about her experiences with therapy:

You know, I've had to relearn some things. I really have. Just feeling the way that I was feeling and having all the resentments and the hurt gave me the courage to change. I knew that that's not my purpose. I didn't want to feel that way, so I started seeking out other ways and just exposing myself to different people and just thinking outside the box and not living in those old wives tales and stuff. I saw a therapist for depression and anxiety and I still go to support groups. I find them helpful. You know, that's what I mean about secrets will lose

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power. I mean sometimes you feel that you're not being heard, but just getting it out, and knowing that, even though your experiences are unique, we all have a commonality because we go through the same thing. Just knowing that, and not feeling so alone, I'm able to see light at the end of the tunnel and it helps me to cope better.

Additionally, several women shared that they currently receive psychiatric services and are on prescription medication for depression, anxiety, and other physical and mental health needs.

The findings regarding women's use of mental health and chemical health treatment services is consistent with the literature reporting that African American women are less likely to seek out and mental health services, and require recovery programs that link recovery with other tangible resources and services including support with education, employment, parenting, and housing (Curtis-Boles & Jenkins-Monroe, 2000; Rhodes & Johnson, 1997). Women's experiences with mental health and substance abuse services echo literature regarding the importance of African American mental health needs and experiences (Logan, et al. 2007).

Participating in Research

Some women identified the process of participating in this study as a positive step in their healing process. Many were also simultaneously receiving therapeutic services but for some, the study was the first time they ever spoke about their experiences of sexual abuse. In a few instances, women expressed an interest in talking to me about their

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lives rather than participating in the mandatory support groups at some agencies. For example, Cicely shared:

Here at the agency I don't like doing the group because I have suicidal thoughts and they're not equipped to handle my situation because once I leave here I'm in my room by myself, thinking. They don't understand it but I just sit here in the group and don't say anything while they're talking, so that's why I said I'm glad we're in here by ourself (sic). They say the group is mandatory. I told them that although I have been in the streets with prostitution, I feel that I am not able to share, and I'm sorry but I don't think they would be equipped to handle me if I had a breakdown and I told them that maybe one day they touch on something I might want to share but it'd have to be on my call. I know what I can handle and what I can't. This [the interview] is going good for me. I'm glad I'm sharing and it's not in a group. I'm going to a psychiatrist trying to uncover the past and I'm breaking down that mentally. I kept all my appointments so I said I did pretty good, me and God. God had my back.

For Rosa, participating in this study was the first time she spoke about her experiences of intimate partner violence. She reflected:

I've never done anything in terms of dealing with those experiences. This is my first time talking about it. It's pretty easy. [pause] I can't find any good words to say about him, or anything like that but I actually like talking about it, just because I haven't talked to anyone about it. So, it's like a relief. Like it's finally off my chest and now I know how I really feel about it. I know how to deal

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with it if it comes up again, or I know how to talk to my kids about, you know, knowing what you want and knowing what you don't want.

Rosa's decision to participate in the study may be a reflection of what Cooper-Lewter (2007) describes as "soul healing" work in which many African Americans effectively process trauma through the belief that "facing challenges should instruct, strengthen, mature, and heal" (p.213).

Although the study was voluntary, unlike Rosa, Aretha expressed reluctance and mild emotional distress, as evidenced by her laughing, while talking about her experiences with intimate partner violence for the first time. She explained it this way: "I never really talked to anyone about it. I have some apprehension because it feels a little embarrassing. I'm laughing but I'm not laughing because its funny." Despite my periodic reminders that she could stop the interview at anytime without any repercussions, Aretha wanted to continue talking.

Shirley, on the other hand, found the interview healing even though she had not previously talked about her experiences of sexual mistreatment. She shared:

I didn't deal with my feelings and emotions from those relationships. I just medicated myself. I'm just now beginning to know who I am. This [the interview] is actually healing for me because it seems like the more I talk about it, the more I become aware of my feelings about things and I can deal with them today especially learning what your truths are, what your beliefs, your values, your morals are and how to respect yourself, how to love yourself and I'm learning so much about myself, things that I actually like.

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Billie felt motivated to participate in the study to help other women and children who may have experienced sexual abuse. She also shared how good it felt to her to talk about her experiences without crying. She stated:

I don't know. I guess I just had the courage to come in here [interview room]. Maybe I felt like women that have been through this [sexual mistreatment] or children, they need to hear, you know, other people's stories and how they handle that situation. It's like I think this was probably one of the most reasons that I really wanted to come in because I done held this in so long to where I really never just told anybody else my story besides my family and my husband. It feels good for me to talk to you about it because normally, when I try to tell this story, I'm sitting her boo-hooing [laughs].

Women's use of the research process to share their story is consistent with literature on survivor's motivations for participating in research (Campbell & Adams, 2009; Taylor, 2002). Additionally, scholars recognized the act of bearing witness through testimony as means by which African American women reclaim their voice and their lives by sharing portions of their lives that were once kept silenced or hidden (Cody, 2001; Gates, 1991; West, T.C., 1999).

Women employed an array of prosocial, adaptive behaviors to help them cope with trauma experiences, which I originally expected, based on the sensitizing concepts of CSDT. An underlying assumption of CSDT is that responses to traumatic events involve both adaptive and maladaptive changes related to the meaning made of the traumatic event/context and the ways in which adaptation occur (McCann & Pearlman,

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1990; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Women also interpreted and responded to traumatic life events in antisocial and maladaptive ways that affected their availability to their children and their reliance on their parenting networks for support.

Antisocial/Maladaptive Coping Strategies

Women in this study also utilized antisocial and/or maladaptive coping strategies to address traumatic experiences in their lives. Most common and consistent with the literature was the use of alcohol and drugs. Women also engaged in survival sex and other criminal activities. Compared with their peers, Curtis-Boles and Jenkins-Moore (2000) report that African American women who are survivors of sexual violence often report higher rates of use and abuse of alcohol, marijuana, and crack cocaine.

Chemical Dependency

All of the established mothers stated that they started using drugs or alcohol at a very early age because an adult responsible for their abuse gave it to them or they sought it out independently as a method of coping with the stressors and traumatic experiences in their lives including but not limited to sexual trauma. Women's experiences using drugs and alcohol typically spanned an extensive period of time (over ten years). For some women, the use of drugs and alcohol preceded sexual victimization. For example, Diane blames her father with introducing her to marijuana years prior to the time that he started sexually abusing her. Diana provided a chronicle of her drug history:

First time I used anything, my dad gave it to me and I believe I was three.

I was either three or four. He had me and my cousin, uh, Paul, and my sister, we was all up in the attic in my grandma's house, his [father] momma and he was

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getting all the kids high. He was giving us all weed [marijuana]... I started smoking crack cocaine when I was 15 years old. I started snorting cocaine when I was 12. So, this is how it go; seven years old I started smoking weed. Eleven years old I started drinking [alcohol] and I'm smoking weed the whole time, see, so that never ceases. By the time I was 13 I was doing pills, smoking weed, and drinking, and snorting cocaine. I tried LSD, uh, angel dust, PCP, LSD, whatever them things are. I tried all of them before I realized that two of them were the same [chuckles]. My cousin, Jerome, gave it to me. Bastard. Then, let's see, by the time I was 15, 16, I was smoking crack cocaine. You know, because one of my sugar daddy's, he sold cocaine and weed and he would give it to me... Well, so altogether I've been getting high for like 37 years. Yep, and when I stopped I was getting high for 37 years when I finally stopped. I was like, you know, I was smoking crack for shit, from the time I was 15 to 2008. I was 42 in 2008. That's a long time, smoking crack. You know, there's not too many drugs out there I have not done. I have not shot up heroin but I have done heroin.

Diane's experiences with drugs were typical of many women's experiences and affected their availability and attention to their children. Maya shared that her introduction to crack cocaine was by her father when she was eighteen years old. She had repressed the memories of being molested as a child until later in her adult life. She explained:

My father is actually the one who gave me crack cocaine when I was eighteen. My father brought drugs up here from Chicago. We used to smoke just

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marijuana. My family, my brothers and sisters, you know, that's all we ever did.

My dad, he says to me, 'Here, try this,' and has me try it, and has my boyfriend

try it, and has my best friend and her boyfriend try it and so then we get hooked. It

was a love affair because it was instant gratification and it took away all of the

pain. It took away all of the heartache.

Curtis-Boles and Jenkins-Monroe (2000), noted that not unlike the general scholarship on substance abuse, histories of parental-substance abuse and childhood physical and sexual abuse are significant antecedents for African Americans (men and women) struggling with chemical dependency issues. Other traumatic experiences associated with substance abuse found in the literature and my findings include economic hardship, social marginality, and individual feelings of powerlessness and alienation (Rhodes, 1997; Staples, 1990).

Criminal Activity

Women's experiences of incarceration and involvement in survival sex were often closely linked with their chemical dependency and drug use and also affected their ability to care for their children. The selling and distribution of illicit drugs was a primary reason many women were incarcerated as well as for their engagement in survival sex. Women reported that these illegal activities offered them a means of obtaining money to meet their basic needs and that of their children. These findings are consistent with previous literature regarding African American women's experiences with the criminal justice system (Collins, 1990; Rhodes & Johnson, 1997).

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Women often discussed their involvement with criminal activity and the criminal justice system through the intersections of drug and alcohol use, survival sex and coping with losses in their lives. For example, Mary explained:

Another loss I experienced was a turning point in my life. I got in a car accident and my friend got killed. We were drinking and driving and that right there, you know, that just took the cake for me. I went to prison for vehicular homicide for five years. I did a lot of soul searching and went to treatment and all that. Prior to that I stayed medicated [drinking and drugs] everyday and I didn't have nowhere to go and, I'm not kidding, I had no income, I'm telling the truth. I would go into a store, steal clothes, go into a fast food restaurant, washing up, cleaning up all the time, and changing hairdos. This went on about a year and a half. I didn't know what it meant to be separated from my kids at that time because I was medicated all the time.

Discussing her struggles with maintaining her sobriety in an environment surrounded by violence, drugs, and gang activity, Angela explained:

I mean, I've had six years sobriety and I fell off. You know, I dipped and dabbed with sobriety but this time it's a wrap [chuckles]. It's a wrap. I done did it already. I don't know what the life will bring you. I already know the ins and outs. Fast money goes fast and it causes prison sentences, and probably death the way the kids are nowadays, and all that...you know, all these young people, all these gang-banging people, killing each other, robbing. The economy is bad. People are...you know, you're liable to do anything when you're on drugs, or trying to

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sell drugs, or whatever. You know... I shaved 12 years off my life in and out of jails, workhouses, and prisons. Now, that's not what's up.

Maya explained her efforts to parent her children while involved in using drugs, prostitution, and prison. She stated:

I was parenting them, trying to parent them while I was still in the streets [prostitution] and using drugs, and then I was still parenting them in prison, by means of using parenting classes and I tried to, you know, I tried to do some, um, like they were trying to do some intervention stuff though. So I've always tried to reach out from prison in parenting them, as much as I could over the phone, through letters. I, like I never stopped trying to be a parent and it was hard, so, a lot of the kids' trust have now been broken.

Diane explained that her sexually abusive father told her she would get involved in prostitution. She explained her motivation for turning tricks distinguishing it from her drug use:

By the time I was 13 I was hoing and didn't stop until 2008. No, that's a lie because I did a couple of tricks when I first got out of prison in 2010. It wasn't for drugs—it was just for the money but what made me cut the dude off, because he took care of me the whole time I was in prison, was when I met him he was a trick and that was my philosophy. That was always my philosophy. "I met you, you was a trick, dude. I cannot be your girl. I don't want to be your girl." "Why?" "Because you're a trick." "Well, you didn't say, well, you're taking my

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money.” “Well, duh [chuckles]. You a trick,” you know what I’m saying? And I had to keep saying this to this man.

Women’s experiences with sexual victimization, drug abuse and distribution, prostitution are documented in the literature (Valandra, 2007). Established mothers relied heavily on their parental networks during their drug use, incarceration and/or involvement in survival sex. Surrogate parenting by extended family members is not uncommon particularly in instances when parents are struggling with problems such as drug abuse (Carlton-LaNey, 1999). Research on African American women and substance abuse suggested a high connection between African Americans and substance abuse and significant history of parental substance abuse and childhood physical and sexual abuse (Boyd, 1993; Boyd & Orgain, 1993; Comfort, Shipley, White, Griffith, & Shandler, 1990; Wallace 1990).

Summary

The results demonstrate that mothers’ trauma experiences extended beyond sexual mistreatment and that women employed a variety of both proactive and maladaptive strategies for coping and adapting to trauma-related experiences throughout their life course with implications for how they parented their children. The majority of the mothers (n=14) expressed a heightened concern and need to protect their children from sexual harm particularly and provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children. In many instances, however, trauma-related experiences and maladaptive coping strategies across the life course limited mothers’ ability to consistently and effectively support the bio-psycho-social and physical needs of their children.

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Women's trauma-related experiences are consistent with the literature that recognized that poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, existing trauma, domestic and community violence, and parenting issues make coping with sexual assault much more difficult for survivors and their families (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2005; Wasco, 2003). As a result of the analysis, I reformulated the expectations to recognize that any life experiences that mothers perceived or experienced as traumatic as influencing factors on their experiences in parenting their children intergenerationally. The complexity of women's trauma-related experiences and their responses to them made it difficult, if not impossible to make a direct link to women's parenting practices. However, women often articulated recognition that traumatic life experiences influenced their parenting practices, irrespective of whether or not they adequately managed the trauma-specific stressor.

Parenting Networks

The second set of general expectations are related to the parental networks used by women and includes four subthemes: (a) women's experiences with intermittent caregiving, (b) mental representations of attachment relationships with their mothers, fathers, and grandmothers, (c) the role of fathers, and (d) intergenerational sexual abuse. Figure 4.2 is a graphic depiction of mother's parental network experiences.

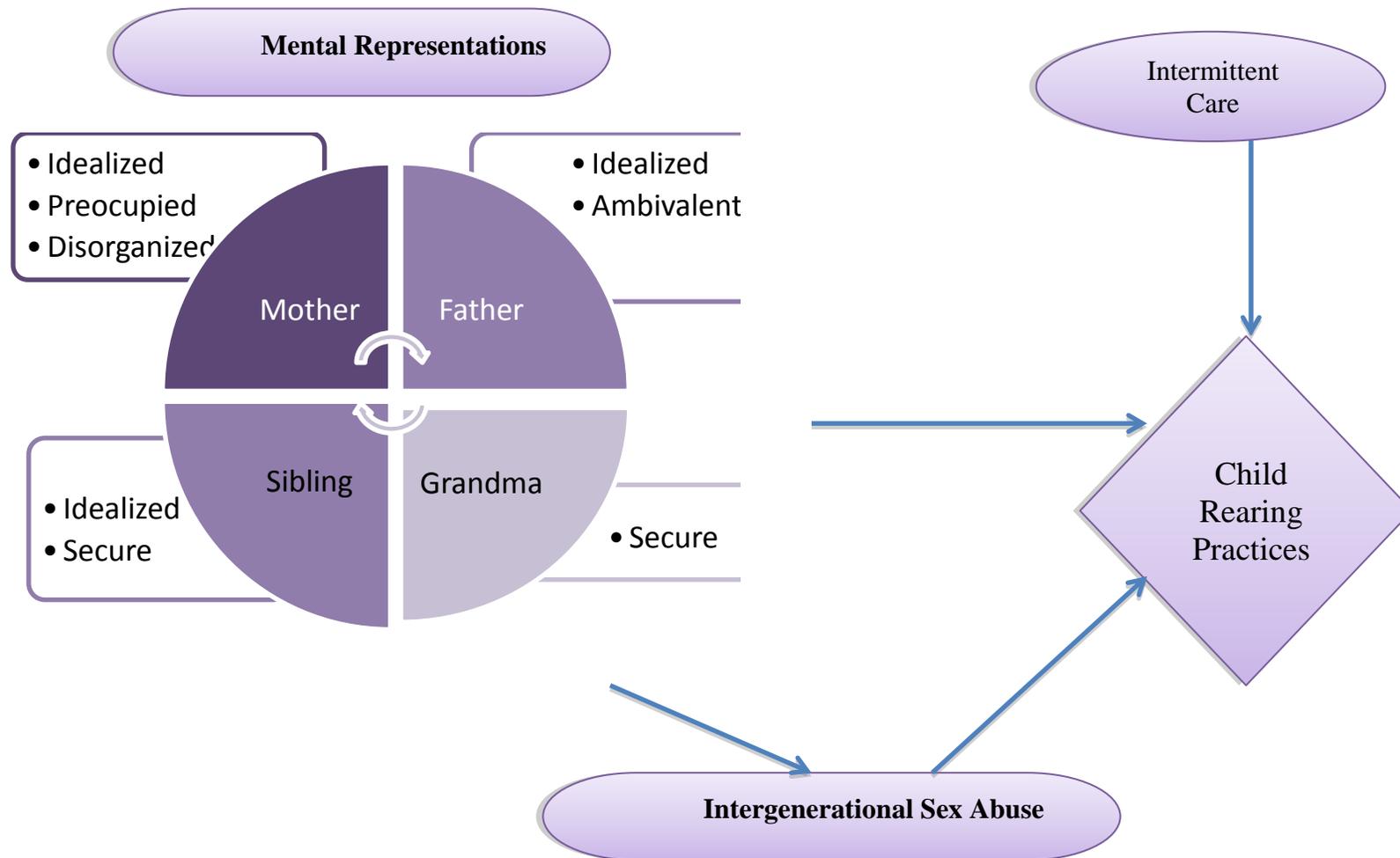
The original expectations associated with women's use of extend family parenting networks assumed that mothers caring for their children would provide continuous care for their children while *simultaneously* utilizing the members of their parenting networks for parental support for themselves and care for their children. However, in several instances, mothers in this study were often absent from the lives of their children for

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extended periods of time. The quality of a mother's relationship with her children upon reunification from periods of absence appeared to be influenced, in part, by the mother's relationship with the alternative caregiver(s), her confidence or lack thereof in her own parenting abilities, and her previous parental experiences. Therefore, I reformulated my original set of propositions to account for the impact of these dynamics on parenting practices within the context of extended family networks. The modified expectations related to women's experiences with their parenting networks is: women with helpful parenting networks and secure mental representations of themselves as caregivers are more likely to develop adequate parenting practices.

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Figure 4. 2 Graphic of Parental Network Experiences



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Alternative caregivers for mothers in this study included, grandmothers, fathers, boyfriends, older siblings, aunts/uncles, pimps, johns, sugar daddies, and the child welfare system. In a couple instances, teenage mothers' children were raised from infancy by their grandmothers as their own children, not grandchildren, and were not reunified with their mothers until the mother was a young adult. Informal kinship caregiving is normative in many African American families and experts recognize this alternative arrangement as a mental health intervention for African American families (Gibson, 2007).

Intermittent Care and Maternal Attachment Relationships

Women's involvement with drug addiction, survival sex and incarceration often resulted in intermittent care of their children and heavy reliance on members of their parenting networks including their mothers, siblings, and their children's fathers, which, in turn, also influenced mother's attachment relationships with their children. Several established mothers discussed their relationships with their children in relation to their attachment experiences with their own mothers. For example, when Maya was incarcerated, she relied extensively on her extended family network to care for her children. She explained:

I've always tried to reach out from prison in parenting them, as much as I could over the phone, through letters. I, like never stopped trying to be a parent and it was hard, so, a lot of the kids' trust have now been broken. Yeah, my mom was there for me, a big impact in their life. My family was a big impact on their life. Main—mainly my mom and like their family, like their dad's side, their dad.

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You know, and so they also pitched in and so everybody kind of helped and volunteers in the street from other programs, did their best to help my children. So I don't know, there were a lot of people that were parenting my children. The children's father pitched in, churches, extended family members. A lot of people helped with parenting my children.

Maya's mental representation of herself as a caregiver suggests a strong investment, yet somewhat realistic perception, in her role and identity as a parent in her children's lives despite many absences from their lives due to her drug use, survival sex, and incarceration. She put it like this:

My relationship with my children, it's getting better. I didn't have one at one point. We're working on building trust with each other. They're working on allowing me to parent them again, due to my drug use, my past drug use, and getting into prostitution, all the stuff I was involved in. So it's gotten a lot better. I'm still learning how to, change the roles, so they can stop being a parent, and now I'm the parent. I think that's the stage that we're in right now, reversing roles [chuckles]. I've been parenting my children the whole entire time.

Maya's discourse coherence suggested mental representations of herself as a caregiver within the insecure-preoccupied ambivalent classification with her children. Additionally, Maya's long-winded answers regarding her relationships with her parents, particularly her father's intrusive behavior and her mother's enabling behavior reflect a self-centered preoccupation with herself. She claimed:

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When I was a child, my mom was my best friend. I always felt loved by my mother. She's my best friend. I felt love. I felt secure. I always felt secure with my mom. I felt special, very important. My mother, um [chuckles], was my enabler. Like I was her baby. Like when I first started getting high, my mom would do anything, give me all of her money, just stretch herself to the limit, break herself. Like I would steal for my mom. My mom would just... "Oh, my baby," because I was spoiled. Like my mom and my dad like totally spoiled me.

Nina's three children were primarily cared for by her mother during Nina's 20-year struggle with drug addiction. She explained that she parented her children off and on due to her addiction and shared how her relationship and experiences with her mother shaped the quality of the relationship with her children as well as her mental representation of herself as a caregiver:

I was caught in addiction for over 20 years so my kids were mainly with my mom. They were back and forth from me to my mom... I think my mother influenced how I wanted to be as a parent because she was so abusive to me that I always wanted the best for my kids. I always said I would never be like my mom but I was. I wasn't physically abusive to my kids but I was mentally and emotionally by not being there for them. I ended up still being like her.

Discussing her attachment-relationship with her mother, Nina stated:

My mother had me when she was 16-years-old. She treated my brother different coming and me up. You know, kids aren't stupid; they know the difference. I think the difference in treatment has something to do with my dad... I

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won't knock her [mother] for taking care of my kids. My mom always gave me material things. I had everything but her time, nurturing, and love, and stuff; no, I didn't feel. We have a good relationship now but every now and then she'll throw a jab and I get her right back because it's like, you know, it's never what you say, it's how you say it, so I get her right back.

Nina's continual disparaging remarks about her mother in relation to her childhood, her own parenting abilities, and current personality suggests unresolved losses and abuse, although I would not describe her commentary as disorganize or confusing.

Nevertheless, Nina presents mental representations of her attachment-related experiences with her mother and children can be described as insecure-unresolved. Octavia is a 50-year old grandmother of four grandchildren. She has two boys and two girls who were raised by her mother, sisters, and brothers until they were teenagers when they were returned to Octavia who was ill equipped, having never parented previously, to care for her children. Octavia used drugs and alcohol for 35 years. She stated:

...I wasted half of my life because I'm half of 100 [chuckles]. I was drinking when I was fourteen. Twenty-six I was drugging and ever since then, every day, and it was around my kids. Now, I didn't smoke in front of them but all of them, they know what I was doing.

Octavia had her first child when she was 20-years old. She described the process by which her children were taken from her by family members and the challenges she faced newly parenting her children as teenagers:

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When they was little kids, um, they was like spread around. It was good for me. I was good with them but they was spread around because my sisters didn't have any kids and they wanted this one, one wanted that one and then my mom wanted my oldest. You know, my oldest was sick. He was born sick and she [mom] was like, "Let me keep him for a week." Then a week turned into a month. The month turned into a year, then years. I moved around the corner from her, she had got married. Then I had a girl and my sisters, they had her most of the time then my third child, um, my mom had and then my last child, I did, 'til he got to the age of 11. He, um, stayed with his grandmother on his father's side 'til he was grown... They stayed with everybody else until they got in their teens and then everybody wanted to give them back to me. I didn't know what to do with them because I was drinking and I really wasn't being a parent. I was wanting to be drunk, or I be trying to put them on punishments or trying to tell them what to do. It was too late. My girl, my oldest one, when she got 18, she left; really when she was 16. She came back at 18 and then she left again and then my younger one, she was just I think some part of a gang or something. Then my oldest son, he was with my mom and his other grandmother, back and forth. He's my youngest one. When he was 11 he went to Gary, Indiana.

The quality of her attachment relationships with her children is suggested, to some degree, in her mental representations of herself as a caregiver:

Oh, I think people would say that I was a (sic) okay mother back then and now, ah, 'cause I gave them material things, but I didn't given (sic) them love.

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You know... It seemed like if I wasn't drinking or drugging I would have been really overprotective of my kids... I was completely different in raising my kids from how my mother was with us because my mother, she raised us strictly. My mother was kind of real strict. I mean before the streetlights was on, we was in that house. We done did our chores. We done took our baths. I mean, I don't know, maybe I felt free, let my kids be free, you know.

At 13-years-of age Mary was pimped by her mother to a domestic sex trafficker known to her family as a friend. He prostituted her in the streets at night along with other girls and made sure she attended school during the day. He fathered her first child. An Italian man who solicited her fathered Mary's other three children. He also cared for the children for about two years while she struggled with an addiction to drugs. Mary discussed her parental supports and explained who cared for her children at the time of her drug use:

My oldest daughter went to my mom at the age of twelve till she was like nineteen. That's when I was getting into drugs and my other kids had went to their dad [the Italian man who solicited Mary]. The youngest three stayed with their dad because I wanted to do what I wanted to do, you know. Especially me and my fiancée. He [the Italian man] was like, 'My kids ain't going nowhere.' I said, 'What you mean your kids ain't going nowhere?' He said, 'You can go where you wanna, my kids ain't going nowhere.' We lived in the suburbs and there was times I'd come over here for, you know, like a weekend, stay with my family or one of my friends and my mom, she'll keep my kids and stuff, and I go over there and just

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get high and then he [kids father] be knowing, you know, what I'm doing but he know I don't do it at home because I don't want to think about it when I really come over here, I just get all hyped up about it. So, yeah, he got tired of that shit and was just like 'I'm taking my kids.' I said, 'We gonna go to court for it.' With him having as much money as he had, he could have really just won the case but no, he just told me, 'When you get it together just come home and the kids will be here.' I came home after a year and a half later.

Mary's parenting network consisted of her mother, the father of her oldest daughter who prostituted her on the streets at night and sent her to school during the day, and the father of her youngest three children, who solicited her services in prostitution and provided her and her children with a home and material goods in the suburbs. Mary reflected on the rewards and pride of being a parent. She painted a picture of herself as a responsible, caring parent who raised smart kids despite her involvement in prostitution and drugs. It is probable that Mary's mental representation of herself as a caregiver is somewhat also shaped by her early childhood relationship with her grandmother who cared for her from birth until Mary was 11-years old. She described her relationship with her grandmother contrasting it with her relationship to her mother:

My grandma raised me from the time I was born to the day she died when I was about 11-years-old. I would see my mom on birthdays and holidays, or special occasions. She [mom] wasn't there like that. All she ever bought me was gifts. She was never there. She was off doing her own thing with her own man. My mother never taught me a thing. Living with my grandmother was beautiful.

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Mind you now, you know, my grandma is basically the root of what I learned about keeping house and taking care of my kids it came from her.

Mary's description of her childhood attachment-relationship with her grandmother suggests a mental representation of a secure attachment, which may have mediated, to a degree, her ambivalent mental representation of the attachment-relationship with her mother. Discussing her childhood and current relationship with her mother Mary stated:

You want to know the worst part of being raped by my uncle? The worst part for me is when I had told my mom, she was like, "You probably deserved it." I don't even know why she's so nice to my kids and treat my kids so nice now. She's trying to make it up to my kids what she did to me but it's too late now so I don't know, that's just who she is. I just let God take care of it. I pray about it, pray about it. God going to take care of her not being there for me, doing what she did to me. I talk to my mom. I respect and love my mom, you know. I talk to my mom every now and then. I talk to my kids, because my mom try to tell my kids a lot of bad things about me. I don't understand that.

Shirley's mental representation of herself as a caregiver is that of a loving, capable, mother although she is also realistic about her abilities when she is actively using drugs:

When my children were younger and I wasn't high, we bonded. I would read to them and we would play games. When sober, I was a lovely mom, telling them I loved them, you know, lots of hugs and kisses. When I wasn't sober, the TV was their best friend. The TV was their mom. I just put them in a room, made sure they had some children's program on.

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Shirley's mental representations of her relationship with her mother (and step-father to an extent) suggest an unresolved attachment-related experience. She shared:

Well, my mom is deceased and she's been deceased for about 25 years. I grew up with my mom and my step-dad. He wasn't physically abusive to us (children) but he was fairly physically abusive to my mom, and me, I'm the oldest of six. I endured everything that he put on my mom. Me and my mom never got a chance, because she died of cancer, to sit down and [I] ask her why did she put herself and us through that. She left here without me really knowing...I know she loved me, because she, I guess she took care of us, made sure we ate, and had clothes, and things like that but we never got that bond of, "I love you mom," and "I love you," you know, telling me that she loves me, we never did that. So I try to tell my kids I love them every chance I get. I thought my mom didn't really like me.

Discuss in terms of the literature on attachment and mental representations.

Idealization of Maternal Attachment Relationships

Two mothers in the study discussed their childhood attachment experiences with their mothers in ways that were suggestive of an idealized view of their mothers.

Inconsistencies and unbelievable accounts of consistent, supportive, and protective experiences prevailed in their narratives despite their unconscious sharing of evidence also suggesting persistent neglect and abuse in their discourses of their childhood attachment relationships with their mothers. For example, Josephine explained that she feels close to her mom and older sister. She stated, "I would use the same words to

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describe my relationship with my mom and my sister; loving, caring, supporting, encouraging, and firm [chuckles].” She shared that “they were always there, mentally, emotionally, all that.” With respect to her needs, Josephine stated:

I was always able to explain however I wanted to, the way I was feeling even if I was angry, upset, mad, whatever it was, you know, I was able to say those things. There wasn't nothing that pretty much we couldn't talk about, you know.

Her flawless depiction of the relationship with her sister and mother was completed when she shared that she would use the same words to describe her relationship with them both – “loving, caring, supporting, encouraging, and firm.” However, the narrative of a picture-perfect attachment relationship to mom and sister begins to unravel when Josephine states that her mother was an alcoholic and died when she was 12-year-old of hardened arteries and alcoholism and her sister raised her. Josephine’s one bad memory of childhood involves her mother being so intoxicated that she cannot assist Josephine in getting ready for, nor is she able to attend a very important day in Josephine’s life – graduation from her church’s bible study program. Josephine stated that her brother had to comb her hair and help her get ready. These statements do not support the depiction of her mother as always present mentally and emotionally. However, they do suggest that Josephine, for whatever reason, may need to deny the impact of her mother’s alcoholism on her childhood development. The final indicator that Josephine could potentially be in denial is reflected in her statement: “*Overall though, I had a pretty good childhood, you know, even despite the fact that my mom drank.*”

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Diane also exaggerated the level of care, protection, and support she receives from her mother who she described as a “chronic alcoholic, drug addict, and all that.” Diane used language like “always,” “never,” to convey that despite her addiction, her mother always met the basic needs of her children regarding shelter, food, and clothing; and “she-lion,” “momma-lion mode,” to describe her mother’s natural protective qualities. For example, Diane described her mother’s response to learning that her father sexually abused her:

She went into momma lion mode quick, “And I’ll kill you.” I can hear him screaming at her and the last thing my momma said, “You can come up here if you want to. I’ve got something for you.” She said, “I live in 5515 King Avenue North. Bring your ass on,” and hung up. I was like, “Okay [laughter]. That’s my momma.” Okay, she gave him the address. So I’m like, “Okay.” Now, she wasn’t scared. She said, “Diane, I am not afraid of your father.” She said, “I will kill him.” I’m like, “Okay.”

After Diane disclosed the abuse to her mother, she found out that her mother was aware that her father sexually abused Diane’s older sister and other children in the neighborhood. Diane explained her mother’s knowledge of previous victims and lack of action based on that knowledge in a way that does not shatter Diane’s construction of her mother as a fearless, powerful protector. Diane shared:

She knew that he would do, you know, the neighbor’s child or, you know, then she’s thinking 16 on up or whatever. She wasn’t thinking about little kids, little girls. My mom, she didn’t think like that. So when I told her, and that it had

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been going on since I was six, she snapped. She snapped. And I guess that's when she started remembering about Alicia and how he used to do her, and Fred, and Leslie up in the attic. And it all started coming back to her. I guess she repressed it away or whatever you might want to call it because it wasn't in her face she wasn't thinking about it.

Despite the image of her mother as an all-knowing, capable, protective childhood attachment figure in her life, Diane provided contradictory statements about her care as a child by her mother (and abusive father), and tended to answer questions giving long-winded responses that were confusing, inconsistent, and incoherent at times. At the other end of the spectrum, at other times during the interview, she was boastful and particularly graphic about her sexually abusive father's, involvement with "gangsters" and his sexual prowess as well as the things he taught her to prepare her for a life prostituting herself. Unsurprisingly, Diane constructed her own parenting behaviors in ways that are consistent with a self-image of a fierce "she-lion" ready to do anything to protect her lion cubs; despite other evidence she conveyed that demonstrated a history of abuse and neglect of her children. Diane reported that her children were removed from her care by child protection and placed with her sister several times during Diane's 37-year history of drug use.

Attachment Relationships with Grandmothers

Consistent with the literature on African American mothering (Kennedy, 1991; Trotman, 2002), a common theme in the narratives of many of women in this study was the role their grandmother's played in caring for them, preparing them for adulthood, and

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for parenting. Women in the study often contrasted their relationships with their mothers to that of their grandmothers resulting in the visibility of stark distinctions and its influence on their own parenting. For example, reflecting on her relationship with her mother and grandmother Rosa stated:

Well, my mom, you know, like when she was in her own little thing. We were actually...me and my sister were actually cooking for mom when we were younger. So, you know, with that happening, we have a lot of, I guess you could say hate in our heart because of that. My mom abused drugs and alcohol. She was around the wrong guys. The wrong guys were making her chose between us and them and she would chose them. My relationship with my mother during my childhood was terrible. There really wasn't one. Terrible. There really wasn't one until about when I was, turned sixteen, I think.

In contrast, Rosa's memories of her grandmother are significantly different. She shared:

So kind of like we were born and my grandmother took custody of us but we had like rights and stuff, so, you know, our mom could come visit with us as long as she was around but you know, of course the majority of the time we were with our grandma but [sighs] I don't know, she [grandmother] just, she just took real good care of us. She, like I said, she parented us. She taught us right from wrong. She taught us what we were supposed to do, what we weren't supposed to do. She [chuckles] was the one that took care of us. She, basically taught us everything, taught us values, taught us, how, you know, how families should be,

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and, you know, she took basically on the role of being a mom to us, instead of our mother.

Rosa's expectations of herself as a parental caregiver take into account her mental representations of childhood attachment relationships with both her mother and grandmother.

She offered:

What I have been through is what influences me as parent. Like I kind of freaked out because I actually have a rough life, so, I don't go off what my mom did or what my dad did. I like to try to do things my own way and see if that works and if not, I might, maybe take a little bit after my grandmother. She would talk to us. She talked to us a lot. She just had a real cool way of understanding us. Like she was a (sic) older lady but she really understood us, as far as to be young. That was real cool.

However, Rosa specifically credits her grandmother with preparing her to be a mom:

I don't receive any support from anyone in parenting my kids [now]. As I was growing up, and I was a teenager, she [grandmother] was teaching me how to be a young lady, how to be a young woman, uh, when I had kids, how to be a mom. When I didn't know what to do about, you know, growing up, she really, really helped me with that. She helped me more, well, not really when they were born but, you know, before that, yeah but, you know, she's getting older now and she really can't do much.

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Rosa's narrative of her attachment-relationship with her grandmother suggests warmth, affection, and protection, i.e. security in contrast to that of her mother, which seems to reflect a preoccupied childhood attachment. Several other women in the study including Nina, Henrietta and Cicely had narratives of their childhood attachments with their grandmothers that were close, nurturing, protective, and loving in contrast to their childhood memories and current attachment-related experiences with their mothers.

Nina found solace and comfort in her grandmother who she believes was trying to "rescue" her from her mother by allowing Nina to live with her as much as possible:

We moved out of my grandmother's house into our own place. It hurt moving from my grandmother's. I loved being around my grandmother. It hurt because it left more room for jabs from my mom, you know. It hurt. It was scary. I just didn't understand why she [mom] didn't leave me with my grandma. My grandma didn't like it at all when we left. She used to talk to my mom a lot but, you know, my mom, she's grown and it's her kids and you know, my grandma would try to get me as much as she could, as much as my mom would allow her to, you know.

Nina shuffled back and forth between the homes of her mother and grandmother until she was 13 years of age. Discussing her close connection with her grandmother Henrietta shared:

I feel the closest to my grandmother but she died when I was prison. I would describe her as caring, loving, helpful, dependent, an angel. I feel close to my grandmother because she raised me. She was there for me. She was like my

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mama and dad. It was hard not being there to help her raise my daughter when I was in prison. My grandmother gives me strength, God being in her.... I feel like my parents just had me and just gave little bits of themselves.

Cicely framed her relationship with her mother and grandmother like this:

No my mother didn't raise me. My mother was abusive. She was an alcoholic. My grandmother took me and my brother when we was babies. She [her mother] was real abusive. In the end she tried, though but I wouldn't let her. It was too late. Well, she didn't try to make a difference with me, she tried to make it different with my baby. Me and my grandmother was connected at the hip. My grandmother had soul. She was like Florence on Good Times [T.V. program] as a matter of fact, that's who she look like. Them White folks loved her, man. She worked for them White folks for a long time. Man, that's my friend, my father, just my everything, man, you know? I'm serious. She's been through everything with me, my addiction, and still love me, you know what I'm saying? And that's hard to find.

For a few mother's however, attachment-related memories of relationships with their grandmother's appeared difficult to discuss and garnered emotions ranging from sadness to anger during the interview. Struggling through tears about being rejected by her mother and grandmother's decision to take her sister out of a sexually abusive situation but leave her knowing she was experiencing a similar fate, Toni shared:

[Crying] I just, I say it's hurtful to let me go through that because nobody should have to go through it. My sisters didn't go through it. I hate my mom.

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Yeah, and I, like even hate my grandma, she knew what was going on and she would still say to me, "I tried to give your mom money for you to eat," what does that do? Why would you give it to her? [Crying] So, I got into it with her (grandmother) too because, you know, like she kept us away from them, like kept me away from her and my sister. So it was like, well, when we did go visit I would always cry to her to let me stay with her [Crying] and she wouldn't take me. [Crying] Um, to be honest, I really don't know why and I have never asked, so I wouldn't know, because she knew what was going on but she took my sister because of what happened to her but I was like, "Why not look into what is going on with me?"

Toni claimed that she was over the pain of being left in an abusive situation by her mother and grandmother. She said, "I never asked her why but I done got over it. I don't too much care anymore because I'm not going through it anymore now." Despite her claims, Toni's affect during the discussions suggests she still carries the pain of her childhood attachment memories related to her mother's and grandmother's rejection of her and choice to protect her sister instead. Toni would probably be classified as insecure- dismissive or enmeshed using the AAI classification system. Angry about the financial incentive she perceived to be important to her grandmother in caring for her and her siblings, Barbara commented:

My grandmother is what you call money hungry. She's only in it for the money, but she still took care of us. I wouldn't call it raising, with being raised, there's a lot of tender love and care. Being taken care of, they just do what they

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have to do, just because they're being paid to do it. My grandmother was being paid. I was receiving SSI. And, you know, back in the day, getting welfare was more simple than it is now.

Barbara's narrative of her childhood attachment-related experiences with her grandmother (and abandonment by her mother) and her affect suggest an insecure-preoccupied/ambivalent attachment experience with her childhood caregivers.

Kennedy (1991) observed that grandmothers play a central role in the parenting of their children and of all the groups studied, African American children were closest to their grandmothers. Gibson (2005) recognized the intergenerational parenting role African American mothers play in the lives of their grandchildren in parenting again and Waites (2008) recognized grandparents as the "key keepers of family values such as respect, religion, love, support, and community" (p.6). While this role was consistent with many women's experiences, not all grandmothers in the study met this "gold standard."

The Role of Fathers

The father's, identified through women's narratives, played varying roles in the lives of mothers and their children. Several patterns emerged from the study findings that shed light on women's mental representations of attachment-related experiences with their own fathers throughout their lives, and their children's fathers as partners and members of their parental networks, and caregivers for children.

A few mother's co-parented their children with the children's' fathers throughout the mother's use of drugs. For example Shirley reported parenting her children

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continuously since their birth. She credits her children's father who supplied her drugs and was abusive to her, with caring for his children as a nurturing parent:

For four of them [children], their dad was pretty much there helping raise them and he was a big part of my drug addiction. He was in my life for 12 years.

He was nurturing to the children. As nurturing as he could be, and he's still involved in their life right now today. I think he taught what he knew.

Shirley used alcohol and drugs for 32 years. At one point during her 12-year relationship with her children's father, he called Child Protection services about her neglect of the children and they were placed with his sister for five years. Shirley asserted:

His sister didn't have any kids. I still had to do the mothering thing. I still had to be there for them on a daily basis. I still had to comb my daughter's hair, and you know, help her get dressed for school, and help them with their homework. I still had to do the motherly things, it just I wasn't in the house with them.

Mahalia shared that during the six years she was separated from her husband due to her drug use, he cared for their children. He continued providing for them throughout their adulthood as she relapsed periodically on her journey to sobriety. She offered that prior to "going ballistic" after the death of her mother, she was able to provide her children with a "really good foundation, firm values," and love. She credits her great aunt and grandmother's care of her as influencing factors for how she raised her children. Mahalia was also realistic about how her absence in her oldest daughter's life contributed to her daughter's low self-esteem and lack of confidence in herself. Mahalia's mental

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representations of herself as a caregiver appear to be influenced, in part, by both her experiences with her caregivers as a child and her co-parenting experiences with her husband prior to her involvement with drugs. Mahalia's experience with her husband is consistent with research findings of resilience in mothers who are survivors of CSA that identified a supportive spouse/partner as a strong protective factor and buffer for depressive symptoms and parenting competence (Wright, Fopma-Loy, Fischer, 2005).

Ida, on the other hand, shared that she is the only one who cares for her children and she believes her first child's father "*needs to get hisself (sic) together first*" before he can play a more active role in her son's life and although her daughter's father would like to play an more active role in his daughter's life, Ida explained, "*he come and get her sometime but I try not to let him. I'd rather go with her because I don't really trust him even though he her daddy.*"

Consistently in this study, established mothers' mental representations of themselves as parental caregivers were inconsistent with the realities of their lives in parenting their children which may have contributed to their use of qualifiers to distinguish how they parented when they were sober, not involved in survival sex or incarcerated. Their use of extended family networks was extensive and can be viewed as a viable and valuable resource, to some extent. On the other hand, the children of mothers that relied on incestuous family networks were at risk for, and experienced sexual mistreatment.

These findings are consistent with literature recognizing the strength in strong kinship bonds in African American families that act as a protective factor during times of

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increased reliance on the extended family system during a crisis but can be equally problematic when sexual abuse is disclosed and the non-offending family member is faced with the possibility of separating from the sexual offender within the family network (Abney & Priest, 1995).

Idealization to Ambivalence – Mother’s Relationships with Their Fathers

New mothers in the study relied much less on extended family networks in providing for the care of their children than established mothers. New mothers’ mental representations of their attachment-related childhood experiences ranged from idealization of their fathers to ambivalence and active anger or derogation toward their mothers particularly drug abusing, abusive and/or neglectful mothers. Two-thirds (n=4) of the new mothers shared mental representations of their fathers that suggest some degree of idealization or ambivalence given the father’s reported actual involvement in the new mother’s life. For example, during the interview Ida admitted to having selective memory regarding her childhood memories of her father. She stated:

I remember some parts of my relationship with my dad. Only thing I remember I guess was the part I liked the most, is when he, taught me how to ride a bike. That’s the, that’s the one part I remember the most then. I was like probably around five or six, somewhere around that age.

Ida lived with her father briefly as a teenager but found him to be strict so she moved out and he was not very supportive of her pregnancy to the point that he stopped talking to her and would ignore her if he saw her in public. Therefore, Ida was very surprised when

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after the baby was born he brought over a car seat and clothing for the baby. She explained:

He was there when I was a teenager. I stayed with my dad a period of time. Then he was so strict with me, so I left. After that he still was in my life and stuff. Then when I got pregnant he was mad at me, so we kind of stopped talking. But like I didn't expect him to come to the house but then when I had my baby, and he was up there, he had bought him a car seat, and some clothes, and stuff like that. I was very shocked because he was really mad at me [chuckles] when I was pregnant. He didn't say nothing to me, he didn't even look at me. He seen me on the street like he wouldn't even look at me, like I wasn't even his daughter [chuckles]. "Hey, what's that girl doing over there? That's your daughter" [chuckles].

In spite of being abandoned by her father as a child and disowned by him, to some degree, as a teenager Ida, smiled for the first time during the interview as she proclaimed, "I love my daddy." She explained her feelings by stating:

...My mom always be like, "I don't know why you be calling him, talking to him. He don't be doing nothing for you." Yeah, he ain't got to do nothing for me. I still love him. He was there. He'd be there for me. I think she be mad because she hear me tell my dad I love him, when I get off the phone with him but I don't tell her that, okay [chuckles].

Ida's mental representation of her father as an attachment figure during her childhood and adolescence as someone who is "there" for her suggests a loving,

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nurturing, and protective father-daughter bond. However, the reality she presented is of a father who was not around during her childhood except occasionally to give her a gift, and a father who provided her with temporary shelter but abandoned her emotionally and physically as a pregnant teenager but showed up again only to provide her with a couple of unexpected gifts after the baby was born. Ida's low expectations of her father is, ironically, consistent with her retort to her mother that "*he ain't got to do nothing for me*" to be loved by her, which isn't necessarily the same thing as being loved, protected, and nurtured by him.

It is understandable, however, why Ida might frame her father, to some extent, like her hero relative to her memories of her relationship with her mother. He brings her gifts unexpectedly, provides her with presumably safe, albeit, strict, shelter temporarily, and even though he abandons her again as an adolescent, he redeems himself once again when he enters her life again bearing gifts, this time for her new born. Perhaps Ida's professed "love" for her father is a form of "hero worshipping" that she unconsciously recognizes as it is inconsistent with the revealing statement that "*There are no family members that I feel close to but I do feel close to the friend that's like a God momma. She the only one.*"

Unlike, Ida, Rosa's narrative of her father is full of inconsistencies and contradictions suggesting unresolved or disorganized attachment relationship with her father. Rosa's father was not actively involved in her life during her childhood. She remembered, "*then my dad, he was never really there. Like he was the type that would come and get me because...we had different dads, me and my sister. So, my dad would*

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come and get me and not my sister.” However, she explained that he was able to eventually do the paperwork and take steps necessary to get legal custody of Rosa and her sister and took them out of the abusive foster care system they experienced. Rosa explained:

I was a teenager, about, then that's when my dad actually took the classes and the stuff to get me and both my sister out of the foster home and we went to go stay with him but then he had a wife that was controlling. She wanted all of his attention. She didn't like the fact that me and my dad was really, really close. So when he took me, she kind of like did her best to kind of split it up, you know. He just kind of...he went her way. Things between us just kind of went bad, really bad.

Barbara readily acknowledges that her father was rarely around and that she would love to have known him better. Nevertheless, she expresses a preference for him and idealizes him despite recognizing his absence in her life. She said:

I remember very good times with my dad. Yeah, I was close to him as a child, but he was never around. My wish was for him to be around most of the time. Dad used to come around with lots of gifts, and, ah...he used to keep us involved with his side of the family. If I would a like had a more closer personal relationship with him [dad], if he wasn't in prison so much, then maybe I think he would a made me a better person actually. I mean, not saying that I'm a bad person, but the way I was raised and brought up, I went through the different path in life instead of the one I chose as a teenager, and then as an adult. He's a great

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guy, not only because he shows the ways of being a father but mentally and emotionally, and spiritually he was a great help.

Like Ida, Barbara held an almost fairy tale projection of her father in her memory. While she acknowledged some of his short-comings, she ultimately sealed the deal with an idealized mental representation of him that was contradictory and inconsistent with drop-ins, gift giving, and incarceration most of the time.

Toni's idealization of the man who raised her is hauntingly traumatic and suggests extensive trauma-related experiences with her childhood attachment figures. She said:

I don't know, basically, him (man who raised her) and my mom had domestic violence a lot in my childhood. And, um, but for some reason like I can still like well, I loved him because, you know, when my mom turned to the drugs, then he took care of me and my younger sister and that's her dad. Um, he took care of me as if I was his. So, you know, he didn't like misjudge me or anything. I guess you could say, um, I just lost respect for my mom. Yep, I've just basically lost respect for her. And then with the man that raised me, like even though he like beat her, and I had witnessed it, I felt like, I don't know, I didn't have anything against him, I guess because even though I could see it, I was young and then, when we got older, when I needed him the most, he was there... We had never got whoopings or anything from him but, I would guess you can have to say it was often that he beat my mom. I do recall some, um, well, at least one, um, incident because where we lived, it wasn't a farm but it was like a barn and stuff and we didn't have animals or horses, just had cats and dogs. Basically he just drug my

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mom through the field by her head, through the cornfield, back to the car because she had took out running and then other times, I guess it was, um, I guess you can say that it was to the extent where she did run.

Toni's idealization of the attention and care she received from the man that raised her suggests severe attachment insecurities related to abandonment by her mother and grandmother.

Intergenerational Sexual Mistreatment

In a few instances mothers' use of extended family network placed children at risk for sexual mistreatment within incestuous extended family systems. Mother's mental representations of childhood attachment relationships, parental caregiving, and adult experiences with extended family networks provided some insight into the adequacy, security, and quality of their attachment-related experiences with their children and their children's welfare in the care of extended family networks in the mother's absence. Established mothers' use of antisocial coping strategies significantly and negatively influenced their accessibility to their children and their capability to care for them without the support of extended family networks. Established mothers also relied on their extended family networks when they used prosocial adaptive strategies as well such as residential chemical dependency treatment. Therefore, I modified my original set of expectations to account for these factors in relation to trauma management and the use of parenting networks.

Five mothers in the study identified children who were sexually abused by a family member or close friend either while in the mother's care or when cared for by an

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extended family member. Nina, for example, expressed deep regret and anger at her mother when she learned that her mother's ex-husband sexually molested her youngest daughter, three-years-old at the time, while the child was in Nina's mother's care during Nina's involvement with drugs. Nina shared:

My mother's ex-husband molested my youngest daughter when she was three years old in my mother's care. At the time when it came out, she [mom] was like my daughter was lying. It's like, how does a three-year-old lie about something like that in detail? So, I was pissed at her [mom]. I hated her for that, calling my daughter a liar about something like that, you know and 'til this day she [mom] don't talk about that stuff. My mom won't talk about it.

Nina also shared that she learned, just last year, that a teenage girl living in the same apartment building when he was younger repeatedly raped her son. He was in Nina's care at the time. She recognized how she failed her children and stated:

We were all shocked when Aaron said that. When he brought that out, it was just like, oh, I felt so bad. I just didn't want my kids failing their kids. Do not fail your kids. You know, everything's not going to be perfect. You know, I don't know what normal is but just please don't fail your kids, always make yourself available. Make sure you know where they are at all times, then you can't allow everybody in your world and everybody to care for your children, you know because the closes person with you will hurt them, you know?

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During her 10-year prison sentence for selling drugs, Henrietta left her children in the care of her grandmother. Someone known to the family sexually molested her oldest daughter who was seven years old at the time. Henrietta shared matter-of-factly:

When I was locked up my oldest daughter was molested. She was about 7-years- old. Now since I got her back, I just don't let her go nowhere, I just be close to her and I don't know, I guess I'm afraid right now [laughs] for her. Her dad's aunt took her to the hospital and stuff and they told her not to testify against the person who did it so the police let him go. The first time I asked my daughter about it, all she be doing is crying and stuff but she doesn't talk about it now.

Henrietta's mother was incarcerated at the same time on a similar charge for possessing and selling drugs. A male adult known the family also sexually molested Henrietta when she was seven years old.

Michelle shared that her adult son from her first marriage told her his father sexually molested him when he was around six years old. She had divorced her first husband by that time and was living with her second husband and youngest child. She shared the information with her current husband (third) who she reported told her, "*Why are you surprised, he raped you, you should have known he was a child molester.*"

Lastly, Mahalia expressed shock at learning that her oldest daughter was sexually molested by her cousin when she was two or three years old after Mahalia sent her child to live with her aunt and uncle as a young mom herself. Mahalia stated:

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The most traumatic is that (sic) not being able to protect my oldest daughter from somebody that molested her...I let her stay with her aunt and uncle for a little while, while I got myself together. I was a pretty young mom. At that point I was like 18, 19 and my cousin had molested her. I didn't even know about it. I never found out about it until just recently.

Mahalia's daughter is in the same treatment program that she is in addressing her own involvement in prostitution. Mahalia's other daughter is looking at colleges and was planning to go out-of-state and live with Mahalia's cousin who molested her oldest daughter. One day in treatment, the oldest daughter shared with her mother: *"I don't want her [sister] going there...because of what happened to me living with your cousin. I don't want her to stay with her relatives."*

For three of the five children who were sexually harmed by a family member or close friend, the abuse was disclosed close to the time period in which it occurred. The other two children did not tell their mother's about the abuse until many years later during their adulthood, thus continuing the legacy of silence. However, all five mothers shared that they believed their children, perhaps sparing their children the emotional and psychological trauma that they themselves experienced during their disclosure processes. The exception to the pattern of silence was Aretha whose mother walked into the room while her stepfather's son was sexually molesting her.

In some ways, the legacy of silence may have played a role in mothers' risk for sexual harm as children within their extended family. Several mothers in the study found out *after* disclosing their experiences of sexual abuse that their mother's, aunts, older

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siblings, and cousins were also sexually harmed within the extended family system, in some cases by the same offender. These experiences of intergenerational sexual abuse demonstrate the complexity of the extended family system as both a protective and risk factor for children with a maternal history of sexual mistreatment cared for within an extended family system and add to the literature on intergenerational sexual abuse and extended family parenting.

While present in the literature, evidence of the intergenerational transmission of sexual abuse among mother's who are survivor's is inconsistent and contradictory (Breckendridge, 2006; DiLillo, 2001; Reid-Cunningham, 2009). Scholars using an intersectional lens recognize multiple factors for consideration when assessing the risk of sexual abuse to children with a maternal history of sexual victimization including the mother's coping strategies, mental health, partner support, and the sociocultural environment (Campbell & Wasco, 2005; Wright, Fopma-Loy & Fischer, 2005; Reid-Cunningham, 2009).

Sociocultural Environment

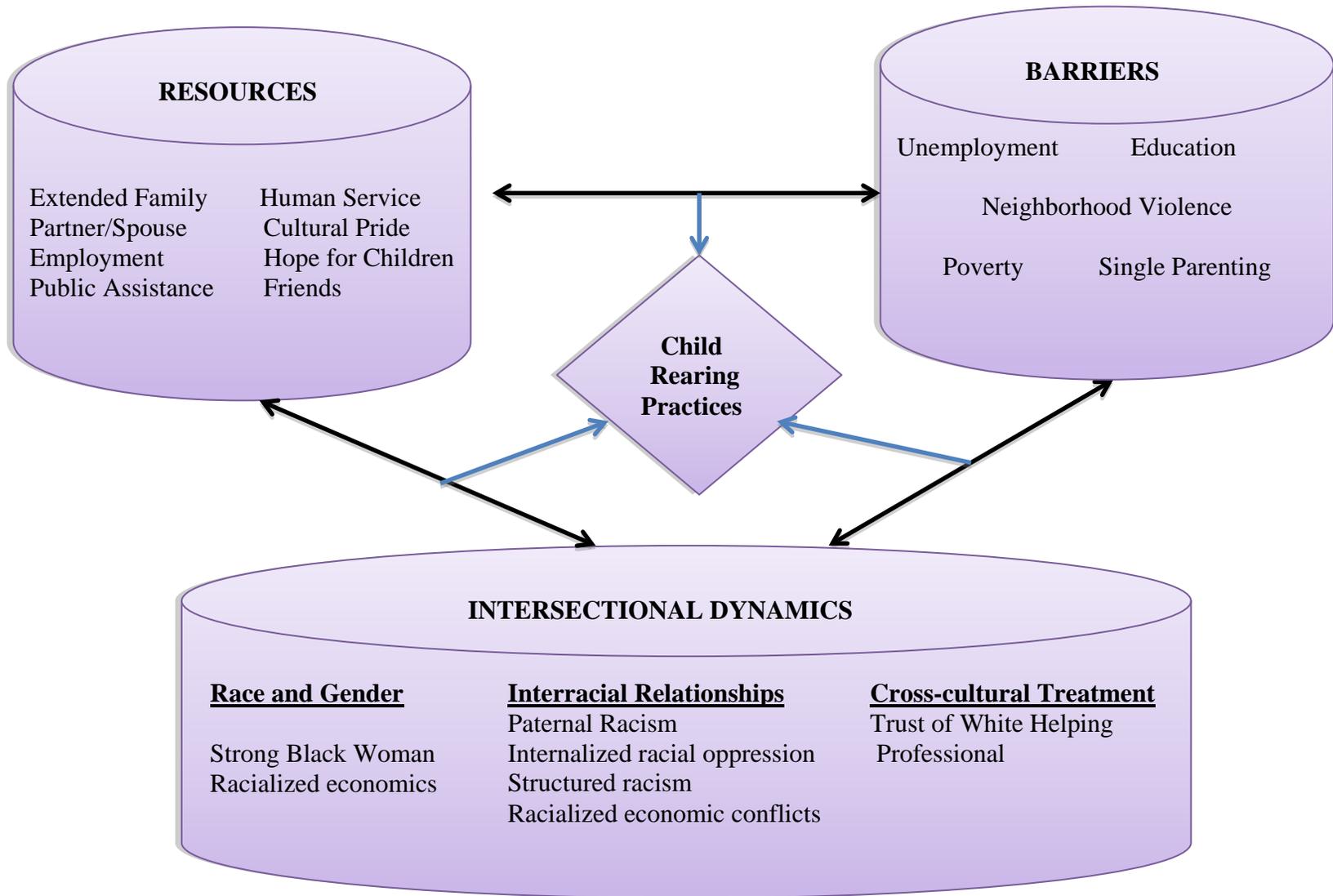
The third set of generalizations reflects women's experiences of their sociocultural environment and its influence in their lives and parenting experiences. The four associated subthemes include: (a) socioeconomic resources and barriers, (b) race and gender, (c) interracial relationships, and (d) cross-cultural treatment. Figure 4.3 provides a graphic representation of the themes and subthemes related to women's experiences of their sociocultural environment.

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In my original expectations, I assumed that women with more environmental opportunities than risks were more likely to have adequate parenting practices. In this study, women shared both environmental opportunities and risks they faced at the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, class, and location (neighborhood/community). Collin's (1990) reconceptualization of race, gender, and class as interlocking systems of oppression and attention to African American women's empowerment were relevant for all the women in the study. All of the women who had experiences of economic and/or educational hardships shared ways they resisted and negotiated the environments in which they lived to support themselves and their children.

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Figure 4.3 Graphic of Sociocultural Environment



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Women relied on a variety of resources to meet the socioeconomic needs including their extended family network, their partners/spouses/boyfriends, employment, public assistance, and human service agencies. The degree to which women utilized the extended family network for resource exchange was often dependent upon family traditions and norms regarding assistance and support (functional solidarity) the roles and responsibilities of extended family members (normative solidarity), and the proximity and accessibility of extended family members (structural solidarity) (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Waites, 2008).

In a few instances, women also articulated experiences they perceived to be discriminatory related to their race and gender. They also shared methods they used to manage and/or resist the interlocking systems of oppression faced and the ways in which they protected or prepared themselves and their children addressing or otherwise adopting to these risks. More often than not, women's experiences with interlocking systems of oppression based on race, gender, or class were expressed in terms of their hopes and fears related to their children or their perceptions of how African Americans are perceived and treated generally in society.

Socioeconomic Resources and Barriers

Established mothers were more likely to rely on their extended family systems for economic support in addition to employment or public assistance. New mothers however, relied less on extended family and more on human service agencies and employment or public assistance. Regardless, women's economic conditions appeared to overlap with their sense of cultural pride sometimes offering a complex mix of belonging culturally

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(consensual solidarity) but not without a cost socially and economically. Rosa's experiences serve as one example. She explained:

I feel connected and some sense of pride with African American communities by well, just us being African American, period. That's always good but you know, I will say they [Other cultures] take it a whole different way. They take what's positive about us and just turn it into something so negative, like all the violence and, you know, the ignorant things. I guess being ghetto is what they want to call it, you know. It just looks bad. They just look at the whole procession (sic). Those certain people, you know, have another culture, thinking about us, like, "Oh, African Americans are crazy or they just...they're ignorant," or something like that. So that's pretty sad [chuckles].

Harriet also shared her experiences of cultural pride and how they are inextricably connected with economic conditions. She shared:

While I do feel a sense of pride in the community, being brought up in [the Midwest], I didn't have any pride in the community because it was like a war zone. You know, but when I moved to [the north], I got to see the diversity and cultures, and realized that we don't all fall into one category. You know, sometimes one apple spoils the whole bunch, but the longer I'm living, I'm learning to see that, you know, we can be a positive force in the community, you know. We're not all intimidating. Sometimes misunderstood. You know?

Rosa and Harriet expressed what Norton (1978) termed the dual reality of living as an African American in a predominately European American society. This duality is

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reflected in the intersections of the discourse on race and class in American as expressed in the lived experiences of both women. Michelle also identified the reality of experiences of race and class oppression in her expression of hopes for her children in the future. She said:

If I had three wishes for my children 20 years from now, I would wish them a future without racism, one where they're judged by the content of their character, who they are. I want them to be living well, having their own homes, and happy, and being who they are.

Diane expressed a similar sentiment in relation to the future of her children. She explained:

What kind of a future do I want to see for my kids? Well, the first thing is not just for my kids, but I wish for peace, you know. I wish for discrimination to go away, basically racism and I wish success for them; I want them to be as successful as they want to be.

At other times, women simply reflected on the harsh economic realities of living in poverty. For example, Rosa shared “When I was living in [the state she came from] the neighborhood I lived in was bad. Always shooting, just guys on every corner. Just bad. It’s just a rough neighborhood”. Her neighborhood experiences were not unique, unfortunately.

Maya discussed the normalcy of violence in the community in which she and her children lived:

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I grew up back early '70's [chuckles], um, [in the Midwest]. Seen a lot of violence. So, I mean, I was already predisposed to the lifestyle, just growing up in [the Midwest]. You know, um, it was just a matter of time and not only was I predisposed because of my environment, I was a product of my environment. I mean, it was normal in my environment, in my community to drink, to be drunk, falling down. It was normal to see Aunt Anita get smacked, you know, for her to smack you back, all the times she done cut Uncle Travis, and he's drunk again. You know, that was normal.

Comparing her life prior to relocating to living in the shelter now, Rosa stated:

Well, since I've been here, basically, just being here has given me a stable place to stay. You know, my kids can sleep in a bed. They don't have to sleep on anybody's couch or take up somebody else's bed. I don't have a lot of money at the moment but, since I've been here, in two weeks I have an interview [job]. So that's good. I mean, I just feel that it's more...my kids are comfortable. I'm comfortable and I haven't felt like that in a long time. Because even if I am staying with somebody, and even if it's a friend, you're still not comfortable because it's not your own...So, you know, at least, being here [shelter], you know, they kind of give you your own little space and it just, it starts you off somewhere, so.

Women's experiences with class oppression sometimes intersected with gender as well. Barbara and Diane spoke about the stress and economic challenge of raising their

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children as single mothers. Barbara connected women's oppression to racial discrimination as well. She shared:

You know some women cannot do it without a man. It's mostly black women honestly. Like I say, I have experiences in my family, friends, associates and it's sad. People look down on us. They love to look down on African Americans. I hate to be judged by my book cover. You have to read the book before [chuckles] you judge it just by the cover and the title.

Diane talked about the barriers she faced being a single parent:

Being a single parent is a barrier, for one. I mean, I was married but my ex, he wasn't here. He was off doing what he was doing. Um, not having no formal education to get a decent enough job so I could take care of my kids. You know, and then like having to rely on Section 8, as, uh, welfare and then I messed the Section 8 thing up, which was definitely a wrong decision on my part.

Race and Gender

A few women evoked the strong Black woman paradigm (Romero, 2000; Thompson, 2000) in recognition of adaptive strategies employed within their extended family and transmitted intergenerationally to cope with adversities effecting daily living. For example, reflecting on her family's approach to mental health, Harriet shared:

Mental illness, alcoholism, and depression run in my family. They're even angry with me for getting on medication, my mother. I can't keep living like this. They didn't believe in medication because you're supposed to be a strong Black woman. You can handle anything, but I believe in the opposite.

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Diane shared that her parental strengths come from her identity and experiences as a survivor and strong Black woman. She explained:

I mean, I just, I know now that I'm strong. I would never have said that a few years ago but I'm a strong Black woman. And I'm a survivor. I'm going to survive. So ain't none of that, you know, fall into despair. I tried it a couple times. It's not a comfortable place. I don't like that. It's dark and it's miserable and everybody there is miserable and I'd rather not. You know, and then they're all complaining and whining. And it's like, no, I just, no. No, don't complain.

Mahalia discussed how her mother taught her how to survive as a Black woman and how she passed the lessons on to her own children. She explained:

She [her mother] did (sic) taught me, I think, how to stay alive and survive in being a Black woman, and how to deal with the powers that be, you know. Just the way she explained it to me, I explained it to my children because, um, you won't be able to live and make it in this society. You have to know who you can trust and who you can't trust. Even though I have faith in my family, I teach my son, don't ever get comfortable with the police because there's just too many jails and [chuckles] full of African Americans...Even though we have a Black president, you know, its still a huge difference.

Several scholars referenced the resilience of African American women in terms of strengths in the face of individual, family, community, and societal adversities dating back to environmental conditions of slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and present day race, class, and gender oppression as well (Donovan & Williams, 2002; McNair &

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Neville, 1996; Trotman, 2002; Washington, 2001). The legacy of resilience and strength is often referred to iconically as the *Strong Black Woman* (Romero, 2000; Thompson, 2000) and characterizes an African American mother, grandmother, othermother “who is self-sufficient, independent, and able to survive life’s difficulties without assistance (Donovan & Williams, p. 99). Consistent with the literature on African American women’s experiences with sexual assault, parenting, help-seeking behaviors, and disclosure patterns, mothers in this study recognized the advantages and disadvantages of embracing the strong woman stance. Racial socialization of African American children is a socialization strategy many African American parents have employed to prepare their children for living as African Americans in North America (Hughes et .al, 2006; Murry & Brody, 2002; Scott, 2003).

Interracial Relationships

Women in romantic relationships with White men also shared the challenges they faced having to navigate race, gender, and class dynamics in relation to themselves and their children within their interpersonal relationships. For example, Angela encouraged her son to deal with his feelings about his White father’s absence from his life and the father’s racism because the father is sick and may not live much longer. She believes her son needs to get some closure, she explained:

‘Try to regain a relationship with your father, even though he’s White, you are his seed, so you need to get some closure with that.’ Roy doesn’t like that his father is White because he [father] likes to say the N-word a lot. That’s when he gets upset. My son tells him all the time, “Well, why do you like Black women

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then if you're so racist?" Now, his father wants to stay in touch with him and give him money. He [father] denied him for so many years. Now, all of a sudden he's changed his mind and he knows he was wrong. That's hurtful.

Cicely questioned her own internalized racial oppression as she expressed her feelings about the dynamics of the interracial relationship and her standpoint about differences in them. She shared:

Sometimes I be saying, "Damn, is you racist?" because for some reason I'm like this here; I messed with a White man for 29 years. He 83 [years old] and I met him on the ho' stroll [Laughs], but I can't stand to see a Black man with a White woman. It's different because Black men focus on what the White man don't want and he [Black man] come and flaunt it in front of the sister. When a sister go and get a White man she's going to get money. She ain't going to get no White man got less than she got, walk down the street and say, "That's my man," so does that make me racist? [Laughs].

Cicely extended her commentary and perspective to a larger context as she thought about the risks and benefits of what it meant for her to be with a White man who acts openly on his attraction to Black women:

Twenty-nine years and we're still best friends. Yep, that's my dog there. He from Iowa, now that's a racist town. I don't see how he living there because he sure love Black women. I got somebody to introduce me to him. I said, "Oh, he's a winner." Yeah, and I treated him real good [emphasis added]. Yeah, he was all right. He took care of my mom, my children. He was a good old fellow. He

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83 years old, I don't think he going to ever die, man. He's strong! He sent me some money. A good old fellow, man. I wouldn't trade him for the world and better not be nobody better not mess with him either. They get the shit beat out of them. He would tell me he was sick. I'd have to go over to his house and take care him. Yep. Well, he done took care of me all these years. He really have. I mean, all through my addictions and everything.

Mary also talked about the benefits and challenges she faced living with the White father of her four children in the suburbs and the material possessions she coveted for herself and her children as well as her discomfort regarding her connection with him:

My three youngest kids' dad, he's Italian. You know, and he had money and stuff like that. He basically took me off the streets and gave me stuff and was giving me the things I wanted but to me, it was still prostituting because that's how I met him. You know what I mean? That's how I met him but he was just, instead of me being on the streets, we were just together even though when we were in our relationship having kids, every time he wanted something, I wanted him to get me something. You know, so I learned that about myself too and I don't know why, I just, I don't know, I always wanted my kids to look nice, you know. I used to see his friends' kids come over and stuff like that. I mean these kids were well-dressed, you know what I'm saying?

While survivors experiences with racism is acknowledged in the literature as a factor complicating trauma and recovery (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2005; Wasco, 2003; Tillman, et al., 2010; Tygai, 2001; Valandra, 2007), survivor's navigation of race-

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relations within interracial romantic relationships and their families adds new insights to the literature on multigenerational parenting by African American survivors of sexual mistreatment.

Cross-cultural Treatment

Another arena in which women navigated the opportunities and challenges of their sociocultural context was in decisions about treatment options. Consistent with the literature and largely expected, questions of trust and privacy, surfaced for some women as they traversed the journey to recovery and working with White human services personnel. For example, Barbara opted to work with her pastor instead of seeking the services of treatment professional regarding recovery from sexual molestation due to trust concerns with White people:

I can't cry no more. Like I cried long enough. I can't even cry for this. Until now I never like had a opportunity to share like this. I, myself, personally, like, all White people are not the same but I don't trust them. Like I can mention it, like, "Yeah, I've been sexually abused," or, "Yeah, this thing happened" but to give details, no. I did with a pastor, and I gave details to the pastor and his wife before. They were my foster parents and are great people, African American people. They live up north too. I feel it's easier to trust African Americans depending on their nature [chuckles]. We weren't allowed to tell the White folks anything, so I didn't get any kind of professional help or support. You didn't speak to it. And I kept my, you might as well say, we all kept our parents out of jail and out of trouble. Yeah because I kept my mom out of trouble, and I so badly

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wanted to tell her because I knew the White folks were out to help me but we kept her from jail, so.

Diane recalled the number of treatment programs she attended as a teenager and how she bartered with her mother to get out of a treatment program recommended for her by White service personnel:

I was everywhere. You know, and then by the time I was 15, I was in the shelter. They was trying to send me to Iowa, [chuckles] to the girl's ranch and my mom was like, "Wait a minute. You're going to send her where [chuckles]?" And I knew, okay, this is my opportunity. [Chuckles] She don't want me to leave. "Okay, well, momma, momma," I said, "I promise" I said, "You just get these White folks out of our business. I will be good. I'll do whatever you want me to do. I'll get back to school." I was, you know, I was going to get "A's." I mean, I'm bartering with my mother because I don't want to go to Iowa either. She said, "Diane, okay." She said, "You've got one time." I said, "Yes, ma'am. I promise. I'll give you my word."

Women's experiences with cross-cultural services is consistent with the challenges African Americans can experience with dominant-cultural social service delivery systems regarding cultural mistrust (Denby, 2007) and concerns that some survivors of sexual assault have in seeking treatment, related to interviewer characteristics and sensitivity, and the nature of questioning regarding sexual assault (Koss, 1996). Lieberman (2007,p.431) noted that for some parents from cultural and ethnic groups with histories of poverty, oppression, and discrimination, "social services'

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have historically become a code word for authoritarian expectations and punitive measures.” Under such circumstances, social workers are much more likely to be viewed with suspicion and trepidation.

Consistent with the literature, the language women used to narrate their experiences within the sociocultural environments in which they live reflect a keen awareness of their social locations with respect to race, gender, and class and there intersections (Donovan & Williams, 2002; McNair & Neville, 1996; Tillman et al., 2010; Tygai, 2001). Many women recognized the importance of acknowledging their successes and vulnerabilities while continuing to survive within the constraints of living within a larger society that holds disparaging images and beliefs of African Americans collectively (Christian & Barbarin, 2001; Collins, 1990; Cooper-Lewter, 2007). Women’s vulnerabilities were exacerbated given experiences with homelessness, chemical dependency, incarceration and domestic sex trafficking. However, they expressed a sense of hope and the possibility of change through the visions of the world they held for their children and their ability and will to persevere despite the sociocultural and economic conditions in which many navigated their lives and cared for their children. Giving voice to such experiences suggest some level of confidence in the power of self-empowerment and transformation. As a result of the analysis, I reformulated the expectations as follows: Women with opportunities to access socioeconomic resources across their life course are more likely to effectively adapt to life experiences perceived to be traumatic to adequately parent their children.

Summary

Trauma Management

The results of the study failed to confirm a direct link between adequate trauma management and adequate parenting practices. Several mediating factors influenced women's ability to manage their trauma-related experiences in a way to provide for the basic needs of their children. Women's experiences with trauma management expanded my original set of expectations to encompass trauma-related experiences women had beyond sexual violence including stressful experiences with neglectful mothers, the child welfare system, domestic violence during childhood and adulthood, revictimization experiences associated with disclosure, and stressors related to antisocial/maladaptive coping strategies with substance abuse, criminal involvement, and incarceration. These trauma-related experiences were mediated to some extent by women's efforts to manage their trauma through prosocial coping strategies including relocation, spirituality and forgiveness, positive meaning making of sexual abuse experiences, and for some women, participating in the study.

Parental Networks

The findings failed to confirm my original expectations regarding women's use of their parental support networks and their ability to adequately parent their children. Women's experiences with their parental networks expanded my original expectations regarding the relationship between the use of supportive parenting networks and adequate parenting. The study findings suggest that mother's mental representations of themselves as caregivers and their attachment relationships with their caregivers over time had an

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impact on their parenting practices. Mothers mental representations of themselves as parents were variable over time and seemed to intersect with their own childhood experiences with various caregivers in their extended family networks.

The majority of the mothers in this study tended to have mental representations of secure attachment relationships with their grandmothers and older siblings who cared for them during their childhood or who cared for their children during their adulthood. However, mothers' mental representations of their attachment relationships with their own mothers appeared to range between idealized and disorganized. Women's mental representations of their father tended to range from idealized to ambivalent. Given the variability of women's mental representations of themselves as caregivers and their attachment-related experiences across their life course, it appeared that, on average, women with helpful parental networks and secure mental representations of themselves as caregivers were more likely develop adequate parenting practices.

Sociocultural Environment

Women's experiences of their sociocultural environment confirmed and expanded my original expectations regarding the influence of environmental opportunities and risks on parenting practices. There was a great deal of variability in women's experiences of their sociocultural environment and access to resources across their life course. Generally speaking, however, it seemed that women's experiences of the sociocultural environment were inextricably linked with their social location as African American women living in poverty. Women navigated these intersections in diverse ways to provide for themselves and their children.

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Established mothers appeared to rely on their extended family networks, partners, and spouses more often as resources of support while younger mothers in the study tended to utilize human service providers more often and family and friends more sparingly. Both young and established mother's expressed concerns about living in violent neighborhoods, as well as negative perceptions of African Americans as experiences contributing to sociocultural barriers. Women experienced employment and educational opportunities across a spectrum that afforded them income through public assistance through full-time wages. However, being a single-mother was also identified as a barrier. In addition some established mothers shared interpersonal relationship dynamics related to interracial dual relationships with men who were the fathers of their children and also solicitors, drug dealers, and/or pimps in their lives. These relationship dynamics seemed to offer more challenges for mothers in their relationships with and parenting of their children. The original expectations, significant findings, and modified expectations are summarized in Tables 4.1.

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Table 4.1 Original and Modified Expectations

Original Expectations	Significant Findings	Modified Expectations
<p>General Expectations The parenting practices of African American mothers who are survivors of sexual mistreatment are influenced by interrelated factors including (a) their management of trauma (b) their use of supportive parenting networks, and (c) their experiences of the sociocultural environment</p>	<p>(1) Trauma and responses to it extend beyond sexual abuse (2) Parenting networks fluctuate (3) Economic resources are scarce</p>	<p>The parenting practices of African American mothers who are survivors of sexual mistreatment are influenced by (a) the ways in which women manage life events they experience as traumatic throughout their life course, (b) their ability to create supportive parenting networks and (c) their opportunities to access socioeconomic resources.</p>
<p>1. Trauma Management Women that adequately manage their trauma are likely to have adequate parenting practices. (a) Women who partially manage their trauma are likely to have mixed parenting practices. (b) Women who have unmanaged trauma are likely to have inadequate parenting practices.</p>	<p>(1) Adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies are used (2) Coping strategies can and often vary across the life course (3) Positive and negative meaning making occurred</p>	<p>Women that effectively balance prosocial and negative responses and meanings given to surviving life experiences perceived to be traumatic across the life course are more likely to develop adequate parenting practices.</p>
<p>2. Parenting Networks Women who have access to and use supportive parenting networks are likely to have adequate parenting practices. Women that have limited access to supportive parenting networks are likely to have mixed parenting practices. Women that have no access to supportive parenting networks are likely to have inadequate parenting practices.</p>	<p>(1) Parenting networks vary across the life course (2) Perceptions of self as a parent influence caregiving (3) Parental self perceptions vary across the life course</p>	<p>Women with helpful parenting networks and secure mental representations of themselves as caregivers and of their attachment relationships across the life course are more likely to develop adequate parenting practices.</p>
<p>3. Sociocultural Environment Women experiencing more environmental opportunities than risks are likely to have adequate parenting practices. Women who experience a balance of environmental opportunities and risks are likely to have mixed parenting practices. Women who experience more environmental stressors are more likely to have inadequate parenting practices.</p>	<p>(1) Environmental opportunities and barriers vary across the life course (2) Proactive responses to varying socioeconomic resources shift across the life course</p>	<p>Women with opportunities to access socioeconomic resources across the life course are more likely to effectively adapt to life experiences perceived to be traumatic to adequately parent.</p>

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Table 4.2 Summary of Major Findings

Major Findings

The parenting practices of African American mothers who are survivors of sexual mistreatment are influenced by the intersections of their (a) mental representations of themselves as caregivers and of their attachment relationships across their life course, (b) their trauma management experiences, (c) their utilization of supportive parenting networks, and (d) their accessibility to socioeconomic resources.

Trauma Management

Women experience trauma as complex across the life course related to the intersections of individual, family, community and societal stressors: (a) Protection of children, (b) Neglectful mothers, (c) child welfare, criminal justice system, (d) domestic violence, (e) Disclosure –victim-blaming, silencing; (e) Fatalism
Prosocial – Relocation, Positive meaning, Spirituality, Forgiveness, Treatment, Informal social supports, Participate in Research
Antisocial – Substance Abuse, Survival Sex, Selling Drugs

Parental Networks

Women’s use of parental networks was influenced by their availability to care for their children, their mental representations of themselves as caregivers, and their attachment-related relationships. Women’s mental representations of attachment-related relationships included:

- **Maternal Attachment – Idealized to disorganized**
- **Paternal Attachment – Idealized to Ambivalent**
- **Grandmother Attachment – Secure**
- **Sibling Attachments – Idealized to Secure**

The presence of intergenerational sexual abuse also influenced women’s use of extended family networks.

Socioeconomic Environment

Women’s experiences with socioeconomic opportunities and barriers varied across the life cycle and influenced their parenting practices as did the dual and interracial relationship dynamics associated with interlocking systems of oppression based on their race, gender, and class statuses. Women’s social location also appeared to influence their decisions to seek and/or utilize cross-cultural treatment services with White human service providers.

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**CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION**

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Several expected and unexpected findings emerged from the case study analysis related to mothers' experiences with and recovery from sexual victimization, other life traumas, their use of extended family parenting systems, and the sociocultural environments in which parental caregiving occurred. Some of the findings are consistent with previous literature, while other results expand and add to the current literature.

Trauma Management Expectations

A principle finding was women's identification of complex trauma experiences beyond sexual victimization across their lifespan. These experiences can be summarized to include intersectional hardships related to individual, community, and societal stressors across the lifespan including neglectful mothers, witnessing and experiencing domestic and community-based violence, and race, gender, and class-based oppression. Women's experiences with negative reactions and responses to disclosure of the experiences of sexual violence within their family networks provides new insights to the sexual violence disclosure literature which tends to identify family and friends as supportive (Ullman & Filipas, 2001) while acknowledging the silencing effects of cultural scripts regarding victim-blaming and protection of African American offenders (Tillman et al., 2010; Tyagi, 2001). While not direct, these findings suggest some correlation between women's trauma-related experiences, their use of parental networks, and their sociocultural environment. These results also reinforce the importance of examining and understanding the experiences of African American women through an ecological and/or intersectional lens to illuminate critical environmental influences for intervention and prevention purposes.

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Trauma Management and Parenting

The first dimension of the proposition that a woman's trauma management experiences influence the adequacy of her parenting practices was not confirmed by the findings. The new mothers in the study tended to use prosocial and adaptive coping strategies including relocation, prayer, spirituality, and forgiveness, participation in research, and limited informal use of supportive women within the shelter. Established mothers were tended to use maladaptive coping strategies such as using and selling drugs, involvement in domestic sex trafficking, to manage trauma-related experiences. However, some mothers also reported having never discussed or addressed trauma-related experiences associated with being sexually victimized, particularly when the offender was known. This is consistent with the disclosure literature (Tillman, et al. 2010; Millar, Stermac, & Addison, 2002). New mothers were also less likely to express problematic interactions with their children than established mothers, with a few exceptions. With younger children, newer mothers are in the earlier stages of parenting developmentally, which could also influence the adequacy of women's parenting behaviors. In addition, all of the new mothers (n=6) resided at a shelter during the time of the interview and therefore, were required to abide by shelter policies and supervision, which are strict around the care of children. Any of these factors could affect parent-child relationships in a variety of ways.

Established mothers' extensive use of extended family is related, in part, to their experiences of intermittent parenting associated with both prosocial and antisocial behaviors including current and past involvement in chemical dependency treatment, and

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mental health services, spirituality, forgiveness, prayer, and participation in research, as well as a history of selling drugs, engagement in domestic sex trafficking, and relapsed substance use. Established mothers were more likely to express problematic interactions with their children regarding their parenting efforts, reunification, and past parenting experiences making it difficult to assess the adequacy of their parenting skills currently.

The extensive long-term substance abuse experiences reported by established mothers is an unanticipated finding. However, the literature does suggest a high correlation between substance use and sexual assault among African American women (Curtis-Boles & Jenkins-Monroe, 2000). Additionally, several mothers (both new and established) had experiences of domestic violence, which research has shown can impact the parent-child relationship of mother's with a history of sexual mistreatment (Reid-Cunningham, 2009). These findings can be used to inform policy and program development specifically to meet the needs of African American women survivors of both sexual victimization and domestic violence with consideration to their disclosure and help-seeking patterns.

Parenting Networks

The second dimension of the proposition that women with access to supportive parenting networks are likely to have adequate parenting practices was not confirmed by the findings of the study. The original expectations does not account for mother's mental representations of themselves as caregivers, their children as recipients of their care, or the parent-child relationship. Mothers' mental representation of themselves as caregivers and of their attachment relationships with their caregivers across their life course tended to

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reflect insecure – ambivalent, preoccupied, and disorganized attachment experiences.

However, mother's more often had mental representations, with a couple exceptions, of secure attachments with their grandmothers, idealized attachment representations of their fathers, and disorganized attachment representations of their mothers. New mothers, particularly, but also, a few established mother, reflected active anger, and disparagement discourses toward their mothers but idealized representations of attachment experiences with their fathers. Fathers, some whom were also batterers, pimps, johns, and drug dealers, did, however, in some cases play significant roles in the care of children particularly during periods in which established mother's were engaged in chemical misuse, incarcerated, or involved in survival sex. Edleson and Williams (2007) recognized that very little research is available examining the parenting practices of men who batter. These findings can be helpful to inform policy and practice with respect to interventions for survivors and their children in relationship with men who are abusive or otherwise engage in socially stigmatizing and antisocial behaviors such as pimps, johns, and drug dealers.

These results add new perspectives to the literature on parent-child relationships of survivors of sexual violence and attachment relationships of survivors and their children within multiple attachment family structures. Existing research on multiple attachment figures has not typically focused specifically on survivors of sexual violence as a population and attachment literature that does include this population typically frames parent-child relationships within the nuclear-family construct. The implications for program development and treatment models with a relational focus and multiple traumas

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that include family members with secure attachment relationships, as allies for survivors may be helpful.

Two-thirds of the mothers in this study had a child, sibling, mother, or other relative who was also a victim of sexual mistreatment by someone in their extended family network, sometimes the same person that sexual molested the mother. Mothers typically did not disclose their experiences of abuse until later during adulthood, but those who did disclose as children were blamed and shamed by their mothers; and in-effect re-victimized. This finding can be explained through multiple perspectives identified in the current literature regarding individual, family, cultural, and societal barriers that contribute to an environment of silence surrounding sexual violence in the home particularly with the offender is known to the victim, as is the case with 85% of sexual violence reports by African American women according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2001).

Tillman and her colleagues (2010) offered several plausible explanations for conceptualizing this result within the sociohistorical context of African American women's lived experiences with sexual violence. The authors purported that women's decisions to disclose experiences of sexual mistreatment and hold offenders accountable may be inextricably linked with racism in the judicial system, individual, familial, community and societal victim-blaming, a high reliance on illicit drugs used to cope with PTSD symptoms, acceptance of racialized stereotypes regarding African American, acceptance of cultural mandates regarding the protection of African American male offenders who are also often framed as victims of racialized stereotypes, and prior negative interactions with social service systems.

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While all of these explanations hold some credence regarding these results, many women in this study offered a fatalistic perspective that nothing can be done to stop men who sexually harm women and children and that they did not disclose their experiences because they did not believe that anyone would believe them including their family and friends. Many intergenerational survivors in this study were also surprised to learn that their own children and other members of their extended family network were also victims of intrafamilial sexual violence. This finding suggests implications for the development of educational programs about sexual violence that do not require victims to out themselves in order to participate, particularly given the potential barriers to doing so.

Sociocultural Environment

The third dimension of the proposition that women who experience more environmental opportunities are likely to have adequate parenting practices was partially confirmed. Mother's discourses regarding the environments in which they lived and cared for their children reflect many more risks than opportunities including violent neighborhoods, domestic violence, inadequate education, unemployment, and an environment of drugs and alcohol. Several women reported how their substance abuse experiences affected their ability to stay continuously employed. Others reported dropping out of high school after they started using drugs. Several failed attempts at treatment and sobriety, with drugs and alcohol readily available in the neighborhood, also plagued some of the established mothers making it difficult to stay minimally employed and to adequately parent their children. Additionally, a few mothers who relied on pimps and johns to care for their children during their drug use struggled with the stigmatizing nature

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of these “romantic” relationships adding to the complexity of decision-making processes and trade-offs regarding co-parenting children. This finding adds new insights to the literature on parenting and parent-child relationships for survivors of sexual assault and may require helping professionals to reconstruct the parameters and definitions they use to define parenting. The role of pimps, johns, and drug dealers as sometimes nurturing, protective fathers is another unanticipated finding that is inconsistent with literature on the behaviors of men who batter and also parent their children (Edleson & Williams, 2007). This result has implications for practitioners and policy makers in assessing the role of these fathers in the treatment process and parent-child relationships for survivors of sexual violence.

Reflexivity Process

In this analysis I reflected how research reflexivity and professional use of self assisted in completing the study. I combined research and social work critical reflection practice paradigms to explore women’s motivation for participating in face-to-face interviews, to address methodological challenges during the implementation of the study, to understand and respond to the relational dynamics within the study, and to analyze and write the study results. My professional identities as a doctoral researcher and an experienced licensed independent social worker (LISW) converged with my personal identities as an older African American woman with direct experience of and recovery from sexual mistreatment. During the design, recruitment, and interviewing phases of the research process, I drew upon my multiple identities to respond to the methodological challenges and relational dynamics identified previously. More specifically, after the study

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was underway, I modified my methodology to account for recruitment challenges associated with the original design, to address communication discrepancies with recruited agencies, to adapt to the life experiences of participants, to understand women's motivation for participating in the study, and to assess and respond to relational dynamics between myself and study participants.

Analysis

Gilgun (2006) identified six critical points during which “we can account for our own reflexivity” (p. 215) when conducting research: (a) before and during the design phase, (b) during the implementation processes, (c) during the analysis of data, (d) during the writing of findings, (e) during the dissemination of findings, and (f) during the application of findings to practice, teaching, and other research. I describe how I used reflexive practices during the (a) design, (b) recruitment, (c) interviewing, (d) data analysis, and (e) writing of the study findings.

Reflexive Accounting During The Design Phase

Most research starts with an idea. A first step in practicing reflexivity for me was to explore the origins of the idea to understand the meaning Black women give to experiences of sexual mistreatment and how those experiences influence their parenting within extended family structures. Here I identify how, through reflexive analysis, I contextualized the literature about the topic within the context of my professional and personal experiences and how that process shaped the way I conceptualized and designed the study.

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First, I thought about underlying assumptions I held regarding what I might find in exploring the topic. For example, in my study, even though I was aware that women experience sexual mistreatment in a variety of ways, I made an underlying assumption that sexual mistreatment is experienced by women as traumatic. I also assumed that African American women might have experiences of other forms of trauma, including race-based and class-based trauma. Although I privileged sexual trauma in my study, it was important to recognize and leave space in the research design for women to discuss other forms of distress. These fundamental assumptions influenced what questions were included in my interview guide, how recruitment materials were constructed, and how I promoted the study within communities serving African American women.

My professional social work practice experiences influenced my research topic as well. I have worked directly in social services and child welfare for close to 10 years with women and children receiving program services for housing, chemical health treatment, domestic violence, and child welfare. African American women and children were disproportionately represented among these service users. As part of the intake process, many women disclosed experiences of sexual mistreatment. The majority did not receive formal services addressing their sexual victimization, but, instead, sought out or were mandated, through the criminal or child welfare courts, to seek services regarding issues with housing, addiction, child abuse and neglect charges, and/or criminal behaviors. The lack of attention to sexual trauma raised questions for me about the factors influencing African American women's decisions regarding disclosure and their help-seeking efforts related to experiences of sexual mistreatment.

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Practicing reflexivity, I considered how the historical context of Black women's experiences with various forms of trauma as evidenced in the literature (Collins, 2005; Logan, Denby, & Gibson, 2007; Pierce-Baker, 1998; Roberson, 2003; Rose, 2003; Tillman, Bryant-Davis, Smith, & Marks, 2010; Valandra, 2005; Washington, 2001) intersected with my own professional experiences. This context was particularly important in considering research with a population that has, as part of its history, involvement with victimization, exploitation, and other traumatizing experiences within the context of larger structural settings, as well as in their individual intimate spaces. I anticipated that one of the salient factors contextualizing Black women's experiences of sexual mistreatment might be stigmatizing racial stereotypes that perpetuate silence. It was important for me to understand how women experienced silence, how I experienced silences in my life, and how these experiences could be accounted for in the design of my study, potential interactions, and study findings. It was important to me that my interactions with women in the study during recruitment and data collection should not contribute to further silencing. Instead, I designed the study to privilege the voices of study participants as much as possible and, through reflexive analysis, attempted to amplify their voices throughout every phase of the research process. This emphasis on the importance of a personal voice influenced my decision to use first-person case narratives in the study and to invite study participants to co-create intervention strategies for addressing sexual mistreatment in African American communities.

As part of the research process, my beliefs, values, perceptions, life experiences, and social locations also influenced the design of the study. I had to ask myself, "How do I

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fit in? How do my life experiences shape the way I experience other African American survivors of sexual mistreatment?" I wrote down what I discovered about myself, so I could revisit it from time to time as new insights and experiences emerged for consideration in relation to my interactions with the study itself and study participants. Reflexive analysis helped me recognize my role as both apart from the individual experiences of study participants and yet a part of the shared experiences of African American women collectively. This clarity was essential in helping me position myself professionally as a researcher in the context of the study. I recognized that my own experiences with, and recovery from, sexual mistreatment would vary in some ways from those of potential study participants. However, our shared history as African American women and resilient survivors of intersecting forms of oppression, made it important to do everything ethically possible to co-create safe spaces in which women's voices could be heard honorably and authentically in an effort to break down the structural barriers that continue to perpetuate silence surrounding sexual violence. Therefore, in the spirit of action research which "demands some form of intervention" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p.5), I designed the study to give women an option to share their thoughts and feelings about culturally specific ways to address sexual violence within families and communities, hold offenders accountable, and play an active role in disseminating information from the study's findings about sexual violence prevention within African American communities. However, the IRB did not approve my dissemination plan arguing that it would breach women's confidentiality and that there was no way of ensuring that the women's participation in the dissemination plan would be truly voluntary. As an

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alternative, I included questions in the interview guide, approved by the IRB, to address these considerations. Appendix A includes participant's suggestions for addressing sexual violence prevention and intervention within African American communities.

Doctoral Researcher Challenges

As a beginning qualitative researcher, I was also faced with challenges in truly understanding what reflexivity means and how it was different from publicly "spilling my guts." With my eyes wide open and directed at myself and my role as part of the research process, I eventually became more at ease and able not merely to appreciate and embrace the complexity of practicing reflexivity prior to conducting research, but also to recognize its importance to the integrity and trustworthiness of the information gathered. I was inspired by an ethical responsibility to be as transparent and accountable to myself as possible regarding my presence in the research. As a result, I hoped that the voices of the study participants would resonate more fully throughout the research process.

I explored several themes related to my professional and personal life experiences, as well as the challenges of reflexive analysis. I recognized with increasing clarity the links between my life experiences and the research I wanted to conduct, but also confronted my lack of confidence and understanding of reflexive analysis. The connections between my personal life, social work practice experiences, and professional research interests were clearly the motivating force behind my decision to earn a PhD in social work. A more challenging concern was how to best articulate these connections in a coherent, integrative and critical voice that met the standards and goals of reflexivity in qualitative research.

CAN I GET A WITNESS? **Personal Life Experiences**

Another reflexivity challenge I faced concerned disclosing stigmatizing life experiences in a professional environment. The process of “coming out” (Finlay, 2002, p.544) or “coming clean” (Gilgun, 2006, p. 215) through reflexivity as part of the research process is consistent with social work’s code of ethics and the professional use of self in social work practice (NASW Code of Ethics, 1996). As a standard of competence and professional practice, social workers are expected to engage in personal reflection and self-correction, as well as to utilize supervision and consultation as part of their ongoing professional growth and development (CSWE, 2008). As a social work practitioner, I had more experience using self-disclosure sparingly and purposefully in practice. However, as a qualitative researcher, the boundaries were not as clear for me. I didn’t know how “out” I should be, under what circumstances, and for what purpose.

During a study I conducted in 2004, I made the decision to come out selectively as a recovering survivor of sexual mistreatment. The study explored the healing needs of prostituted African American women (Valandra, 2007). I disclosed parts of my personal and professional experiences with agency staff and gave them permission to share the information in discussing the study with potential participants. My intention for using self-disclosure in this deliberate manner was to position myself so that women could possibly see some reflection of themselves in me, in order to consider participating in the study. During the interviews, some of the participants from the 2004 study shared that having information about my personal and professional background was a key factor in their decision to participate in the study. I am

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encouraged by Finlay's (2002) assessment of the potential benefits of coming out through critical reflection:

Coming out through reflexive analysis is ultimately a political act. Done well, it has the potential to enliven, teach, and spur readers toward a more radical consciousness. Voicing the unspoken can empower both researcher and participant. As more researchers grasp the nettle, the research in the future can move in new, creative directions. Are we ready to embrace the challenge? (p. 544).

With continued support and direction from my advisor, I embraced the challenge and judiciously examined other themes such as love and forgiveness that are pertinent to the study I conducted.

The themes of love and forgiveness emerged for critical reflection when I considered how my own healing process might influence the study. Initially, my healing was somewhat stalled when therapists imposed on me, as a recipe for recovery, what I experienced as a 'disclosure-confrontation-forgiveness' formula. In essence, some therapists believed that my healing was conditioned on disclosing my experience, confronting, and forgiving the aggressor. Thus, I had some strong feelings about the therapy experience that needed to be scrutinized. I expected that there would likely be women in my study who loved the people or person that harmed them sexually, and some women who likely believed that their healing was conditional upon forgiving those who had harmed them, as well as those who had failed to protect them. I knew I needed to monitor my thoughts and feelings about these concepts in order to be present to women's truth about how they experienced the paradigms of love and forgiveness, if at all, in their

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own healing spaces, whatever those spaces may or may not look like. Unpacking this loaded topic through reflexive analysis was fitting. The process alerted me to my own potential of becoming a silencing factor for study participants through the imposition of my perspectives and opinions about the road to healing and recovery and the legitimacy and usefulness of certain healing modalities.

Reflexive Accounting During The Recruitment Phase

The use of reflexivity in positioning the researcher and addressing methodological changes in research is well documented in the literature (Butler, et .al, 2007; D’Cruz & Jones, 2010; Underwood, et al., 2010). D’Cruz and Jones (2010) recognized researcher positioning and subjectivity as important components of conducting theoretically grounded social work research with attention to the politics, ethics, and stakeholders of the research process. Additionally, the significance of staying open and responsive to the possibility of methodological change is touted as best practice in reflexive research literature (Hollyway & Todres, 2003; Riessman, 1994; Underwood, et .al, 2010). In this section, I illustrate how I used both researcher positioning and methodological shifting to gain access to study participants, and to adapt the study to reflect women’s parenting experiences.

Professional Positioning

Practicing reflexivity helped me shift from reacting in a panic, to eventually responding more thoughtfully with intention, and confidence to several unanticipated shifts in the research process. I attended to how I communicated with potential study participants and the larger public about my study. I revised my recruitment materials a few

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times to make them more understandable and accessible to potential participants. For example, my study flyer explicitly stated that the study was open to all family configurations. In addition, although I deliberately positioned myself as a “professional” and “expert” with agency staff, with study participants, I focused on positioning myself with demographics, including my age, race, gender, and life experiences. I also monitored other salient demographics, such as education, skin complexion, and social class, recognizing that these demographics could shape my interactions with potential recruitment sources and study participants.

My primary recruiting focus for the study was African American women in the general public. However, after receiving only one participant through public venues, I implemented the second recruitment strategy approved by the IRB. I contacted social service agencies beginning with programs with which I had past professional affiliations. Throughout the recruitment correspondence, I thought strategically and reflexively about the intersections of my professional identities as an assistant professor in social work, a licensed independent social worker (LISW), and my doctoral student status, and how other professionals might perceive those identities from a hierarchical or status standpoint. Therefore, in correspondence with agencies, after identifying myself as a doctoral student, I emphasized my professional status, licensing credentials, and extensive social work practice experience with vulnerable, albeit resilient populations.

I wanted agencies to understand that, if they responded affirmatively to my inquiry, they would be working with a mature, responsible researcher and practitioner who was sensitive to the humanity and dignity of their service users. In effect, I attempted to

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elevate my professional status over my student status in order to be perceived as a seasoned, responsible practitioner. I did not disclose any personal identifying information except gender and race on the flyer I attached to email correspondence. I wanted to imply a level of maturity associated with the longevity of my practice experience. I assumed agencies held social workers in a positive light, which is not necessarily the case. However, the assumption paid off and five of six agencies responded favorably to the invitation to participate in the study.

Methodological Shifts

The recruitment door to potential study participants opened when agencies agreed to participate in the research. In contrast, it in effect, closed when I attempted to recruit other members of the extended family system to participate in the study, including children over 10 –years of age. Originally, it was my hope to interview African American mothers and any of their children over 10 years old, as well as other key persons from whom mothers received emotional, physical, or parental support. I referred to these persons as support persons in my study and believed that multiple perspectives would contribute to a fuller picture of the parenting experiences of African American mothers. However, I could not recruit these support persons directly. They had to be informed of the study directly by mothers and they had to contact me if they were interested in participating. This process was approved by the IRB in order to minimize the risks to the welfare of support persons who were secondary to the purpose of the study.

I faced several unforeseen challenges trying to interview support persons. Some of the women participating in the study only had children less than 10 years of age, or had

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relocated to the area and, therefore, were without familial support. Only one woman agreed to let me interview her 10-year-old son. A few women agreed to tell their adult children and relatives about the study, but I never heard from those persons. Some women were ostracized from their family of origin after disclosing their experiences of sexual mistreatment at the hands of a family member. Others purposely did not look to their family and kin of origin for parenting support, but relied on non-blood related family members. The challenges I faced in recruiting support persons required “methodological flexibility” (Underwood, et al., 2010, p. 1586) to honor the voices and life experiences of the mothers in the study. Recognizing this reality, I informed my advisors of a need to consider a methodological change in the recruitment plan.

Two and a half weeks after the correspondence with my advisors regarding my inability to recruit support persons, I made a decision to change the protocol, not only out of respect for the study participants’ experiences, but also because of concerns about my growing empathy toward the mothers in the study. My judgment was compromised as women shared information with me about their family members and children. I questioned my ability to interview these extended family kin fairly, given this realization. Since I did not have access to co-interviewers, I thought it would have been unethical for me to interview the family members of study participants knowing that I was biased toward or against them based on what women shared previously.

Reflexivity is acknowledged as a tool to support qualitative researchers when a methodological shift is necessary to privilege the perspectives of study participants (Underwood et al., 2010). It was extremely important for me, in cultivating the researcher-

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research participant relationship, to respect the interpersonal relationships mothers had with their children and extended family, and how they wanted to engage them in the study (or not as the case may be), even if such respect meant the dissolution of one of the strengths of my research design. Critically reflecting on my growing biases towards some of these support persons who were unknown to me confirmed my decision to change the focus. Additionally, I made an ethical decision not to interview the child of the one mother in the study who agreed to allow me to interview her son. Within the previous six months, several professionals had interviewed him already after he disclosed that he witnessed his younger brother being sexually harmed by an older female family member. In my professional judgment as a social worker, he was too vulnerable to have one more adult stranger questioning him about a traumatic experience.

I made another methodological shift based upon the criteria for participation in the study. Mothers needed to be currently parenting children between the ages of 0 – 18. However, I discovered in the process of recruiting and interviewing mothers that many of them were currently parenting adult children who were in their late twenties, early and mid thirties, in some instances. Moreover, several of the mothers did not consistently parent their children throughout their lives, but were providing, what might be described as, “intermittent parenting” for a variety of reasons. My construct of “currently parenting” was different from the reality of mothers’ parenting experiences. After discussing these phenomena with my advisors, through email correspondence, I revised my protocol to cover a wider age range and definition of currently parenting. The IRB approved these modifications.

CAN I GET A WITNESS? **Working with Agency Staff**

Research on what motivates sexual assault survivors to volunteer for face-to-face interviews suggested that study participants perceive tangible (monetary compensation) and intangible (emotional, psychological) benefits for themselves, including a desire to help other survivors and to advance research about the topic of sexual assault (Campbell & Adams, 2009; Taylor, 2002). During the course of this study, some participants expressed motivations consistent with previous research regarding their reasons for volunteering for the study. Several of the women shared that they have told their stories countless times in chemical treatment programs, the court system, and with other mandatory and voluntary service providers. On the other hand, a few study participants acknowledged that they had never disclosed experiences of sexual mistreatment prior to volunteering for the study. These varied comments led me to speculate about what other motives may have resulted in women's participation in the study and whether they actually perceived their participation as voluntary or guided by the hierarchical relationships they had with agency staff in the programs in which the majority of women were receiving services. Seidman (2006) advised interviewers to avoid the use of third parties for gaining access to study participants if at all possible. He observed, "Third parties may be familiar with potential participants, but they can seldom do justice to the nature of someone else's project" (p.46). My use of third party agencies corroborates Seidman's observations. However, reflexive practice helped me frame my role as interviewer.

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The majority of the women in this study volunteered through the agency in which they received services. Their first communication about the study likely came from a staff member at the agency or from a woman who had already participated in the study. After about five interviews, I noticed some verbal patterns in the ways women were communicating about the study that led me to believe they may have received inaccurate information about the study's purpose, the eligibility criteria for participation, and the voluntary nature of the study.

Sometimes, near the end of an interview, a woman would state, "I'm glad I talked to you; my case worker thought it would be a good idea, " or "My case worker suggested I talk to you. She thought it would be helpful for me." Additionally, in a couple of instances, at the end of the interview, I would discover that women who did not identify as survivors of sexual mistreatment had nonetheless volunteered for the study. These puzzling experiences led me to wonder about women's motives for participating in the study, and to question what messages they were receiving about the study.

In my email correspondence with my advisors, I shared my suspicions that staff might be encouraging women to talk to me, possibly because of my status as a social worker, which I had shared in recruitment correspondence with agencies. I also suspected that my racial identity might be a motivating factor for staff to encourage women to participate in the study because many of the clients were African Americans while most of the staff was European Americans. I recognized that I could not confirm any of my suspicions without conversing explicitly with the staff. However, I chose not to do so. As a researcher, it might have been appropriate to discuss the staff's understanding of the

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study and how their understanding might influence women's decisions to participate in the study. However, my suspicions that there had been miscommunications about the study's main criteria came from my interpretation of staff members' comments to me that it was good for their service users to see me. I interpreted such comments to mean that it was good for their service users (i.e. other Black women) to see a professional Black woman. Furthermore, I was not personally comfortable engaging European American staff that I had minimal rapport with in a dialogue about my racial identity and professional status vis-à-vis their own. The stakes (access to prospective study participants) were too high to risk potential misunderstanding given the precarious and emotionally laden nature of my experiences with race and class relations in society. Additionally, I believed I could address the discrepancies through other less personally vulnerable methods.

Reflexively assessing these experiences compelled me to act out of an ethical obligation to accurately represent the study and myself. I wanted to ensure that women really were volunteering for the study and not feeling compelled to participate because someone in a position of authority over them was recommending it. Therefore, I changed my interview protocol to include a screening process to: (a) confirm that women met the study criteria, (b) assess whether they clearly understood that the study was voluntary, and (c) determine that they understood the purpose of the study. As a doctoral researcher and reflexivity analyst, I could appreciate the wisdom of my advisor who affirmed that recruitment can be challenging when the researcher intends one thing, staff give potential informants a different message, and informants interpret that message in yet another way

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altogether—none of which may be intended to manipulate or deceive participants about the study's purpose.

While the ethical issues loomed large in my mind with respect to misrepresentation of the study's purpose, its voluntary nature, and criteria for participation, it was also important for me to address the issue in the least disruptive way possible. I responded based on the social work ethic regarding privacy and confidentiality related to “imminent harm to a client or other identifiable person” (NASW Code of Ethics, 1996, p. 10). In assessing the interpersonal relationships between the staff person and the service user, the staff person and the researcher, and, finally, the service users and the researcher, I decided it was best to follow my new screening protocol with the service users and let them decide whether they would like to participate in the study after they were fully and accurately informed of its purpose, limitations, and benefits. I chose not to clarify the criteria for participation with agency staff. I believed that it was simpler to implement my new screening protocol than to spend costly time and effort arranging a session to instruct all of the staff how to introduce the study. Using the new screening process, I was more confident that women were participating voluntarily and fully informed of the study's purpose, benefits, and limitations.

Reflexive Accounting During the Interviewing Process

I illustrate how reflexivity and the professional use of self served me during the interviewing phase of the research process to address communication discrepancies that occurred, understand women's motivation for participating in the study, and respond to the relational dynamics that unfolded with study participants, my advisors, and agency

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staff. Engaging in reflexive practice, I had to pay close attention to power imbalances, insider/outsider statuses, and ethical standards of practice.

Testimonials and Witnessing

Reflexivity and the professional use of self served me also during discussions with the women. The act of giving voice to one's trials and tribulations in life through narrative testimony and witnessing is historically rooted in the context of the African diaspora and offers Black women, who have experienced various forms of silencing, a method to "engage in oppositional public talk" (Taylor, 2002, p.150) and reveal a discourse of resistance and resilience (Etter-Lewis, 1993), as well as grief and loss. The language and method of dialoguing through testifying and witnessing is congruent with a Black/womanist epistemology and African American women's ways of knowing (Collins, 2000; Taylor, 2002). Many of the mothers in this study employed a narrative style of storytelling in line with the oppositional speech, talking back, testifying, and/or bearing witness that Black feminist scholars describe (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989; Taylor, 2002).

In the context of my study, women testified often times by speaking in a passionate and emotional tone as they repeated verbatim dialogues and experiences that had occurred in the past as if they were happening in the moment. As they spoke, I, the listener/researcher, became a witness to their stories of pain, sorrow, resistance, recovery, and transformation. Reflexively reviewing my field notes, I recognized that I had experienced the feeling of being seamlessly transported in and out of women's narratives as they shifted at times between talking about the past, to embodying and reliving aspects

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of their past. As I attended to the shifts in their affect, word usage, and body language, I became a witness to their testimony.

Staying present to this process as it unfolded was like agreeing to be led, mind, body, and spirit, wherever the testifier wanted to take me. Some women appeared to use this form of “embodied retelling” to express their emotional burdens and experiences. Many confirmed this hunch, when they told me, at the end of the interview, that they found talking about their experiences helpful. Furthermore, some women who disclosed that they had never talked about their sexual maltreatment before said that they were glad of their decision to participate in the study and were comfortable talking to me. In a qualitative study of African American women’s experiences with intimate partner male violence, Taylor (2002) reported that several study participants experienced the interviewing process as healing and were motivated to participate in research to help others through their personal testimonials. Taylor recognized testimony as “self-healing, affirmation, and empowerment” (p.154) for African American women.

The dialogical process was not necessarily straightforward. I did not know when a dialogue would shift into a testimonial or where I would be led once a participant began to testify about her experiences. However, I did know that it was important that I trust the process and follow the testifier’s lead. Taylor (2002) recognized testimony and bearing witness as dialogical methods that “shift the focus and power from the researcher to the individual and allows her to speak to the collective and in a collective mode” (Taylor, 2002, p.156). According to Tarpley (1995), the quality of the data collected can be enhanced when this shift occurs in the interviewing process.

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Reflexive practice, however, meant that I also attend to the process, not just the quality of the data collected. Because I used face-to-face interviews to collect data, I deliberately engaged study participants in a reflexive dialogue about the research process. Sometimes I actively inquired how the interviewing process was going. At other times, study participants voluntarily shared feedback with me. Additionally, if I observed visual signs that a participant might be experiencing some discomfort (crying, agitation, sudden shifts in body language, eye contact, tonal quality), I engaged the participant in reflective dialogue as a safety measure. Therefore, reflexive practice during the interviewing process was synonymous with ethical, responsible, and culturally responsive research.

Collusion and Exploitation

Whereas the dialogical process can be therapeutic, it can equally lend itself to collusion and exploitation. Seidman (2006) cautioned interviewers to be careful not to turn the interview into a “vehicle for the interviewer’s agenda” (p.84) when attempting to gain clarity from study participants about their story. He frames techniques for qualitative interviewing from the standpoint of the interviewer in the driver’s seat with power and agency throughout the interviewing process. On a couple of occasions during interviews for my study, I believed women attempted to use the interview to advance their own agenda. I described the experience in my field notes as being “verbally seduced.” Reflecting on these experiences after the interview, I wondered if I had somehow engaged in something akin to “researcher voyeurism.” In one instance, a mother switched from responding concisely to my questions to elaborating more with a kind of bravado and boastfulness in her tone and body language that became more animated and exaggerated

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as her story grew. For example, she started sharing a story of victimization that quickly grew into a story in which she became the aggressor bragging about her ability to subjugate others. That story morphed into an account about a prominent person she met and then she segued into a different story in which she was accomplishing some unimaginable magnificent feat. Thus, the stories became more extravagant and she continued to portray herself as larger than life. This seemed like a shift from testifying to exploiting the research space.

Reflecting on the experience, I wondered whether the study participant was trying to impress me and whether I should have followed her down the path she was leading me or stuck to my interview guide. The resulting three-hour interview was the longest interview I conducted during the entire study. During the interview, even though I continued to ask clarifying questions and go back to my interview guide, the study participant's responses continued to be long animated monologues unrelated to the question. I believe I made the wrong choice in deciding to follow her down the path she chose. In retrospect, I wondered if she recognized the incongruence between my respectful engaging nonverbal and verbal communication and my increasing agitation. In effect, she had succeeded in "hooking" me with her story and I believe she knew it.

As a researcher, I realized that there is a fine line between the processes of testimony/witnessing and collusion/exploitation. Through the use of critical reflection, I realized that the interviewing process at times was a healing space where I experienced my body as expansive and my heart open as I witnessed women's body language aligned and present with their affect and the content of their testimony. Emotionally, the exchange was

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congruent and synchronistic. At other times I became annoyed and contracted in the space as if a psychic battle, perhaps, was going on between the study participant and me. It was as if we had started the interview on the same page, but the participant had turned the page and I struggled with whether to turn it back or not. The space was like a tug of war or what Seidman (2006) referred to as a power struggle. He encouraged qualitative interviewers to avoid power struggles about the focus of the interview by offering enough guidance to help the participant respect the structure and purpose of the interview. In this instance, I believe I also needed the guidance, not merely the study participant.

Turning Off The Tape-Recorder

Reflexivity and the professional use of self helped me embrace the complexity of women as simultaneously resilient, vulnerable, and active co-agents in the construction of their life narratives. Another way I witnessed women's agency during this study was after I turned the audiotape off. Seidman (2006) identified many benefits to tape-recording study participant interviews such as the assurance that their words will be treated responsibly. While I witnessed some women in the study paying particular attention to the tape-recorder to ensure that it was picking up their every word, others purposely waited until I turned the recorder off before sharing specific information, or asking me a question, as if they did not want certain things "on the record."

After I turned off the tape-recorder women would seek advice, ask me about resources, or otherwise negotiate "benefits" beyond the \$10.00 and CD (Valandra, 2002) I offered as a token of appreciation for their participation in the study. It was as if the women in this study recognized the value in their stories and wanted to "barter" with me

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on their terms. For example, at the end of the first interview, one study participant was in tears, grappling with her father's silence regarding her son's molestation by a female cousin, and she asked me if I thought she should forgive her father. In response, I asked her some reflective questions about her beliefs and values and encouraged her to think about what the concept of forgiveness means to her and to use her inner knowing as a guide in what to do regarding her father. In this instance of negotiating relational dynamics in the interview, the study participant sought my expertise as a social worker, and I was guided in my response to her by the professional use of self in social work that supports client empowerment through self-determination and the paradigm of the client as expert (Miley, O'Melia, & DuBois, 2011). I was grateful that I had explored the concept of forgiveness through reflexive analysis many years ago. The reflexive process and my social work practice experience helped me respond to the participant without imposing my perspective on her reality. Being able to reflect in action, I continued to privilege the power of the study participant to explore and embrace her own construct of forgiveness as a guide to action in her life.

At the end of another interview, when the study participant had checked to make sure I had turned off the tape-recorder, she asked me if I was aware of any resources she could access for furniture because she was moving out of the shelter into her own apartment soon. Again, I interpreted the question not only from my perspective as a researcher, but through my lens as a social worker. The timing of the question after the formal interview, as well as its nature, suggested that the study participant was ascribing a helping professional role to me. Like a good social work broker, I obliged her request by

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providing her the names of resources in the area. This study participant embodied an approach that suggested reciprocity. All these examples of “bartering” expanded my thinking about the ways women in the study negotiated space and their agency, within the context of the interview, to give me what I wanted and to get what they needed or wanted from the study. That these negotiations occurred at the end of the formal interview suggested that women respected my role as a researcher and the structure and purpose of the interview; yet, they also ascribed a helping professional role to me.

Reflexive Accounting During The Analysis and Writing

One of the hallmarks of good qualitative research is recognizing the tentative and subjective nature of analysis itself (Finlay, 2002; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Patton, 2002). Verbatim transcripts, field notes, and a personal journal served as tools supporting reflexivity during the analysis phase of the study. I converted verbatim transcripts into first person case narratives for each study participant. I continually reflected on how to best represent the voices of African American families in ways that maximized their cultural truths. I paid close attention to linguistic patterns in my decision to represent participants’ voices with direct quotes versus paraphrasing. For example, a woman might refer to a relative as her granddad or grand pappy and it was important for me to use her terms as opposed to grandfather or grandpa. Vygotsky’s (1987) wisdom that a participant’s consciousness is reflected in her words served me in this respect.

Moreover, I deliberately reflected on such questions as, “Whose stories are represented? Whose voices are missing? In what ways did my presence influence the participants’ responses?”

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These questions informed me about how the interpersonal nature of interviewing might shape my analysis. While it is next to impossible to find answers to these reflective questions, raising them, journaling about them, and using field notes and transcripts to account for my interpretations represented my efforts to stay intentional, conscious, and transparent in amplifying and privileging the voices of study participants as authentically as was possible during the analysis phase of the research. These efforts also supported the trustworthiness and credibility of the study (Patton, 2002).

Maintaining reflexive practice throughout the data analysis and writing of study results was especially difficult for me as a researcher. My study involved testing expectations and was deeply anchored in a multidimensional theoretical framework that dictated attention to specific sensitizing concepts stemming from the theories guiding the study design. Furthermore, my use of an analytical approach to case study research that I had a limited understanding of and had never used before compounded the challenge of reflexive analysis. It was therefore necessary to engage in reflexive dialogue with one of my advisors and to code a transcript with her as part of an effort to keep my interpretations grounded in what women said and how they said it.

Field notes also served as a reflexive tool during the analysis stage. When analyzing a woman's narrative, I read and reread my field notes, which had been written immediately after each interview, in addition to what was said in the transcript. I paid particular attention to observations about women's nonverbal facial expressions, body language and tone as a way to keep how women expressed themselves present in my mind during the analysis. I wanted to reflect on not only women's consciousness, but also the

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spirit of their perspectives and experiences in the analysis and writing of their stories.

Similarly, recognizing fully that my observations were a subjective interpretation, I also used my journal notes, which were written close to the time of the actual interview, to reflect on how I was feeling and what I was thinking right after an interview. Reflexively paying attention to my thoughts and feelings during the analysis and writing of findings helped me account for and minimize my subjective judgments when analyzing a transcript. Following this reflexive practice was not always easy. At times, I was tempted to abandon the continual habit I had developed of consciously evaluating my subjective responses.

During the analysis and writing of findings phase of my research, I was inundated with data and overwhelmed by the analysis process. I wanted to shut down the internal dialogue, put away my previously written field notes and journal, and stop scrutinizing the research process and my role in it. I wanted to simply focus on reporting the “facts” without consideration of my part in constructing them. Gilgun (2010) offered that qualitative researchers would serve the best interests of research participants and enhance the authenticity of findings by continually engaging in a process of writing, reflecting, and discussing, among other things, “the nature and quality of the data, and how they will present findings” (p.3). Thus, during this phase of the research process, reading, writing, reflecting, and discussing became my reflexive routine. To help me stay on the track of reflexive practice during this phase of the research, I constantly revisited the original purpose for conducting the study in the first place and the commitments I articulated in the reflexivity statements I wrote several years ago and rewrote periodically, prior to actually

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implementing the study. Other challenges included my need, as a doctoral student, to finish my dissertation as soon as possible, as well as the internal pressure I experienced to demonstrate that I could effectively utilize the analytical tool required by my advisor. Reflexivity helped me “provide an open venue for the perspectives of informants to blossom” (Gilgun, 2010, p. 3).

Reflexive research and the professional use of self offer a deliberate and dynamic method of conducting responsive ethical research. Although challenging, practicing reflexivity to consciously acknowledge and reflect upon the influence of the researcher’s personal and professional perspectives can help me maintain methodological flexibility. In this study, the reflexive process shed light on study participants’ motivations for engaging in discussions about potentially stigmatizing and emotionally laden topics, and shaped how they participated in the research process. As a researcher, this reflexive approach to qualitative inquiry helped me hold myself accountable to standards of ethical practice, as well as pay attention to how I participated in the research process. Acknowledging the researcher’s social demographics and its influence on the research process can illuminate the power dynamics and help social work researchers deliberately co-create research spaces with study participants. Additionally, it is important to understand that the production of knowledge unfolds within a complex tapestry of players and stakeholders, and that it is shaped by relational dynamics throughout the research process from its conception to the writing and dissemination of findings.

Limitations and Future Reflexive Research

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A limitation of this analysis of reflexivity is its exclusion of the reflective experiences of study participants, agency staff, and my advisors. Each of these stakeholders influenced the research process with respect to power balances and interpersonal dynamics emerging throughout the study. Furthermore, I did not explore with my advisors the power dynamics inherent in the doctoral process, which, given that the original study was conducted in partial fulfillment of my PhD requirements, significantly shaped the study design, implementation and analysis. I recognized my advisors as stakeholders in the research with much more expertise and authority than I have within the context of the graduate academy. At times, my experiences with these power differentials limited my ability to hear our discussions as negotiable dialogues. Instead, I experienced our conversations as mandates and this sometimes eroded my confidence in trusting my own embodied knowledge, experiences, and observations while in the field. At other times, I experienced my advisors' expertise and direction as supportive and a source of confidence in my ability to implement various aspects of the study. Additionally, this reflexivity assessment does not include an analysis of my social statuses vis-à-vis that of my advisors, and how our subjective statuses in relation to race, class, and age influenced the research process and this reflexivity analysis.

Future research on reflexivity in qualitative inquiry should attend to relational dynamics among various research stakeholders and the nature of data. Interpersonal relationships between faculty and students in doctoral programs can benefit from critical reflection of how power relations can shape not only the research process for doctoral students and study participants, but, ultimately, impact research findings. Moreover, for

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future reflexive research it would be beneficial to structure the practice of reflexivity such that perceptions and experiences of research participants and agency staff can be included.

With respect to the data used for the reflexivity analysis, coding field notes and correspondence with advisors and other colleagues can improve the credibility of the analysis and results. For an outline of tips and guidelines that researchers may find helpful to consider when engaging in culturally responsible reflexive research with vulnerable albeit resilient populations see Valandra (2012).

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**CHAPTER VI:
PRACTICE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

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Overview

The African American women's narratives from this study have relevance for social work practice, child welfare policy, and research although the findings are open-ended and subject to revision as are common with case study research (Gilgun, 1994). The scope of my discussion regarding the findings implications is segmented into implications regarding women's experiences with trauma management, parental networks, and socioeconomic resources. Within the dimension of trauma management, I focus on practice and policy implications in relation to results associated with: (a) mental health and treatment models, (b) disclosure-revictimization, (c) help-seeking behaviors, (d) positive meaning and coping strategies, and (e) negative coping strategies. In the parenting network dimension of findings, I discuss: (a) extended family networks, (b) fathers, and (c) intergenerational sexual abuse. The sociocultural environment includes implications for community empowerment and the section ends with some critical policy questions for social work practitioners and policy advocates to consider.

Trauma Management

Women in this study experienced trauma as a complex process instead of a single event related to a single incident. Social workers should, thus, consider it important in developing culturally responsive interventions, to construct trauma-recovery programs and policies similarly to the ways women experience trauma. Additionally, for some women, trauma-related experiences extended beyond sexual mistreatment and treatment programs might benefit from placing trauma-related experiences and recovery within a cultural context that recognizes the intersections of race, gender, and class barriers that influence

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how African American women respond to disclosure, help-seeking, and interventions

(Tillman, et .al, 2010).

Mental health prevention and treatment models should focus beyond individual pathology to include structural and environmental barriers that pose threats to women's psychological, emotional, and social well being with an emphasis on strengths, capacity building, and empowerment. Culturally specific clinical and mental health treatment models can be found in the literature (e.g. Denby (2007), McNair & Neville, 1996; Rhodes & Johnson, 1997; Tillman et .al, 2010).

Mother's trauma-related experiences influenced their parenting practices directly and indirectly. Two-thirds of the mother's reported feelings of being overprotective of their children as a result of their own sexual victimization. Research suggests that traumatized parents may have a difficult time distinguishing real from perceived danger making it much more difficult to adequately guide the safety of their children (Lieberman, 2007). These findings suggest a need for what scholars define as "relationship-based interventions for children of sexual assault survivors" (Reid-Cunningham, 2009, p. 930). Within the context of this study intergenerational family relationship models are relevant for consideration by practitioners in supporting African American mothers who are survivors of sexual assault in protecting their children. The AIS model (Waites, 2009) can be employed as a useful assessment tool to examine protective and risk factors within the mother's parenting network, and to develop intergenerational interventions to strength the child's parenting network as a protective factor.

Disclosure - Revictimization

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Women's experiences with negative responses and victim-blaming associated with disclosure to informal family and friends, while not surprising within the larger sociohistorical and womanist/black feminist frameworks, is inconsistent with some research that identifies informal networks as supports for survivors (Golding, et al., 1989; Ullman, 1996). This result represents an important finding for service providers in creating parenting programs that provide skills to help parents appropriately respond to and support sexual abuse disclosures by their children within the extended family network as well as programming that directly challenges rape myths and stereotypes. Barriers to disclosure in this study included women's fear of not being believed and beliefs that nothing could be done to stop the abuse. These disempowering beliefs suggest the need for empowerment and education-based interventions are critical to support survivors in speaking out about their victimization. Additionally, social workers should consider the possibility of providing sexual trauma-related education as a matter of course with in conjunction with other related services such as chemical dependency treatment to recognize the likelihood that non-disclosure is more probable when the sex offender is known and an African American man, the assault happens in the home, and the victim is of lower socio-cultural economic and social status.

Help-Seeking Behaviors

The majority of the women in this study delayed seeking sexual-trauma-related recovery services, in many cases, for several years. This finding is consistent with research on assault-specific, demographic, and cultural and ethnic factors affecting African American women's reactions and responses to sexual victimization (McNair &

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Neville, 1996; Millar, Stermac, & Addison, 2002; Neville & Pugh, 1997; Wyatt, 1992; Tillman, 2010). Ullman (1996) noted that African American women who are survivors of childhood sexual victimization are less likely to disclose adult victimization, seek treatment, and have higher trauma-related symptoms. Women in this study were more likely to use natural support systems than formal social service, if they sought sexual trauma-related support at all, and the majority did not. Social worker efforts to breakdown barriers that result in silencing of survivor's efforts to disclose their experiences and seek recovery services need to be proactive, culturally sensitive, and ongoing. Education, outreach, and policy advocacy at all levels of practice is essential in achieving this goal. Strategies offered by women participating in this study (see Appendix A) are relevant in breaking the silence and supporting families in seeking recovery services. They include efforts such as, holding fun, educational community forums that include food and drinks (nonalcoholic) to teach people what sexual violence can look like for each individual, organizing a speaker's bureau for African American survivors who feel comfortable talking about their experiences to add credibility to other outreach efforts, offering community-based, age-appropriate programs about sexual abuse for children, youth, and adults, and recognizing that in some instances, fatalistic perceptions that nothing can be done to stop sexual violence or reduce barriers to disclosure are also a part of some survivors' reality.

Additionally, it is important to challenge cultural-mandates and race-based stereotypes that perpetuate silence in African-American communities and to work collaboratively with community stakeholders to develop ongoing strategies addressing

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sexual violence. Tillman (2010), and her colleagues outline several culturally specific collaborative methods for empowering African American communities in reducing barriers as well as social service, law enforcement, and health care professionals.

Positive Meaning Making and Coping Strategies

Consistent with a strength-based, empowerment approach to practice, social workers can benefit from broadening their tools for intervention to include both traditional and non-traditional mechanisms for positively coping with the trauma and aftermath of sexual violence as well as prevention considerations. Wright, Crawford, and Sebastian (2004) found that positive adjustment trauma-related experiences support improved relationships with others, spiritual growth, and improved parenting skills. The narratives of women in this study suggest that social workers consider relocation as a coping strategy for survivors escaping abusive environments. Women choosing this method of trauma-relief may need support and assistance in creating a new support system for themselves and in parenting their children effectively in the new environment. Again, relational models of care with a focus on the parent-child interpersonal functioning would be important.

Other positive healing modalities that social workers might consider as potentially relevant for African American women include, spirituality, expressions of forgiveness and no forgiveness, finding a greater purpose for their experiences of sexual abuse and other trauma-related experiences, and participation in outreach efforts to raise awareness about sexual violence in African American communities, as well as the development of culturally relevant education and treatment programs specifically designed for active drug

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using mothers, mother-daughter groups, father-daughter groups for nonviolent father's sporadically involved in their adult children's lives. Social workers would benefit from framing African American survivors as active agents who see themselves as resources in preventing future sexual violence in their communities whenever possible.

Additionally, for some women participation in research may be a viable healing modality. Consistent with previous research (Taylor, 2002), many women shared the benefits they experienced from talking to me in the context of the research study. Additionally, funding research that benefits African American women and supporting their participation in such research can improve social worker's and other helping professionals design culturally responsive programs to meet women's needs.

Negative Coping Strategies

Consistent with the literature on the intersectional vulnerabilities of sexual victimization, substance abuse, poverty, and criminality, many African American women in this study were at risk for becoming substance abusers at an early age associated with environmental factors such as domestic and community violence, childhood sexual abuse, poverty, and race – and gender-based oppression (Curtis-Boles & Jenkins-Monroe, 2000; Rhodes & Johnson, 1997). For some women, substance use was an antecedent to experiences of sexual mistreatment and a way of coping with environmental risk factors while for others, the use of alcohol and drugs was habitually to deal with the emotional and psychological pain of the sexual victimization. Mothers who relied on drugs were extensively absent from the lives of their children and relied much more heavily on their extended family systems for support in child rearing, which meant, in some cases,

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exposing their children to intrafamilial sexual abuse (Leifer, et .al, 2004). An appropriate intervention approach for social workers to consider when exploring culturally responsive treatment and intervention models for these mothers is Bent-Goodley's (2009) Black Experience-Based Social Work (BEBSW) perspective. This model draws upon the strengths and adaptive capacities that African Americans relied upon historically in identifying, defining, and addressing individual, familial, and social and community trauma-related issues and problems. As an intervention, the BEBSW perspective can help African American mothers who have used drugs and alcohol extensively to mask their pain utilize culturally-responsive concepts of "moaning, mourning, and morning" (p.262) as culturally-responsive assessment tools understand their individual experiences of separation and loss within a larger collective context of cultural influences (Bent-Goodley).

Parenting Networks

The Extended Family Network

It is a significant finding that many of the women in this study, reared in extended family structures simultaneously had caregivers that were attentive and nurturing (secure attachment) and others that were neglectful and dismissive (insecure/dismissive attachment). This finding may help social workers assess the degree to which secure attachment relationships may serve as a buffer in moderating the effects of the insecure attachments early in a child's life and across the life course. Additionally, these narratives suggest social workers consider the possibility of assessing parent-child-family attachment relationships across the life course as oppose to only during early childhood in predicting

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the likelihood of intergenerational abuse. Longitudinal studies are relevant in gathering empirical evidence to this effect.

Additionally, understanding prominent features, structures and functions of the extended family and kinship network systems can help social workers to partner more effectively with family members to assess family strengths, needs, and opportunities for cultural-responsive interventions and prevention strategies (Waites, 2009). The Afrocentric Intergenerational Solidarity (AIS) perspective offers social workers a comprehensive and thorough framework for understanding and assessing extended family structures and their viability as protective or risk factors for children with a maternal history of sexual mistreatment. This perspective provides a systematic way for practitioners to examine the strengths and challenges of intergenerational dynamics in relation to functional and normative roles within the extended family, how the values, beliefs, and traditions practiced within the family system support and hinder the development of appropriate boundaries and prosocial behaviors of family members, and the proximity of family members to each other which bear upon the accessibility of family members to one another. The AIS perspective can also help social workers identify “safe” persons within the extended family that a child may feel close to and can look to for support. Actively engaging grandmothers as allies in supporting children at risk for sexual harm within the extended family may also prove beneficial.

Fathers

In addition to the AIS assessment tool, social workers are strongly advised to thoroughly assess the role of violent father’s actively involved in parenting. Within the

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context of domestic violence treatment models, Groves, Van Horn, and Lieberman (2007)

noted that father's can be present in the lives of their children symbolically, emotionally, and at times physically and given this reality, an ongoing assessment of safety parameters should be conducted in collaboration with mothers. The author's outline several key questions for deciding on fathers' involvement that can be adapted in work with survivors of sexual abuse and their families.

Intergenerational Sexual Abuse

The finding that five of the mothers in the study had children who experienced sexual molestation during their childhood is consistent with the literature on intergenerational sexual abuse generally (Leifer, et .al, 2004; McCloskey & Bailey, 2000, Plummer & Eastin, 2007). With the exception of one case, all of the mothers were relying on the parental support of their extended family network at the time the child was abused and in all five cases the mothers in this study believed their children when the sexual victimization was disclosed. In three cases disclosure occurred during the time of the abuse and in two cases during adulthood. Contextual factors including teenage pregnancy, incarceration, divorce, and drug use influenced mothers' reliance on extended family networks for support. These findings stress the importance for social workers to collaborate with African American mothers *and* their network of support in conducting intergenerational child safety assessments within the parenting networks to explicitly identify persons within the parental network who may pose a risk to children and those who may serve as protective factors. In fact, teaching mother's how to conduct an intergenerational family assessment and recognize the risk factors for behaviors that can

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place children at risk for sexual abuse within her parenting network an empowering approach for social workers to consider.

Eight women in the study also had a family member come out as a survivor of sexual assault at the hands of an extended family member reinforcing the need for sexual abuse screening by within the extended family network when a child's welfare is assessed.

Sociocultural Environment

Community Empowerment

Social workers can benefit from using asset mapping (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) and capacity building (Gamble & Hoff, 2005) models and strategies for engaging community stakeholders in assessing the structural barriers in neighborhoods with limited economic, social, and political resources. These strength-based, community empowerment approaches are essential in identifying community strengths and resources that can be harnessed in addressing community-based barriers, as defined by the members that reside in such spaces. It is also important for social workers to continue their efforts to end systemic forms of oppression including racism, sexism, ageism, and classism as these structural barriers significantly influence African American survivors of sexual mistreatment, heightening their exposure and vulnerability to sexual violence, and hindering their efforts to disclose their experiences, and access support through formal services, all of which impact their ability to prevent abuse in the next generation in conjunction with their families, partners, and community.

Policy Considerations

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Several relevant questions can help social workers to critically examine appropriate culturally responsible policies for addressing structural barriers affecting African American survivors of sexual violence. The questions below target policies intended to support intervention and prevention efforts at the individual, familial, community, and societal levels of practice and policy advocacy and development:

- What structural changes can be made over time in society, law enforcement, and the medical and social service delivery systems to transform cultural messages regarding gender, race, class, sexual orientation-based socialization practices and stereotypes that perpetuate silencing of some sexual mistreatment survivors and the privileging of others?
- What are culturally responsible ways for sexual abuse survivors to receive pertinent services and information without necessarily coming out as survivors?
- What ways can individuals, parents, communities, and social service professionals gain skills to respond appropriately if a survivor decides to disclose experiences of sexual victimization by someone known to the survivor?
- What culturally responsive models are available to help adult and children identify potentially safe individuals with whom they can consider risking disclosure for help seeking purposes?
- What are culturally responsive ways of building allies and collaborations within African American communities to hold African American offenders accountable so that survivors do not have to risk doing so?

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**CHAPTER VII:
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

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Limitations

Several limitations in this study warrant attention. The limitations I discuss relate to the study population and methods associated with interviewing, data analysis, and the use of assessment tools and protocols.

A significant limitation of the study is the homogeneity of the study participants. The study participants fell into primarily two categories, young mothers experiencing homelessness and older low-income mothers in recovery for substance abuse and use in prostitution. The findings of this study may not be applicable to all African American mother's who are survivors of sexual mistreatment or mothers representing the socioeconomic status and life experiences reflected by these study participants. However, many of the findings of this study were consistent with and support previous research on coping strategies, meaning making, and trauma recovery for survivors of sexual violence and African American women specifically.

Mothers who participated in this study were interviewed only once. Without the opportunity to clarify or follow up with them beyond the initial interview, the data I collected are more susceptible to my misinterpretation. I had no opportunity to talk with them in depth to clarify or follow up because of the instability of their living situation. My use of verbatim transcripts, first person narratives, and field notes in analyzing women's narratives hopefully helped mitigate my misrepresentation of their stories. I wrote field notes immediately after each interview and included both verbal and nonverbal content I observed during each interview. Having other researchers involved in the study analysis and member checking data would have enhanced the study's validity (Gilgun, 1994).

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Two of the theoretical frameworks I used in this analysis are worthy of mention in terms of their limitations. The AIS perspective is a strengths-based practice model designed specifically for application with African American intergenerational family structures. Its full practice application has not been widely tested (Waites, 2009) and to my knowledge, until now, it has never been used as an analytical tool in the context of research. As a research tool, the model can benefit from the development of a measurement scale of the type and degree or level of cohesion expressed by study participants. However, given its relevance as a culturally responsive model designed to reflect the strengths and challenges of intergenerational family dynamics in extended family structures, it was a very appropriate model to use in this study. Additionally thinking of intergenerational relationships along a continuum including measures of cohesion, conflict, and ambivalence may be more appropriate to understand the changing dynamics (positive and negative) occurring in intergenerational relationships (Luscher, 2011).

Furthermore, the AAI protocol was designed to assess adult mental representations of attachment relationships with their parents. Thus the interview tool was designed based on a nuclear heterosexual family model construct. Extensive training is required to administer, code, and interpret the results of AAI. I was not formally trained to administer the AAI as strongly suggested by Main and her colleagues (1988). Therefore I relied heavily on the scholarship of Hesse (2008) to understand the protocol and the ways in which AAI transcripts are coded, analyzed and classified. Additionally, although I modified the AAI by substituting the word “caregiver” for “parents” to assess women’s

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mental representations of multiple attachment-related experiences, I did not modify the method of coding, analyzing or classifying the results.

Future Research

Future research is needed to explore the perspectives and experiences of children, fathers, and extended family members in families with experiences of sexual mistreatment. Additionally, future research should include more diverse African American populations such as middle-class families, males, and individuals and families from the general public. Methodologically, modifying the AAI protocol, coding, and classification system to assess mental representations of adults parented in multiple caregiving settings could be beneficial.

Research is also needed to understand the multiplicity of African American mother's experiences of trauma-related experiences and its impact on parenting practices, and intergenerational caregiver relationships. Relationship-based intervention programming and policies are needed to meet the familial needs of African American women who are survivors and raise their children in extended family structures. That a significant number of women in this study appeared to internalize sexual victimization myths suggests the need for research to understand how internalized sexual violence stereotypes influence healing and recovery as well as parenting and parent-child-family relationships. That some women in the study embraced forgiveness as a positive strategy while others rebuked it as significant to their recovery process and peace-of-mind suggests the need for future research to understand the variability of women's experiences with the process of forgiveness as strategy in addressing sexual victimization. Additionally,

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further research regarding the characteristics that contribute to supportive and unsupportive natural support networks for African American mothers who are survivors of sexual violence will be beneficial. Lastly, additional empirical research is needed to assess the role of racialized sexual stereotypes and the race of the offender on women's disclosure and help-seeking behaviors.

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Appendix A

Participant Perspectives of Parenting and Sexual Violence Prevention

Study Participant Responses		
What do you think are some of the best ways to educate people in your community about sexual abuse?	What do you think are the best ways to encourage people in your community to stop harming women and children sexually?	What do you think would be helpful for working professionals to know about your experiences as a parent?
Have lots of community meetings – make it fun, have a rally, with food and drinks	Pay attention to your surroundings, who you have around you, male or female.	Watch for the behavior, the withdrawals, the hopelessness. It's not always the drugs. There's the trauma itself.
Don't trust nobody, you can't even trust your family members.	Honestly, I don't think nothing because they just going to do it if they want to anyways. It ain't going to change nothing.	Case worker should talk to parents and children.
Basically let them know that you can say no. If you're not being treated right, try to get away. Don't sit there and make excuses for the guy and why he's doing things.	I think if they could actually see the ending results of what they are doing, maybe that would like some type of reality check, to make them open up and see that they are really hurting that person.	It's hard being a woman and growing up from not having kids to having kids. You have to be a role model and it's challenging having to be this bigger person for these little people.
Have more support groups or educate others that its okay to talk about these things because when you actually look at it, it's been going on since the beginning of time, since we were slaves.	I think the more people talk about it and the more it's talked about, people don't feel like it's such an isolated incident	I think they should have empowerment and assertive classes for our people. Because if you don't know nothing but being oppressed, how are you going to convert from being an aggressive person to an assertive person if you're not given those tools. You don't even know you are being aggressive because that's the way you've been raised.
Believe in your inner thoughts and feelings, even if you have known someone for years. You still have to trust your inner self.	Have open ears and learn the people around you. Believe in your children, learn and trust your children and listen to them.	A single women an first-time or second, or third-time mothers, we have to be strong and we have to learn from our experiences

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		whether they're good or bad. Its up to us to be the key person in our family.
Going through the schools, having functions. I think even if you got to offer something up like a luncheon, a dinner, or something like that, and workshops. Have some kind of incentive for them.	I don't know. Just listing some of the effects that the harm has on women and children.	Make sure the person is very, very comfortable with parenting and give them resources for everything because people feel afraid to even disclose that there are things that they don't know.
I don't know how you would go about stopping sexual abuse	I don't know. I feel so much empathy and sympathy for those people and really bad for young kids. I want perpetrators to go to jail or somebody to hurt them.	I used to think that timeout thing was just a bunch of crock. I used to be a spanker. I learned that taking away privileges helps. That was the most helpful thing to learn.
Be careful of who you bring your children around. Get a background check because you can be with a man 10 and 15 years, and then just in the 11 th year he can molest your child. You think you know. You don't know people.	At the first sign, get some help.	Talk to kids and see where there mind's at, let them talk about whatever they want to talk about, not what you want to talk about.
They need programs for kids and adults too because I would have never told and I'm 50 years old. I would have never said nothing because I didn't want that shame and stuff	I don't know what it will take to stop men from doing it. I don't think they will stop until something happens to them, until they get busted.	I want them to teach parents how to comfort your child well enough that they will be honest with you and open to you to share anything they need to share
Speak it. Go to schools and certain areas and speak about sexual abuse.	They want to do it anyways.	Being a parent is hard but you have to do it.
Get people who have experienced it to talk about it. People take heed to true stories better than statistics so they can prevent their children from going through it.	Be willing to admit it; no one is perfect; get professional help; let neighborhoods know that these people are moving in.	Get the full background on how and why a person parents the way they do. Avoid child protection in your life – check the emotional background of the parent's state of mind
You have to teach people what sexual violence looks like for each individual. What is violence for you? Is it control? Is it intimidation? Is it isolation, humiliation?	Let them listen to some of the stories of mothers and children who have been harmed. Let them listen to their own heart, if they're the ones who have harmed. They	Don't go on with your own preconceived ideas as to who you're going to cure. We don't have that power.

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<p>There are many forms of abuse and so many times we thought we knew it all; we didn't know nothing.</p>	<p>know the face of it and they know what it's like. You can deny so long but eventually the real you comes to the surface too.</p>	
<p>Talking mainly to mothers and fathers and telling them don't put fear in your child and don't be their best friend but be there when they need to talk to you.</p>	<p>At the first sign get some help.</p>	<p>Offer a hand.</p>
<p>Actually, be careful who you bring you kids around. Get some background checks, you know because you can be with a man 10 and 15 years and then just the 11th year he can molest your child. He can do anything, you just think you know this person</p>	<p>What do I think it will take to stop sexually harming women and children? Roots, man. Ain't no more root and ain't nobody setting no roots either. They're just living day-to-day. Ain't no togetherness. The bible say that though. In the end, mothers against daughters, neighbors against neighbors. So it ain't nothing you can do about it, not now.</p>	<p>I would want to be able to go in and have, um, stuff in the schools in these at-risk schools, alternative schools, and have groups where these kids can come and talk about the things that's going on with their parents, or lack of because they may be selling dope, or out there strung out, or whatever. These kids need to know, it don't matter what your parents are doing; you still can make it</p>
<p>I think the best way to educate people about sexual mistreatment is to find the people who have actually been sexually mistreated, to educate them, um, not to get statistics or whatever, I think get somebody who actually survived it, who lived it, and to go out and to speak, to go into the highways and the byways, and then the crevices where people are actually getting molested at, or sexually mistreated, not to be going to some seminar where everybody rich is sitting there and they want to donate some money. That doesn't help. You need to get out there and get dirty and you need to hit the streets</p>	<p>I think the best way to encourage people to stop harming women and children sexually is, um, through love. I think the world is just one big sore just waiting to be healed.</p>	<p>Don't go on with your preconceived ideas as who you're going to cure. We don't have that power and we just have to touch that mustard seed, that faith. Once it's in operation you don't have to do and struggle in yourself to figure out a solution. It comes by itself.</p>
<p>If I could communicate anything to my</p>	<p>I think there have to be more programs</p>	<p>I would want them to know, um, how to</p>

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<p>community about my experiences as a parent I would want to talk to the teens and the children whose parents aren't parenting them correctly, to let them know that there's other people out there who are willing to help you, that you can still come out of this, and survive, and be okay, and still be successful in spite of what your parents are doing or not doing.</p>	<p>about sexual mistreatment for kids and adults too because I would have never told and I'm 50 years old. I would have never said nothing because I didn't want that shame and stuff and most of it is still buried but its still there and every now and then one of the ghosts will come out and you remember, you know? It was a relief when I told my psychiatrist and he understood. He was like, "It's okay. It's not your fault," and stuff like that.</p>	<p>comfort your child well enough that they will be honest with you</p>
<p>You've got to listen to them and talk to them. You brush it off, you could brush it off because there've been a lot of incidents. Some mothers just don't want to believe it, and then they hoping, "ah them kids just heard somebody else say that, or they're trying to get my attention or something like that because my friend, she died two years ago</p>	<p>[Chuckles] let them listen to some of the stories of the mothers and children who have been harmed. Let them listen to their own heart, if they're the ones who have harmed. They know the face of it and they know what its like and you can deny so long, but eventually the real you come to surface too</p>	
<p>Family is community and if community could embrace one another and share lessons learned in knowledge, our children would be much healthier. We as a people would prosper and flourish</p>	<p>Shoot. I don't know. I don't think they will stop until something happens to them, 'til something happens. Like they get busted, like...</p>	
<p>You have to teach them, what does violence look like, you know, what is it, really. What is violence for you? Is it control? Is it intimidation? Is it isolation, humiliation? There are many forms of abuse and so many times we thought we knew it all; we didn't know nothing.</p>		

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<p>You know, it doesn't have to be as hard as they make it for single parents, especially single women of color. You know, there's a lot of barriers out there that prevents us from...from just simply providing healthy food and a safe place for our kids to grow up in</p>		
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Appendix B – Case Study Narratives

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Case Study #1 – Ida

Her grandfather sexually abused Ida during her childhood. She is a 20-years old mother with two children, a three-year-old son and 10-day old daughter. She relocated in an effort to get away from her drug abusing mother and grandfather as well as the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings.

Sexual Molestation and Role Reversal

I'm not sure how old I was when my granddad started molesting me. I'm not sure, probably like six, seven. It affected me a lot. Like it took my childhood. I didn't have my childhood. That's why I'm like still like in a child's state of mind, childlike and stuff like that. So it messed me up a lot, forced me to grow before I had to. I'm twenty years old now. I don't know how I dealt with it. I have no idea [chuckles]. My childhood was not good. I didn't have a childhood. It was adulthood. My granddad and then me having to take care of my sisters like they my kids made my childhood adulthood. So I was surprised when I had a baby. Then I had another baby. That's why I was shocked, like because like I already had kids.

Effects of Sexual Mistreatment

It affected my growing up and teenage years. Like I'll get mad...like when I get mad I scratch on my face and stuff like that and like and my skin. They used to tell me, "Why did you do that? You're messing up your own face. Like you ain't hurting nobody else. You're hurting yourself." I sort of felt the same [mad] but a little pain relief I guess. They [God momma] admitted me like in some type of home or something like some type

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of suicidal house or something like that, I don't know and that's when I stopped scratching my face and stuff. I was around sixteen or seventeen. I just try to throw it [memories of molestation] out of my mind, you know, not think about it, so that's all but it always seem to come back.

Some things changed when I got pregnant with my son. And it just kind of changed a lot of stuff because I did want a baby so bad. [Laughs]. Yeah, I mean, how his dad was trying to get me, and then I got what I wanted, but when I had him it wasn't all cracked up to what I thought it would be. I don't know. I thought it was just going to be sweet, like being a mom. Like I don't know. I didn't think it was going to be like that hard like seriously. I didn't think it was going to be hard, that we worrying about getting pampers and formula, all that stuff, have to take him everywhere I go and couldn't never find no babysitter, have to worry about making him clothes, and all this and that, you know. It was hard. His dad helped me a lot until he got one years old. Then when I moved up here [to this state]...well, I actually came when he was a baby. Then I left and came back when he was one.

Disclosure Process

I didn't tell anybody. I waited 'til I got older. I think I was about fifteen when my brother [older] came home and me and my mom had like a little incident or whatever, and then like I just blurted it too, like "that [name of granddad] be molesting me." She told me, "you probably liked it." My cousins and my sisters was right there when I blurted it out. And then my cousin started crying because she was like, "I remember him trying to, he had me sitting on his lap trying to give me some M&M's or something. And

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he was touching me.” And I was like “why you didn’t tell my mom so she can believe me?” And she still didn’t say nothing so. [The incident] I forgot what I did. I did something to one of my sisters. And then she [mom] came in the house snapping on me about something about that. And then, I just started crying and I blurted it out. And after that I just left.

When my mom told me [chuckles] that when I told her I started thinking about it, like did I actually like it? Is that the reason why I didn’t say nothing during the time when I was little? So, I don’t know. I wish instead of saying that she would at least try to comfort me or get him put in jail or something, do something and not saying that I probably liked it especially when she tell something like that to your daughter. And she should have set me down and talked to me about it. It probably would have made things better.

My granddad, he wasn’t nowhere around. He’d been gone for some years before I even said that. It was me, my sisters, and my cousins living in the house when my momma said what she said. I didn’t never tell my dad about being molested. I don’t think he even know about that. The first time when I came out here my financial aid worker, she asked me if I wanted to talk to anyone about it and I told her no, because I didn’t want to talk about it. But like now I’m like, willing to talk about it and stuff. I don’t know, I’m just tired of holding it in I guess. I don’t know. I need something different to make me probably go about a lot of things different and stuff. I don’t know, probably everything I do in life, I don’t know. Honestly, I don’t know how I would make decisions different if I hadn’t experienced it [molestation]. I probably be more in a state

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of mind that I'm supposed to be in life like a older person my age is suppose to be, instead of being stuck right there in a child's state of mind, where he took away from me, all that.

Relationship with Children

I'd say we have a good relationship. My son, yeah, I have a nice son. But like by me being molested by my granddad, I don't know, I get, like sometimes, when he [son] be on me and stuff, I'm like, "get off me," you know what I'm saying? I be feeling like violated. I don't know why but that's how I be feeling sometime when he be on me a certain way. That's why I yell at him, like, "Get off me [chuckles]." He's probably wondering like, "dang, what'd I do?" and I feel bad and stuff. That's like the only thing that I think that affect our relationship. I started noticing that probably a year ago.

I don't know my strengths as a parent. I have no idea. You're asking me a lot of questions I never thought of before. I have, I don't know. I guess I'm a good mother. I'm doing better than what my mom would be at. So I try to be there and give them what my momma never gave me. I got my parenting skills from me...my childhood and me growing up, and experiencing what I experienced. My son gives me strength to keep living and keep going on before she [daughter] came. It's her now too, but my son.

Expectations of Children

I just want [chuckles]...I just want them to finish school, something that I didn't do, and have a happy life. That's all I want. I don't want them to need or want for nothing. My son is like a little man, so all you've got to do is tell him and he'll go right

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along with it. He's like a little man, like he's been here before or something. I tell him or I yell at him when he does something wrong. To be a better parent I guess I would like to try to have my son to be more open to me. Because he's like...like if I say to him, "Like tell me...you know, tell me if somebody touch you right here or touch you right there, you know, like that" and then he be like screaming on the bed and I be like, "What's wrong?" He be like covering his ears, like, "I don't want to talk about it," and stuff like that. I was like, "Why you won't tell me?" He be like, "mah," you know. So...like he itching down there and stuff but he don't want to tell me. But that's why I'm trying to like figure out what happened to him to get him to open up to me and like, you know, be able to talk to me about stuff like that, because he don't want to talk to me about it. And I need [chuckles] him to talk to me about it. Seriously [chuckles]. He don't understand that part yet. Everything got to keep that up. My mom didn't do it to me. I want my daughter to tell me everything too and she a girl. It's more hard on her part too. I mean, because like, I don't know, because I experienced it [molestation]. And I like, I'm like scared because I know, I don't...I know I'm not going to be the type of mother that my mom was to me. But I don't want to make them mistakes and, you know, and like mess up, so make her scared like...that she can't come and talk to me. Because that's what my mom did to me. That's why I never came to talk to her because she was like always snappy and stuff like that. And like she wasn't the type of mom that you can go talk to, and stuff. And so I tried not to...that's why I think it'll be so hard on her [her own daughter]. That's why I'm like...and I don't want to make it too cool, you know, it'd be like too cool to her and her

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friend but I don't want to be too strict on her that she won't come. I don't know that's, and that's why I'm kind of like stuck at. I don't know.

Hopes for Children

The first [chuckles] thing, I wish that they graduated from college and their degrees, and a master if they can., probably the second thing, it would be successful in life, and don't have to ask no one for anything, they always have what they want and what they need, and that they look after each other no matter what, and don't let nobody get in between them. Especially my son, look after his sister and take care of her.

As an adult, if somebody do touch me kids [chuckles]...I don't want to think about it but if somebody do touch my kids, and if I'm not there that day, they could go tell somebody, like they have somebody that they could...that they open enough too to go talk to about it, and don't hold it like...like I did and mess up their childhood and stuff. I don't want nobody to make them grow up so fast. I want them to tell somebody. I don't care who it is, somebody.

Sibling Relationships

I have three little sisters and one older brother. I was taking care of my little sisters and stuff. It was just us. I just fed and bathed them, and washed them, make sure they get up for school in the morning, get them dressed, and stuff like that. I ain't never take care of them like actually buying them stuff. All that other stuff, my mom, she sort of did it but she didn't really do it like she's supposed to. I'd say my mom used to sleep with men for money. I don't know. I know that because she used to bring them home and stuff. And then all they talked about is the money, money, money. My brother was

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always gone. He's locked up right [chuckles] now. Yeah. He get out in March. That's why I'm trying to have like a place for him to come and stay and stuff. Hopefully he do better than what he's doing now.

Relationship to Caregivers

Nobody took care of me. I took care of myself. And my mom was never there, so. She was always going out, or something, she was never there. Nobody else was there. My mom was always gone. And then she let my granddad move in. And that's when it started. I don't know how long it went on, for a long time I guess. I could just remember when it started, you know. My relationship with my mom is not so good. Everything is not so good about it. Like...oh, she's like a scared-type mom, can't talk to her about stuff like that. Then she'll get mad or curse you out, tell you to get out her face or something like that, so I don't...and that's why I really wouldn't open up to her, so it's like, came out as angry when I said it to her. So, we ain't got no good relationship. But now that I'm older, like it...like it kind of got better. Like we talk a little bit more and stuff. But I never brought it back up 'cause she might get mad or say the same thing she said before. I don't know. And I don't want to go through that. So it was sort of still the same. And then like, I don't know. It seemed like, I guess when I was nineteen, and then turned twenty, it like changed a little. Like we talked a little bit more and stuff. I guess because I'm not there, I don't know. The first word I can think of for my mother is [long pause] unfit. I don't know what else.

I remember some parts of my relationship with my dad. Only thing I remember I guess was the part I liked the most, is when he, taught me how to ride a bike. That's the,

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that's the one part I remember the most then. I was like probably around five or six, somewhere around that age. He was there when I was a teenager. I stayed with my dad a period of time. Then he was so strict with me, so I left. After that he still was in my life and stuff. Then when I got pregnant he was mad at me, so we kind of stopped talking. But like I didn't expect him to come to the house but then when I had my baby, and he was up there, he had bought him a car seat, and some clothes, and stuff like that. I was very shocked because he was really mad at me [chuckles] when I was pregnant. He didn't say nothing to me, he didn't even look at me. He seen me on the street like he wouldn't even look at me, like I wasn't even his daughter [chuckles]. "Hey, what's that girl doing over there?". "That's your daughter [chuckles]." [Smiling for the first time during the interview]. I love my daddy. But my mom always be like, "Why you...I don't know why you be calling him, talking to him. He don't be doing nothing for you." Yeah, he ain't got to do nothing for me. I still love him. He was there. He'd be there for me. I think she be mad because she hear me tell my dad I love him, when I get off the phone with him. But I don't tell her that, okay [chuckles]. So she yells at me. Sometimes I'd go to my grandma's house on my dad's side. She baked a lot of cakes and stuff like this, so I would see him there. But he would never come to our house because him and mom, they didn't be able to get along.

Supportive Kin

There are no family members that I feel close to but I do feel close to the friend that's like a God momma. She the only one. She taught me about the feminine stuff and being a woman. We talk to her on the phone and stuff. She in Chicago. I met her through

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my first baby's father. When I went to go stay with my baby's dad at his grandma's house after I told my momma about my granddad, and then that's when we met. Well, then we went to go stay over there, and then that's when I met her. And I started staying at her house and stuff. I was fifteen. His grandma didn't know I was staying in her house. He was sneaking me in every night until I started staying with my God momma.

It took some years for me to leave Chicago. Actually, my auntie, when I called her, she used to stay up here she on her way back up here from Iowa. But I had called her and told her about it [sexual molestation] and stuff. Like it took her like two or three years to come get me. Well, she came and got me from out there, and I came right here and started staying with her, and then I was pregnant with my son, so that's when I came and stayed with her and tried to get my own place. It didn't work out the first time. Now I'm back a second time.

Parental Support

I'm the only one who takes care of my children. My auntie was helping me before with my son. But now it's just me. My first baby's dad, because he's already in Chicago, so he'll call my son and talk to him but other than that, [disapproving tone]. He need to get hisself together first. Right. My daughter's dad, he come and get her sometime but I try not to let him. I'd rather go with her because I don't really trust him even though he her daddy. So, that kind of affect me right there. I never thought about telling him about my childhood experience.

Family Traditions Celebrated

Thanksgiving sometimes. That'd be the only one, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

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Losses

My grandma on my dad's side, I know she's still living, yeah, the one on my mom's side, she is too. I forgot [pause] and my granddad on my mom's side is still living. And I don't know about the one on my dad's side, the granddaddy on my dad's side. I don't know.

Lessons Learned from Childhood

Well, at least I could say I learned how to deal with pain, emotion, and how to be a [chuckles]...a adult and take care of...of what your responsibility is and stuff.

What Community Should Know

I would say [chuckles] don't trust nobody [chuckles], not even...can't even trust your family members. I mean, I know they're your family but you always have to dress appropriately and make sure you have no skin showing because there ain't no telling what they [chuckles]...what they're thinking or what they're looking at. You know, even if it is your family member, you've still got to have that...that thought or doubt in your mind, like for real. I really...I really don't know what else. It's just that.

With my granddad, I don't like quite remember like what I was wearing and what I had on but it probably had a part of why it was, why it started. I don't know. That's why I just said it. It might have contributed [chuckles] to the story that happened.

Education About Sexual Abuse Prevention

[Long pause] I don't know. Yeah, they should like...and have meetings where they meet about it and [chuckles], I don't know. I don't know the name of it but they

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should like have random meetings and things or people like should make a thing, like caseworkers or whatever go to a parent's house and talk to the kids and stuff like that about it, or, you know, like try to give them a warning of what to look out for and stuff like that. Because a lot of kids probably don't know. That's probably what they need to know. The parents and the kids. They all should be together [chuckles], and, everybody, even a father, if he a dad.

How to Stop Harm of Women and Children

Honestly, I don't think nothing because they just going to do it if they want to anyways. It ain't going to change nothing. If it's there, it's there, if they, if they think of doing it and they do it. I don't know, the devil is powerful, so.

Trust of Others

That's why people shouldn't trust nobody. They should just keep their kids with them at all times, as much as they can. A lot of people...a lot of mothers just throw their kids off on people though, not caring who they is. They don't know what they...don't know them from day one. I be seeing that in the shelter here. This girl...I don't know, she just got here, the new girl. And then the girl that's been here, she did a CCA, and she had the new girl doing it. And I'm like, "She don't even know you. She don't even know what type of person you is. You know, and say she take the daughter and do anything to the little girl. You don't know her. And the baby can't talk. She can't tell you," you know, like that. That's crazy. And that's why, I mean, how people just be throwing their kids off on people, and don't even know them. Right. People may come off as a nice

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person or one so holy and stuff like that [chuckles]? You know, really turn around and is the worst person you ever thought they would be.

Case Study #2 – Billie

Billie's stepfather sexually molested her when she was five or six years old her paternal uncle sexually fondled her. As a young adult, her mother's husband sexually harassed Billie. She received varying levels of support and disapproval by her extended family members during her disclosure of the sexual abuse experiences.

I have one child and he's five years old. I'm 28-years-old. I co-parent my son with my husband. We've been together for like, it'll be six years, I think, this year. We got married in like December 2008. I have four sisters and I'm the oldest.

Experiences of Sexual Mistreatment - Childhood

I didn't like my childhood because it's like, I got raped. This was before my last two sisters came along. It was just me and my other two sisters, and, you know, the last two sisters I have now, their dad did it to me and my sisters, he raped us. I think I was like five or six years old. I know he raped my sisters too because I was there when it happened. I know he and my mother had been together for like 13 years but they are no longer together. You know, and then, my uncle – my dad's own brother – was another person that also, you know, kind of like touched me in a way that I didn't want to be touched.

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Disclosure Process

I told my grandma and, you know, I guess it just spreaded after that. I was scared to tell my mom and I didn't tell my mom until I was 22-years-old and when I told her she was like, "Why didn't you tell me?" I told her, "Because I was scared."

When my grandmother told everybody else, they were upset with my mom. It was like they thinking like, "Why is she still with him? Why is she holding up for him?" Stuff like that. I was afraid of telling her because I thought that I probably would have got a whoopin' or something, and that she wouldn't have believed me. We [her sisters] didn't talk about it as much. I think as we got older, that's when we started actually talking about it. Like my last two sisters, they like 22 and one is 19. I let them know what their dad did as well but I think it kind of upsetted them. I guess like I could tell by little facial expressions and stuff. You know, and like they'll be like, "Well, that ain't what I was told," I was like, "Well, can't nobody tell you but me and my other sisters."

When I bring it [sexual mistreatment] up, if me and my momma get into an argument and I just bring up something, something like that, she'll avoid everything and switch the subject and try to make it seem like everything is my fault. It's like I guess she can't really take it right now because she know this is what happened and I think her conscience is really beating her up right now you know.

A couple weeks ago my sister came and told me my auntie said, well, she think I was lying about it. That like really upsetted me because I was like, I was sitting there, you know, crying, full of tears, and I'm like, "How would she know what had happened because she wasn't there?" It was like I felt like I wanted to just fight at that moment. I

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felt like I wanted to like just be violent at that moment because I was so upset. At the same time, I had to calm myself down because I know what goes on with my body as far as, you know, I'd be depressed a lot. I'd be stressed a lot to where sometimes it leads into panic attacks. So I had to calm myself down. She [auntie] is my mom's sister. It was like when we were kids and, you know, every time somebody would come and question us or bring it up, it was like we kind of avoided the question, like, "Let us be, We're kids. Let us..." I just wanted to play at the time, or, you know, do homework, whatever I was interested in doing. I think it was time to just let everything out later, so, it was like I couldn't just keep holding on to it like this long. Like I told my mom, my sisters, and like I forgave my sister's dad but at the same time it was like I would never forget it, but I forgave him.

Sexual Mistreatment and Disclosure – Young Adulthood

My mother's husband she's with now, he approached me, my sister, my cousin, and her sister, the one's that's passed away. He has approached me a lot of times and I let her [mother] know about it. He even came to me to where he was like, "When me and your mom are intimate, I think about you." He described my private parts to me and I looked like, "Why is you even staring at me while I'm asleep?" Sometimes he'll go down the stairs and just stand on the staircase and just look. It's crazy. Then, you know, he tried to actually sell me off to one of his friends, to where he couldn't do it, so he was like, "If you let me lick your private I'll give you \$100.00." I just stormed out the door and started crying, you know. When I ran downstairs and I was crying, my auntie that passed away was like "What's wrong? What's wrong?" I told her what had happened and her son was

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like, “You know, you’re bogus for what you did,” you know and I guess I walked out of the house so quick it was like I didn’t have nothing to say to nobody. I just wanted to leave because it’s kind of like to me, I feel like I’m reliving the past, to what my sisters and them dad did to me and it’s like I’m just so tired of it right now. I’m just really tired of it right now.

When I told my mom, my mom was at the Bingo and I told her what happened. Like she didn’t do nothing. She didn’t do nothing. They probably had their arguments but she was still with him though. She been with her current husband like 13, 14 years. I forgave him too, as well, so but I still go talk to him, you know, but not like just in a room by ourselves or anything but, you know, I talk to him like I talk to a friend or something like that, you know because like, I told him, I forgave him and everything, but, you know, I know to be careful too at the same time because he’s a alcoholic so that’s why he approached me, because he was drinking. I don’t know what was going on between him and my mom at the time but, you know, he approached me. The majority of the time he did something, he was drunk.

Effects of Sexual Mistreatment- Young Adulthood

All I can tell you, all I did was sit and cry. I’d sit and cry for years. If I sit and watch a movie and see something like that, I cry. It hurts. You know, so, it’s just like it’s relating to what I done been through, you know. Then, you know, after that happen, when I did get raped, it’s kind of like I see myself not like being around a crowd of males. If I see a lot of males on one side of the block, I’m crossing the street. So it’s like it kind of make me, you know, afraid of men too and I’m still, to this day, is afraid of men. I told

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my husband about the situation and everything, so he know everything. He was upset to where, you know, he was like, “That’s your momma. How could she let something like that happen to you?” You know, stuff like that.

I think, still to this day, you know, my mom’s current husband be eyeing me sometimes so it’s like, I don’t know, it’s kind of scary. I think that’s why I don’t really go over her house like that well, and he don’t just do it to me; he do it to my sisters as well. I know one of my sisters is very, very outspoken. So she’ll let him know right off top but I think we’ll tell him, but at the same time I think we’re kind of afraid too to just say anything and I think we just let it go. We don’t even go, its like to the point where I don’t even tell my momma if he’s doing anything. You know, and I tell my momma I can handle him myself because I know she’s not going to believe me. I kind of just take it on myself. All four of my sisters still live with them. It’s like they don’t want to be there just because of him. I think if he weren’t in the picture everybody would be fine. Right now he’s in the picture. I thought things would change because last year she got a divorce and then, next thing I know, he was in rehabilitation. He got out of rehabilitation and couldn’t find nowhere to go and end up staying with my mom again, got back into drinking. I don’t know if he’s doing drugs again but yeah, it was like they’re right back together now.

Meaning Making

I have some confidence and strength now but I was really a weak, weak person at the time when the stuff happened [sexual mistreatment] to where I couldn’t build up enough strength to say, “Well, this is what happened” without crying. I know its going to

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hurt but I think I would rather do things without, you know, trying to let my emotions get the best of me, you know. So motivation, determination, everything that's nice but I still have that little feeling that to where, you know, sometimes I have little flashbacks of it, to where I don't want to think about it. So it's like, if I'll go watch a movie or something and see something like, I kind of turn it, you know, listen to music, write poems, anything I can find, not to think about it or sometimes I have poems about it. You know, so it helped me a lot because it's like what I wrote in the poems, I expressed all my emotions and my feelings about it.

Yeah, I think a weak person is like someone crying all the time, not really doing anything for themselves, you know. I get scared to be around people, scared. I don't know, I'm just scared to tell people like how you really feel, they get...like if you do, something might happen to you, stuff like that and like, its like I was just so weak to where I always felt depressed about everything, every little thing there was, not just that issue but others. I was stressed and there have been times to where I didn't eat. I'll eat here and there but not as much as I was supposed to and stuff. I wasn't like drinking a lot of fluids and stuff. There's a lot of things that I felt I wasn't doing right at the time. I think I overcame some of it when I met my husband. He taught me a lot. He taught me not to be afraid to tell anybody if you have a problem. Tell them. Tell it anyway. You know, express how you feel. He's outspoken as well, so he get on my butt about it [laughter]. He won't let nobody, you know, take advantage of me, not even my mom. That's my bodyguard right there [laughter]. He's 28-years-old too.

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Relationship with Child

I have a very good relationship with my son. I talk to him, I will play games with him. Help him with his homework. You know, teach him just the little things I think he can understand about life. The most rewarding experience for me as a parent is having my son and I'm proud that I can teach him a lot. You know, like just let him know that I will always protect him and everything. I won't let nothing happen to him and everything.

Child Safety Concerns

The most challenging part of being a parent you know, is what you have went thorough in life and know that the same thing is going to happen to your child, good or bad but, you know, I look at the bad part because I don't know when that might happen, but I know, you know, something bad is going to happen but you just don't know when. So, you know, I look at that. I don't want to think negatively, but at the same time it's kind of hard because I know what life's about and I'm still learning life myself.

I'm concerned especially, you know, about strangers walking up to him, you know, him getting sexually abused, you know, maybe like getting picked on by kids, like the little things I guess. You know, like being bullied because I see, you know, when he get bullied sometimes he cries and then it's like I've got to learn how to teach him to defend himself, not like actually just be fighting but, you know, other things as far as protecting himself. Like sometimes I really don't want my son to be at my mom's house because he's {mom's husband] there. It like reappeared [sexual mistreatment] because, like I say, it's people out here today raping little boys as well and that's what I'm afraid

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of because my son, if somebody give him something he's gone. I leave him at my mom's but at the same time, if my sister's and them there, I'm pretty sure, you know, they're going to make sure nothing happens to him.

Expectations of Child

I think people would say I'm a good parent, overprotective parent [chuckles], a parent that's looking out for her son, hoping that he don't make the bad decisions in life. Well, like now, there's gang-banging going on. It's like, now, any type of color, somebody shooting you or doing something to you because of the color. You know, I'm scared for that when he get older. I don't know what life's going to be like in probably like the next five, ten years but, you know, stuff that's going on right now, I'm scared of that and I'm scared that he might end up, you know, get into a gang or something. I'm scared he might end up stealing, robbing stores, or anything, stealing from family members and that's something I don't want to happen and that's something I'm teaching him now.

I expect him to do good in school, I want him to graduate high school and graduate from college. You know, I'm hoping that he'll have his own business, having his own place, his family. So basically hoping he succeeds in life.

When I disapprove of his behavior I take his toys; certain ones that he love to play with, like he just really care about, I take them away or you know, if I don't do that I just put him on punishment, and let him know, "Well, you're not going to be playing with any toys. You're just going to, you know, study you're A, B, C's 1, 2, 3's, and stuff like that." I'll probably like put him on punishment for like a week or two, depending on what it is

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[chuckles] so, yeah, depending on what the situation is. When I approve his behavior, you know, I give him a comment, like I give him like positive comments, like, "That's good. I see you're learning," you know, "Good job, " just different little positive comments. Then like, "I see you're growing up now. You're learning, " you know, stuff like that.

Some things have changed over time in the way I parent him. Like when he was an infant, you know, it was like I guess I didn't want nobody holding him as much because he was mine, you know. I wanted to do everything because I'm the mother and everything but as he got older, I see it as like I'm becoming to get more strict on him, and so, you know, as far as teaching him his do's and don'ts and stuff like that.

Hopes for Child and Emotional Stability

Okay, number one, I want him to, like I said, I want him to graduate from high school, college. I want him to have his own family. I want him to succeed in life, to where he can succeed in anything. I don't care what it is, as long as it's something positive, but I think what I went through, I think I've got my own dreams for my son, to be a motivational speaker. That's what I want, but he might not do that. He might want to be a football player [laughter]. Well, he told me he wants to be the police. He wants to be a police officer when he grow up [laughs]. How do I feel about that? No [laughter], no.

I think he wants me to be rich. No. I'm just playing [laughs]. No, no, no. It's like for me, I feel like money is not anything to me, so I was just joking about that but I guess he'd probably wish for his mom to just be happy, You know, I think being happy is every child's wish, to see their parents happy even if they're not together or they're together.

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So, and that's what I'm working on now, is being happy instead of, you know, just being sad or depressed about it, trying. I'm working on all that right now. You know, I kind of feel like bad for my son because it's like he, when he see me cry he'll, I think it even like make me even more emotional because he like, "Mommy, what's wrong? What's wrong? Why are you crying? Are you okay?" So, yeah, I've got to, I have no choice but to let him see that when I'm happy he's going to be happy, you know, and you [son] don't have to worry about anything.

Co-parenting

I think I spoil my son but my husband is like, "Don't do that because it's like making him into a little punk, a sissy," and stuff like [chuckles] that. So, it's kind of like, yeah, he's the father figure in his [son's] life to where the stuff I don't know to teach my son, he's there to teach him. I guess he [husband] don't want me to spoil him [son] a lot. So that's what it is, to where he always comment like, "That's why he act the way he do, because you're sitting here and you spoil him and you go against everything I tell him." So it's like that type of thing. He [son] cries a lot. You know, he [husband] expect him to like hit a person back if somebody hit him and everything, stuff like that. I think he want to teach him to be more of a man than just being a little sissy all the time, crying about every little thing that goes on.

I don't like it. I agree with him as far as I spoil him and everything, but s far as the other things, "Well, you've got to do this to make him be a man." That I don't agree with so his father like, "Well, you hit this person back if he hit you," I tell my son like, "You

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know, tell somebody or just walk away because if you hit him, that's not going to solve anything." It's just basically like bringing up another issue, you know.

I think my son got a lot of my ways because I see him cry. I see his feelings get upset real quickly so, you know, I see he's got a lot of my ways. I'm happy about that because I know he's letting his emotions out. Other people might think it's a wuss or something but to me, it's not because that's how I felt when I was a child. So I'm happy for him to you know, if you cry, you cry. If it hurts your feelings to where it has you crying, oh well, cry it out. That's what I was always told, to cry it out.

Relationship with Caregivers

My mom and I was close, real close until I got older and 'til all this stuff started happening, until we brought up the past. It was like everything was just going downhill, everything. Like me and my mom is not even close at all. Like we will talk. We'll have our arguments and stuff like that, but we're not as close like we used to be when I was a child. It was before when me and my mom was close but after the fact, as I got older and I will tell her all this such and such person they did and I would listen to how she responded. It's like, you're supposed to be my mom. You're supposed to be protecting me. You're supposed to do everything in your power to stop this from happening and it wasn't like that so it's like I've got some respect, but I don't have a lot of respect for her. When I talk about what happened [sexual mistreatment] she [mom] won't respond, she would actually switch to another subject.

When I would get upset as a child I didn't really have much to do but cry. I was a big time crybaby [chuckles]. All I did was cry, cry, gave myself a lot of headaches. I

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would cry because I feel like anything somebody say wrong or out of the way to me, it hurted my feelings. My grandma, aunties, and mom would be like, “Ain’t nothing wrong with you. Be quiet. Shut up.” So it was just like that. I don’t know, I guess they just weren’t feeling how I was feeling. To them it was like, “Girl, ain’t nobody hurt your feelings,” stuff like that, you know, like, “Be quiet. Go clean up or something. “ That’s it. So I feel like they really weren’t caring enough about how I felt.

What would I wish for in terms of my relationship with my mom? Well, the first thing I’d wish for is for her to get rid of him [mother’s husband]. Second thing is that I want her to, you know, believe her kids when her kids tell her when this such and such happened. I want her to do that and I want the relationship with my mom, I want the closeness to my mom. I want that back, you know. I just want us to be a big happy family without him in it because I think he is the one that’s causing problems and I think that’s why me and my sister and them have this little tension that’s going on with our mom.

I don’t know much about my father. I was told he cheated on my mom with her cousin. I heard he used to beat on me when I was, not even a toddler, but I was a infant. You know, he didn’t really do much as well either. He met his, I don’t know if they’re still together but, his current wife, you know, whopped me and my sisters. She burnt my sister hair out and everything. I mean, just like that. It’s like I felt like she was more in control of the relationship than he was and he let her do whatever she wanted to us and didn’t say anything about it. This all happened in the Midwest before we moved here and before my grandmother took us.

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There were times to where he [father] used to come and get us like every weekend and stuff, and we would go over to his house but it was like it was boring. I would rather stay at my grandma's house than to be there and it was like I didn't like his wife. We had tension towards each other and stuff, so, and it's like. I don't know if he's doing it now but, you know, I felt like he didn't take care of his kids like you're supposed to, but you're taking care of hers and you've got three daughters. I don't know how many kids she got, but I know she got some kids [chuckles]. I was round 12-years-old at that time. I have had some contact with him since then. After like a couple years, I talked to him in maybe 2004, I talked to him a little bit. Then the next year, when I had my baby, I talked to him, in 2005, and last year, 2009, I talked to him. I was trying to get him to come up here but that didn't work out. I wanted him to come up here because I missed him. I forgave him for everything. You know, and I wanted to spend that time with my dad. It's like I feel like I will never have the time to spend with him, because I feel like he don't want nothing to do with us. I don't know what his reasons is. You know, he come up with little excuses, "Oh, I don't know your phone number," stuff like that. Like, you know my number and, you know, his sister stay like a couple blocks down the street from him in the Midwest, so it's like you can get it from her. So it's like right now don't nobody want to have nothing to do with him because of his wife.

Supportive Kin

I loved my grandmother. You know, I'll go tell her anything. She was like my foster parent because me and my sister's were taken away from my mom and when we was like probably about six, five, six years old. I don't remember but yeah, my sister and

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them dad, from what I was told, supposedly beat on my sister. With my sister, where she's so light-skinned, she had like all these bruises on her and when the police came, I guess she was explaining the story to the lady cop but the lady cop didn't believe her but they didn't have no choice but to take her in anyway so we lived with my grandmother until she died. I was like 17-years-old.

Losses

I was close with my auntie who passed away in 2006. Basically, the people I was really close to the most died. My grandmother, she's gone too. She passed away in 2000 or 2001. I didn't deal with it good. I was like angry, upset. You know, I was really like, shit, anybody that came in my way is like, I just had that anger to where I didn't care no more. I didn't care about anything. My mom and my husband who was my boyfriend at the time, helped me; gave me support around the death of my grandmother.

Family Traditions and Values

I think we celebrated like the normal traditions, Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, Labor Day, birthdays and my whole family participated – my mom, sisters, grandmother, aunties, and uncles. We went to Church every day, which I didn't like, but [laughter] I needed it. You know, like eating dinner at the table with the family, and having fun. We get around and we tell stories a lot, like ghost stories, any type of stories we can think of, we did that a lot. I still celebrate these traditions with my family.

Family Migration

I was in the Midwest for like 12 years and then moved up here in '95 so I've been here since. My auntie lived up here so during Christmas she came to visit. I guess I told

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my grandma that I wanted to move up here with my auntie so she let me go and then the next year, that's when my grandma and my other two sisters came up here and then my momma followed right behind her. I was fine with it. It is just, I felt like her husband, I feel like he's just a child, to where he need her help with everything and when I say everything, *everything*.

Interactions and Challenges with Family and Friends

When I was a child, I didn't really have much friends. Like I said, I stayed isolated a lot. I got called the devil and everything by one of my aunties and my cousin because I stayed in my room. I liked to stay in my room for hours and hours. You know, I listened to the radio and something like that, just do...just find myself doing something in that room, that I can do, that I enjoy doing. So, yeah, I isolated myself a lot. I didn't really have a lot of friends. I guess I got this expression on my face to where a lot of people like, "You look mean a lot." So I guess I had this little mean expression on my face when I walked through the door, even though I'm not, ain't nothing wrong with me. I guess that just stuck there, so my cousin and my auntie would call me that. That kind of hurted me to where, why would they say that? I don't know. I would cry sometimes in my room. Sometimes it wouldn't bother me because I got used to it to a certain amount of time but it still huts. You know, and to this day it's like my auntie, I talk to my auntie and she tells me like, "You've got to stop being mean." I told her I'm not mean. I told her one of the girls told me in here [shelter] she said when she could see me, I look like the type of person to where don't nobody better bother me. So she said, "When you started opening your mouth and started talking, you're a whole different person." That's the way

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I want it to be. I don't want nobody thinking that, oh, I'm this rude, evil type of violent person that just like, that's not me, and I try to let everybody know that, even if I've got that expression on my face. I might be mad at somebody. You never know but I'm not that type of person on the inside or the outside.

Sometimes, it's like, for me, I don't know, I might be rude by saying this but I don't like people. I guess, depending on what type of emotion I'm in, you know, if I'm in a bad mood or, you know, I'm getting depressed. I sit and stare. I don't like people. I don't want to be around people so it's like I barely like see my sisters, you know but now it's like I've got to see them every day because I take my son to school, so [chuckles]. I always did that [isolated herself] when I was a child and it's like I continue to do it and it's like I don't have a problem. Sometimes I isolate myself from my family as well. It don't feel good but I think I just do what I think was best for me, you know, to have my time to myself.

I think at the time of my teenage years until adult life, I didn't have the strength to live. I didn't want to be here. You know. I don't know, it's like I said, I had a lot of depression to where it done drained me, my health and everything, and, you know, I feel like I wanted to give my son, you know, just give him away because of the problems that I had and I didn't want him to live through that so. Like right now, I'm working on it to where I got to stay focused. I got to stay positive. I've got to stay happy. You know, I can't let a lot of emotions get in the way of me doing what I have to do, you know, in situations like this [homelessness]. I don't know, I just, like everybody say, you have to live for today. So that's what I'm doing. I'm trying my best to live for today and not the

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past. So, you've got to live for the future but you never know what's happen, what will or what might happen in the future, but, you know, I'm living for today.

Socioeconomic Support

When I need some kind of financial support, I turn to my mom but she let me down. I was late on my rent to where I didn't really have it. So, I came to her to see if she would loan me the money and she said she would, so, when I come over there to see if she was going to give it to me, she said she didn't have it and the same day she went to Chicago so she had some money, right? So, yeah, that really hurted me to where it's like I feel like my mom is my child. I'm her mother and she's the child because I give her everything and if she asks me, if I've got it, I give it to her. I think when I started being more responsible for myself it was at the age of 18.

Yeah, I had lost my place. Me and my husband lost our place last year and we had to leave in May of last year. What happened is that I found out that some police raided my house, but I wasn't there. My husband just got out the hospital, his nose was broken and everything. Come to find out, the police got the key and came in, and pulled their guns out on him, and while my son was there. So, I guess somebody must have told them there was drugs in the house but they didn't find anything. So now, after we left there, I stayed with my cousin for like two months. From my cousin's house, I went to my sister house and stayed there probably like a month or so. From my sister's house I went to a friend's house, stayed there for like maybe two, three months and now, from there, I'm here [shelter].

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My husband, you know, kept telling me, “Why don’t you go in the shelter?” I was scared to go in a shelter because, I don’t know how old I was, but when my baby sister was little, she got like bad asthma and they was in the Ekard [shelter] and my mom was telling me this place was like really filthy to where one day the nurses had to actually come out and check on her and then they come to find out kids was getting sick from food poisoning. So that’s what kind of made me scared to go to a shelter because I didn’t know what it would be like if I would have went or what shelter they would have sent me to. For years I always like I will never be in a shelter but its like never say never because you never know what might happen. So it was like, now that I done found me a place, I got pulled for the Samantha Housing Lottery and everything. I told my husband, like, “Now I see why you was telling me to go to shelter, because these people help you,” and they do. So even though I was putting my own work out, you know, going out every day, putting my own work in, finding housing, jobs, and everything, I’m kind of happy right now. Like I said, everything is falling into place to where I actually, you know my son’s in school, and I can go back to school, you know.

Career Aspirations

I want to be a physical therapist. I graduated from medical assistant so now I want to actually go for physical therapy. I just like helping people. You know how they give you like these little questionnaires, to like have you rate yourself and what type of person you are? Come to find out I am learning about myself. I like helping people.

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Lessons from Childhood

I think my childhood taught me things is going to, you know, take some time. I didn't know how hard it was until now. The situation [homeless] that I'm in right now, it's really hard so I'm understanding it and I understand I've got to have patience. Everybody always told me, "You have to learn how to, you know, go talk to somebody." I was the type of person, I never liked to talk to nobody. I never wanted to tell anybody how I feel. I just hold everything inside and it's like if somebody come to me in the wrong way I think all them emotions just come out and it don't even have to have anything to do with them, its just emotions from the past or maybe the present or something.

How was it for me to come in here and talk to you? I don't know, I guess I just had the courage to come in here. Maybe I felt like women that have been thorough this [sexual mistreatment] or children, they need to hear, you know, other people's stories and how they handle that situation. It's like I think this was probably one of the most, one of the most reasons that I really wanted to come in because I done held this in so long to where I really never just told anybody else my story besides my family and my husband. It feels good for me to talk to you about it because normally, when I try to tell this story I'm sitting here boo-hooing [laughs].

Like I feel way better than I felt during the time I was a child, into my teenage years. It's like I don't have to be afraid to tell it, tell the story, no matter who it is. You know, you want your story out there, and you want people to understand what you done been through, and how you dealt with it, things you can do to, you know, get through it.

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No, I don't think it had no type of negative effect on how I turned out. I think it made me even better. I done went to college; I done got my little associate's degree. I done got a family now. You know, so, I think maybe the thing turn into positive and make you way more of a better person than you normally were as far as like being afraid of things, so basically, you've got to always learn how to, you know, talk to somebody because it always helps to get any emotions that you're feeling right now out. Even also, you know talk to young women and children, you know, explain your situation, give them some ideas as far as what to do and how to deal with it. Just let them know, you know, tell them like you don't have to be afraid. You know, even if somebody's trying to threaten you, let them know you don't, you're not afraid. You know, you can always go talk to somebody. You can tell the police. You can tell your mom, anybody. You know, just let them know that you're not afraid no more. You know, you've got God on your side, so it was really hard for me.

It's like now that everything that came through, I felt like I did forsake him [God]. Now that, you know, it's like everything has changed to where I know what I have to do now. I have to go to church. Even though everybody kept telling me, "Go to church," I didn't want to but now I see that I have to and I see that, it's like my plan is falling in place now. So, now I've got to teach that to my son. He's like "I don't want to go to church." "Yes, you do got to go to church [laughter]." Yeah [laughter], I don't know what child did want to go to church because I know I didn't. I just wanted to play, go outside [chuckles], watch TV [laughs]. Church was boring. Its just like hearing people talk, like it was just boring, so I think I was rather into the music than just hearing

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somebody preach. It was like everything change when you get older. As you get older you learn a lot.

What Helping Professionals Should Know

I think they should let people know you don't have to be afraid of anything. Always go tell somebody, or, you know, if you're feeling a certain type of way, go talk to somebody. You know, if you feel like you're ready to, you know, just give up, or you're trying to commit suicide, you know, hurry up and find some way to figure what you're going to do before that actually happens, right at that moment, you know. If they have kids, you know, let them kids know you don't have to be afraid of anything. Mommy's here, daddy's here, you know, your family's here to protect you always. If your family isn't there, see what type of help you can get. You know, go talk to somebody and see is there anything they can do to try to help you get out of this situation, you know.

What Community Should Know About Sexual Mistreatment

Maybe have lots of community meetings or something. I don't know, maybe you can have like, make it like a type fun thing, make, like have like a little rally going on but then, at the same time, you've got to be more serious about what you need to talk about, you know, like just handing out flyers of what we have and what we're going to talk about, you know, something like that to where they have food, drinks. Not like alcoholic drinks.

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Education About Sexual Abuse Prevention

Basically, well, I think the first thing I would say, you know, pay attention to your surroundings, who you have around you, male or female. It's a big issue. I can't really figure out what else to really say that I haven't already said.

Case Study #3 – Rosa

Rosa's boyfriend raped, verbally, and physically abused her throughout their four-year relationship. Rosa and her sister cooked and cleaned for her mother who was addicted to drugs and alcohol, until their grandmother took custody of them. She and her sibling were removed from their ailing grandmother's care and placed in the child welfare system as a child.

I'm 23 years old and have two girls - three and four years old. After my first daughter was born, I wasn't having the same feelings about my boyfriend anymore. I was actually very, very depressed. I wanted to move on from him but at that moment, I guess I would say he was the only family I had at that time. So, by us being together and probably him feeling like I was the only person, well, he was the only person that I had, he took advantage. It would be times where he would want to have intercourse and I wouldn't, or he would be intoxicated and he will try to, you know, try something. I wouldn't want him to he'll just keep it going. It got to a point where I'll be like, "Okay," but I'll just lay there, and he'll just do what he want to do anyway. You know, and it's like I'm thinking that's a turnoff, so that'll make you stop but it's not you're doing it anyway. That's kind of how my second daughter was conceived. I was, still into my six weeks with my first daughter, after I had her he would force himself on me. I'm thinking

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I'm doing all these things to keep him off but it wasn't working. It was an abusive relationship too, so that's kind of why I kind of just went along with it. Sometimes that's what would lead to, like if I didn't go along with what he wanted to do it'd be like verbal abuse first and then it'd be physical.

Effect of Sexual Mistreatment

It did affect me a lot, because, first of all, that was the first time I ever went through anything like that. Again, I was young and I didn't understand, why was this person who was saying they care so much and love me so much...why was they doing this to me? I didn't have anybody else to look up to, or to get advice from, or a brother to say, "This is not supposed to be happening," or a dad to say like, "This is not supposed to be happening." So I just really didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do. It stopped when I finally got away from him. That was the only way.

I realize now that I can say no and I can teach my kids to just know the difference between like who's being genuine with you, like really being concerned and caring about you, as opposed to someone who's just caring about you because they want something from you, or they're trying to get some other things, or something like that. Because they're out there, these guys that will tell you anything just because of what they want. You know, and there's some good guys out here that really, you know, respect women, and they want a woman for her and, you know, not just, you know, for the outside, but her personality, who she is and not, you know, just a sexual thing.

It gives me strength to just know that I'm maybe out of the situation and that, you know, I was smart enough to leave him alone, and not let it get any further, to the point

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where, you know, I would get really, really hurt, like maybe ending up in a hospital or something like that. Like I got away when it was time to get away. I was with him about six years.

Disclosure Process

I've never done anything in terms of dealing with those experiences. This is my first time talking about it. It's pretty easy. [pause] I can't find any good words to say about him, or anything like that but I actually like talking about it, just because I haven't talked to anyone about it. So, it's like a relief. Like it's finally off my chest and now I know how I really feel about it. I know how to deal with it if it comes up again, or I know how to talk to my kids about, you know, knowing what you want and knowing what you don't want.

The hardest part was constantly letting it continue to happen. Like just constantly letting it go on, and on, and on. I guess sometimes I blame myself because I wish I could have stopped it. I blame him too because I'm pretty sure he knew what was right and what was wrong and that just wasn't right at all. You don't treat nobody like that, especially if you say you care about that person, or you have a certain feeling for that person. I mean, I'm a woman. If I say no, it's no [chuckles], you know?, but, you know, at the time I was young and I didn't know any better, so.

Relationship with Children

In general, I have a pretty good relationship with my kids. My oldest one, she's at the age where she has her attitudes so I've been dealing with that but it's pretty good. I actually haven't been dealing it [laughter] that's the problem. Usually I'll talk to her and,

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you know, try to understand why she's feeling that way but you know, she's only four so she's not really understanding; so, right now, I really don't have a clue on how to deal with it. Sometimes when she's feeling like that, she usually wants to sit by herself. She doesn't even want to talk to me.

What I have been through is what influences me as parent. Like I kind of freaked out because I actually have a rough life, so, I don't go off what my mom did or what my dad did. I like to try to do things my own way and see if that works and if not, I might, maybe take a little bit after my grandmother. She would talk to us. She talked to us a lot. She taught us basically everything we know, right from wrong, when we were younger like who to talk to, who not to talk to, just everything. She just had a real cool way of understanding us. Like she was a older lady but she really understood us, as far as to be young. That was real cool.

The most rewarding experiences for me as a parent is just knowing that these two are the only ones that got my back [laughter]. It really is. Like I just love seeing my children in the morning. I like...you know, just coming up to me, hugging me, "Good morning, mommy," and all of that. You know, that's all rewarding, just us playing, us talking, us, you know, interacting with each other, that's all cool [chuckles]. I'm most proud of the things I see my children learning every day, like when I hear that they've learned something new, or when they get excited to tell me that they learned something new, or something like that. It's real cool too.

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Separation from Children

I feel bad when I separate from my children? I don't like to not be around them [chuckles] because I'm so used to them. Like I said, they're three and four and they have been my family for three and four years. Like there's no time apart. When it is time apart, I enjoy myself but all I'm thinking about is my kids, even when I drop them off to daycare or to a babysitter, like, "Man, I'm going to miss ya'll," or, you know [chuckles]. I miss them right now [laughs] but I need a little break right now [chuckles] too.

So, no, it's a little one. I had just a little traumatic experience with having her. I had her early, and I had her in the toilet. I went into labor and I went to the hospital. They told me I wasn't having contractions. I left and went home. Two hours later I had her in the toilet. She wasn't breathing for about ten to fifteen minutes. By the time I got to the hospital they like they had the lady come in to pray with me and, you know, basically telling me like it's over, like she's not going to make it or whatever, just while the lady was talking to me they came in, like, "Well, she's starting to breathe on her own, so I'm going to try to, you know, help her out a little." So, she came a little soon, so it's like with the littler they are...I have and it's a really closer attachment to her, I guess you could say than I do with the older one just because of everything that I went through. Then after she was born, they didn't let me bring her home for like a month and a half. So, once I did it was like I always had her here.

So you know, it's like that's another thing as far as my kids go, like I feel bad because I do feel like sometimes I'm treating one better than the other, or I'm hugging on her more than I'm hugging on her older sister, and it's not that I'm doing it on purpose. I

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guess it's just what I've been through with her and, you know so that's why I think maybe the four year old, that's where her acting out comes into play. Because I don't know if she feels like I'm showing her sister more love than I'm showing her. With her, the four year old, I do have that mentality, like, oh, she's a big girl, so I try to treat her like a big girl but she's only four and she still probably want that attention, like that she was, you know, a kid, like a baby.

So I guess that would be like a problem that's just with me. Like, you know, so, I try to you know, to show her affection but to me she feels so big. Like she's a big girl, so I don't know, but I try. I try to work it out. It's also her mouth too. Oh, my gosh, you meet her, you'll be like, "This girl has been here before." Like it's... and she's only four, and she thinks she know everything. You can't tell her nothing. You can say "The sky is blue." "Uh-uh, no it's not. Do you see those little white things up there. The sky is blue and white." [Imitating her daughter]and you be like, "Okay." [Laughs]. She just thinks she knows everything. I can't tell her nothing. I just try though. I really do try.

Expectations of Children

I let my children know that I approve of what they're doing by telling them. I give them a, "Good job," or, "Wow, that's good," or, "You go, girl," or something, you know, something like that. That's all it takes them to be excited, like, "Oh, look at this mommy." "Good girl," and they just...it brightens up their day [chuckles]. I find the disciplining the most challenging thing to do. Well, like I mentioned earlier, the oldest one, the four year old, with the attitude. You try to talk to her and work with her, but even if it doesn't work, its still attitude, it makes it worse. It's actually, it's really aggravating

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for the parent. It's really aggravating for me. So, you know, you don't want to whop only you don't want to, you know, punish them that harsh because, to me, by her being four and her having her own attitude, I think she's not going to like me, or, "Mommy did this to me, so, I don't...you know, I don't like her" or whatever, so I really find that hard because I don't want her not to like me, or I don't, you know, so I care about how she feels.

So that's been hard for me, because it doesn't give me that structure to discipline her. It's like I'm just letting her do whatever so she won't be mad at me but other than that, the little one, she's three but she's like still my baby, so she don't really [chuckling]...she don't really do much. So that's something very hard for me to do - discipline her because she'll give me those big eyeballs, and I'll be like, "Okay, just sit down." [Laughter]. She knows my soft spots.

Right now I just expect them to be kids. I don't want them to grow up too fast. I don't want them to have to worry about things that they do not have to worry about. I do expect them to, you know, get older and, you know, make wise decisions in their life, they can come to me for everything. I just lead them...basically in right direction. I don't want them to like fall in with any bad things that, you know that would just get them off track, just drugs, the violence that's going on out here now, the bad influences of everything, just all the negative stuff. I can't keep them away from but I would expect them to listen to me, and, you know, just take my advice, and, you know, do things the right way.

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Boys [chuckles] would be an example of growing up too fast. That's really my biggest one, is boys. Because my oldest daughter, the four year old, again, she's...you know, she...she's...we have more boys in our family. So, to her, when she's staying with boy cousins or, you know, boys that's my brothers, or uncles, or something like that, you know, she think it's fine. I don't want her to get outside and still think that it's fine to play with these boys, or guys, or men that...you know, because she don't know but that's the, what I really have a problem with. Like getting her to know the difference between, okay, this is your family, you know, it's fine that you're talking and, you know, being social and of course with your family, but with guys on the street or little boys on the street, and I just don't want that to happen. I want to help her see the difference and understand that boys out in the street might be friendly, and caring, and she might be taking that the wrong way. Like just, "Hi, little girl." Because I actually had a incident a few days ago where there was a little boy that came here [shelter]. One of the parents told me that she saw her laying on his lap. Now, she plays a lot with my brother and he'll hold her while he play the game or something like that, but that's your uncle. I know him and, you know, I'm comfortable with that because that's, you know, our family but if I would have saw something like that, she doesn't know that that's not okay. She doesn't know this little boy. There was something that the little boy might have said for her to do it or...you know, I don't never want to be in a position where...even little kids, they'll probably do it because that's what they know, and be telling her, "Oh, come here little girl. Come sit on my lap," or whatever and I want her to know, "No, I don't know you like that," you know?

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When I disapprove of their behavior I tell them no. Like I sort of, again, I try to talk to them and tell them that that's not the right thing most of the time they usually get it. Sometimes I do have to constantly tell them the same things over and over but most of time I just talk to them and we try to...I try to get them to understand that that's not what you're supposed to be doing. I guess it's basically about communication because I really try so hard not to whoop them as for, you know, being a discipline for them. I don't...I really don't believe in whooping because I remember the whoopings, you know [laughter]. I don't...I don't have the heart to do it.

Hopes for Children

Well, I hope with Ayana, I would see her as being a doctor or something [chuckles]. Malindy, some type of superstar, because that's all she's been through is like dancing, and singing, and modeling. She's a very "out there" type of person, so like something that just puts her in the light [laughs]. That's what she likes to do. She likes to be the spotlight of attention and everything. So, just with their attitudes now, maybe she'll be like that, something where she can show off. The other one, she's a little bit more laid back but, you know, she likes to do things, and work with her hands. She likes to play doctor with her little baby dolls and stuff, so just...something like that. She's more quiet and shy, laid back, kind of like how I was when I was growing up. I would want them to go to college. I want them to go to college, finish college, and just to be happy, just to be happy. I mean I'm fine as long as my kids are, you know, doing everything they're supposed to do, and then I'm fine.

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Sibling Relationships

I have, two brothers and one sister, one other sister. My oldest brother is 34-years-old. The other one's 28. My sister is 21 years old. My brothers were with my dad when me and my sister were placed in foster care. Well, the one...the 28 year old was with my dad. The 34 year old, however old he is [chuckles] he was, incarcerated. I had, another brother that passed away and that was the only brother that I was close with. Well, I didn't include him in the, you know, brothers but, yeah, that was the only brother I was close to. What was significant about my relationship with him? He was just cool [chuckles]. It was...I don't know, he really, I felt he was the only one that was treating me like a little sister at the time, you know. I...I really took to him like my dad. Like me...like how me and my dad was really close, it was me and him really...we was just like the same. I used to go to him. Whether I went to my dad or my mom, he just...you know, he always used to do stuff with me, take me to the park, read me stories, or anything I asked him. He was a really cool big brother. He was about eight or nine years older than me. He had leukemia.

Relationship with Caregivers

Well, my mom, you know, like when she was in her own little thing. We were actually...me and my sister were actually cooking for mom when we were younger. So, you know, with that happening, we have a lot of, I guess you could say hate in our heart because of that. My mom abused drugs and alcohol. She was around the wrong guys. The wrong guys were making her chose between us and them and she would chose them. My

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relationship with my mother during my childhood was terrible. There really wasn't one.

Terrible. There really wasn't one until about when I was, turned sixteen, I think.

So kind of like we were born and my grandmother took custody of us but we had like rights and stuff, so, you know, our mom could come visit with us as long as she was around but you know, of course the majority of the time we were with our grandma but [sighs] I don't know, she [grandmother] just, she just took real good care of us. She, like I said, she parented us. She taught us right from wrong. She taught us what we were supposed to do, what we weren't supposed to do. She [chuckles] was the one that took care of us. She, basically taught us everything, taught us values, taught us, how, you know, how families should be, and, you know, she took basically on the role of being a mom to us, instead of our mother.

When were older, we went from being with our family to being with these different families [foster care]. Then my dad, he was never really there. Like he was the type that would come and get me because...we had different dads, me and my sister. So, my dad would come and get me and not my sister. It felt different not being around my younger sister and, you know, my sister was six and I was eight. So it was like really different. We were in foster care for about six, seven years.

Childhood was rough. Even in the foster home. We were fighting everyday with the girls that was in the families that we was with. The foster lady, she felt that was like her way to discipline us. Whenever we would get in trouble or she didn't like something we did, she would always call her granddaughter to come over and fight with me or my sister. Sometimes I wouldn't be there and she'll try to call the daughter over while I

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wasn't there, or sometimes my sister wasn't there and she'll call the girl over for me, or, it was just, it was rough. It was really rough.

We had a social worker. We would report everything to her. I guess because they wasn't seeing anything physical, and I guess that the lady was like covering up everything that was...she was doing, they kind of wait a while until they actually start like seeing things and seeing how we was reacting with the family. And that's when they took us out, and they...they moved us but yeah, the social workers, they didn't...I mean, they...you know, they can only see so much and they can only believe so much because we were kids. We were in about two foster homes for six or seven years.

I was a teenager, about, then that's when my dad actually took the classes and the stuff to get me and both my sister out of the foster home and we went to go stay with him but then he had a wife that was controlling. She wanted all of his attention. She didn't like the fact that me and my dad was really, really close. So when he took me, she kind of like did her best to kind of split it up, you know. He just kind of...he went her way. Things between us just kind of went bad, really bad.

Supportive Kin

How do my family members respond when somebody in the family needs assistance? They don't. Everybody is just more on their own thing. They're just into their own things. I have some aunts and uncles who could help out but they don't so if I needed something, I'd probably go to friends probably, or a boyfriend or something [chuckles].

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I don't have any family members that I feel close to but I do have a friend of mine, who I call my sister. She's younger than me but, you know, I'm really feeling like this is my sister. She understands me and we're super, super close. You know, and I don't even know where I'd be without her, because she's younger than me but she's very smart for her age. A lot of the things that she tells me, I be like, "Wow, this is coming from someone that's, she's 21 but she's just got so much advice. Like she tells me all the right things, something like, that I feel that maybe if I had a older sister, or even my own other sister, like considering what I've been through, I feel like maybe me and my blood sister she'll be able to talk about it. Like what she's been through what I've been through but I feel more comfortable talking to my friend, where, you know, because she understands me. She helps me. She gives me advice. So, you know, if I don't know what to do, she'll be the first person I'll call before I will call my own blood sister. I've known her for about five years. There are no relationships that I respect and honor like this as far as my family. I don't know anything about my family history as far as grandparents; great grandparents and so on either except my grandmother taking care of us. My grandmother was very loving, caring, she was dedicated, real, I guess you could say family oriented, like the months that she was around. She just had a real good heart.

Parental Support

I don't receive any support from anyone in parenting my kids. As I was growing up, and I was a teenager, she [grandmother] was teaching me how to be a young lady, how to be a young woman, uh, when I had kids, how to be a mom. When I didn't know what to do about, you know, growing up, she really, really helped me with that. She

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helped me more, well, not really when they were born but, you know, before that, yeah but, you know, she's getting older now and she really can't do much. She's been through all these different surgeries, so it's really hard now but I just remember things that she used to tell me, like, you know, as far as taking care of them [her children] and with the discipline, that's why I always choose to talk first, because that's what she taught me. That's how she approached everything with us. Like we'll talk first, and if the talking didn't get through to then that's maybe when she'll get the switch but [chuckles]. So yeah.

What gives me strength as a parent is just getting up every day, doing what I've got to do, to make sure that everything that I've been going through, I make a change. When I do something to better myself, I do something to better my kids. I just really want them to grow up knowing that I did everything I can to make sure they were safe, they don't have no worries. Like I said, I just want them to focus on being kids right now. As we grow, as I grow, as they grow, you know, we're going take them...you know, go to the next step. Once they get teenagers, we're going to work on that, you know, into adulthood, we're going to work on that. So that's what I'm here for, that's what I get up for, that's what makes me strong [chuckles]. I don't have any limitations as a parent. I'm going to do it all. I'm going to do it all [chuckles]. I don't know how other people would describe me as a parent [chuckles], hopefully it'll be a good parent. I mean, I would say I was doing my best.

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Family Traditions Celebrated

My family didn't celebrate any kinds of traditions when you were growing up. No holidays, birthdays, family reunions, special events, or things like that [chuckles].

Family Proximity

Most of my family lives in the Midwest. We don't visit each other. I came here because I heard it was a state that helps women out a lot and I was just struggling, trying to make a better life for me and my kids. I've been here two weeks. I'm real new. I have a cousin here. He moved here with the mother of his kids about five years ago.

Socioeconomic Support

Well, since I've been here, basically, just being here has given me a stable place to stay. You know, my kids can sleep in a bed. They don't have to sleep on anybody's couch or take up somebody else's bed. I don't have a lot of at the moment but, since I've been here, in two weeks I have an interview [job]. So that's good. I mean, I just feel that it's more...my kids are comfortable. I'm comfortable and I haven't felt like that in a long time. Because even if I am staying with somebody, and even if it's a friend, you're still not comfortable because it's not your own...So, you know, at least, being here [shelter], you know, they kind of give you your own little space and it just, it starts you off somewhere, so. I heard about this shelter through, the resources that was given to me when I got here. When I was living in [the state I came from] the neighborhood I lived in was bad. Always shooting, just guys on every corner. Just bad. It's just a rough neighborhood.

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Loss and Separation of Family Kin

The first time I was separated from my grandmother was when me and my sister were taken into foster care. It was just like...she was the only person we had at the time and we was the only people that she had at a time. So, I guess you could say it just felt like a big part of her was taken away and a big part of us was taken away. I just remember her being hysterical because the lady just popped up at our front door, like, “Oh, we have to take the kids.” We were just in the house playing and she was taking a nap. The lady comes to the door, and like we’ve got to go. You know, I just remember her calling everybody she can think of, like, “They’re taking the kids. They’re taking the kids. Where is their mom? Call her, get her here,” and whatever but we never really got the chance to even, you know, say goodbye because everybody was just in this big up—uproar. We were screaming and hollering, and she’s screaming and hollering, and next thing you know we’re out the door, and that was it. That was it. We didn’t get to see her again until we were old enough to know everything, it’s like I said, ‘til I was about 16 years old but the foster lady, she actually wouldn’t let us talk to her. She wouldn’t let us call. She wouldn’t let us...when they’d call, she would tell them that we were gone or, you know, she’ll tell them some stories, like we didn’t want to talk to them but that never really was the case and I don’t even understand why she did that [chuckles]. I really don’t.

The other separation that stands out in my mind growing up as a child was just basically when my brother was taken away. I mean he died from leukemia. He just

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played a big role in, you know, like I said, other than my grandmother, that was my only family who I just really took to so. I was 14 when he died.

I guess with my mom I felt some kind of rejection as a child because it's like what did we do so wrong to, you know, get treated like this? Why are we going through all this when we're just kids? Like you're grown and you had kids, so is it that you don't want us or...or maybe we just didn't understand. Maybe she was going through something but I guess that would be something, like that it might feel getting rejected.

Lessons Learned from Childhood

My childhood experiences just made me more wise to things and just to be more smarter. I know I don't want my kids to feel like how I felt about my mom. So I guess that's where my own type of parenting come into play, because I don't want them to feel bad about me, or I don't want them to wonder why does mommy treat me like this, or feeling like they're not wanted, or anything like that.

I also think it [childhood experiences] held me back to because I didn't finish school. I feel like if I just had that structure, and that guidance, and everything, that I feel like I would have completed and done what I was supposed to do but by me moving around so much and just having all this other drama in my life, it just threw my focus off of school. So I'm at school thinking about all the things that's going on out of school. So, it just really affected it a lot. I finished the 11th grade but still, with that, I just feel like I got by somehow. You know, I don't know, I feel like I could have learned more. I could have done more. I could have stayed in school. I'm a very smart person. I like to learn. You know, I'm good with the books. It's just that my focus was in so many other places.

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Then you've got so many influences around you and you don't have anybody that's telling you what you're doing is wrong but you feel like it's okay, especially when you're a kid, so, you know, you're just like, "Oh, I can do whatever I want to do. Nobody cares." So, that was just like my mentality then. My kids changed that. My first daughter I had when I was 18. I just hated it but I had to grow up a little bit and change a little bit when I was 18, but that's really when it hit, when I became a mom.

My childhood taught me not to let whatever I go through bring me down. No matter what situation, no matter whatever you go through it only makes you stronger. That's my motto. Like I've been through so much and I just take everything I go through day by day. I just take that and be like, "You know what, today was a bad day but tomorrow will be better. I'm going to make it better."

Adult Relationship with Mother

No, I basically feel the same way about my mom. Now that I'm older I just try to understand where she's coming from and I guess since it's already been, since, you know, the feeling I've been feeling even when I was younger is already in me, I can't let it go but I try. I have some relationship with her.

It's a okay distance relationship. I don't like it. I don't like it because It's kind of crazy because I haven't been with a family where we have, Thanksgiving dinner all together or like the holidays and stuff together but I'm a family type of person. So I believe in being close with your mom. I believe in being close with your dad and, you know, just being around your family, and being comfortable but not with her, I don't know what's up with her. It's because she still has problems, that she has...that's...what's

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going on, being like the drug abuse and alcohol abuse. You know, it's to me like, "Why can't you see this is what tore us apart then? We're here now and we're here to help you. So, instead of steady rejecting everybody, and rejecting me, and you see I'm trying to be here for you, you know, it just makes me just want to give up." I just...you know, I just put my hands up and I say, "You know what? I'm grown now. You're grown, so I just have to let you do what you've got to do." You know, I'll talk to...I'll call her and, you know, we'll talk for awhile but as far as being around her, I could be around her for only so long [chuckles].

My children? They love her [chuckles]. They love her to death. They think she is the best lady around [laughs]. I mean, and I can say that, you know, with my kids and with us she is different. You know, because, you know, she was younger then, so she was just like wild, out there. She's older now and you know, she still does what she does, but she also knows she's older. You know, she has grandkids now and you know, she's more active with them than she was with us. She'll play with them. She give them snacks all day. She'll sit up and watch cartoons with them, and movies, and stuff like that. I guess that's where I look at her too, like, "Man, like you can do this with them. Even though you still have your issues, still why you couldn't be like that with us," you know but yeah, I guess I can say she's been a pretty cool grandma to them. That's all we ever wanted, was just a little attention, just, "Look mom, look at this little picture I drew." It was always like, "Yeah, yeah, okay." [Imitating her mother] and then she's that way and we over here like, "Why she didn't look at my picture?" You know, with them [her own children], she'll sit there and color with them and stuff like that. So, I mean, it's a good

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feeling because I see she's trying, and she's there for her grandkids but it's also like,

"Man, like I know I could have been a lot better if you would have just took that time and showed me how to draw that 'A' [chuckles]."

Cultural Pride

I feel connected and some sense of pride with African American communities by well, just us being African American, period. That's always good but you know, I will say they take it a whole different way. They take what's positive about us and just turn it into something so negative, like all the violence and, you know, the ignorant things. I guess being ghetto is what they want to call it, you know. It just looks bad. They just look at the whole procession. Those certain people, you know, have another culture, thinking about us, like, "Oh, African Americans are crazy or they just...they're ignorant," or something like that. So that's pretty sad [chuckles].

What Helping Professionals Should Know

Well, first thing, it's hard. It's hard just being a woman, like from going to not having kids to having kids, like you really have to grow up a lot. You know, because it's not just you anymore. You have to, you know, be a role model, and you have to, you know, be this bigger person for these little people, you know, it's challenging. The kids will test you [chuckles]. You've got to be strong. You have to be strong. You have to know what you want. Like you have to know, "Now I have a kid. Where am I going from here? What is the next step?" You know, you have to set goals for yourself and your kids, even if it's day-to-day goals, week-to-week goals, month-to-month goals. You have to

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just, you have to, you know, be on top of your game. [Chuckles] For instance, you've got to know a lot once you have kids.

What Community Should Know About Sexual Mistreatment

Basically let them know that you can say no. If you don't feel right then say something. If you know, you're not being treated right, then, you know, try to get away. Don't try to, you know, sit there and make excuses for the guy and why he's doing things?" Don't be afraid. Do not be afraid. [pause] Talk to someone. Ask for help.

Education About Sexual Abuse Prevention

I think if they could actually see the ending results, like if it was to get more physical or more violent, like if they see what really happened if they continue doing what they're doing. Maybe that'll be like some type of reality check, to make them open up and like see like that you're really hurting that person or even just seeing a person...or just like let's say we, if my kids father like actually seen me talking about him, you know, and he's also there looking, maybe he will understand and see like how I really hurt.

Final Reflection About Parenting

I mean, being a parent is pretty cool. It's all about your approach. You know, you can be a good parent or you can be a bad parent. You know, it's just all about your approach.

Case Study #4– Harriet

Her mother's boyfriend sexually molested and impregnated Harriet when she was 13-years old. Harriet's mother did not believe her. She left her mother's home at age 18 and left her daughter in the care of her mother even though she realized she was placing

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her daughter at risk for abuse. Harriet reasoned, at that time, that it was better than having her daughter in the streets with her not knowing where she was going or what she would do.

I'm 39 years old and I have four children, one girl and three boys. The girl is 23 years old and the boys are ages 19, 14, and four. I'm currently in treatment.

Sexual Molestation

I have a daughter as a product of me being molested and it was one of my mom's boyfriends. To this day she [mom] doesn't acknowledge that that's what happened. I mean, I was only 13 years old when it started. How am I old enough to consent to have sex with your [her mother] boyfriend? She don't believe it. She believes if it did happen, I was the one who was being promiscuous. I mean, this is a grown man. You know. Yeah, he's beating on her. How was she going to save me? You know, I felt like I was the sacrifice, you know, to keep him from beating on her.

Effects of Sexual Mistreatment

When my daughter was born, that's when I gave up. You know, I started questioning if there was a God. You know, I came from being a very outward person into a very inward person, because I always excelled at school. I stopped caring about my appearance, trying to wash it away. I just felt totally hopeless. I was pregnant and I didn't even know I was pregnant. You know, sex had never been explained to me at that point. I was still thinking babies came out your navels. You know.

Well, for the longest time I thought it was my fault, but then as I got older and I replayed it in my head, I knew that it wasn't something that I wanted. I knew it was

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wrong. I don't know how I knew, but I knew it was wrong, and I definitely knew something was wrong when they just wanted to pack up and move. You know. I kept it a secret so that I didn't want anyone to look at her [mom] with shame. So I put off my happiness and kept her [daughter] secret. I just couldn't live with a lie no more because I had started just being destructive, and getting into drugs, and not caring about myself or anybody else. You know, the people that loved me the most, they were gone, so who's going to love me now in the way that I need to be loved?

Saul [mother's boyfriend] never denied it. Even his family acknowledges my daughter looks more like him than my sisters do. You know. His family say's "You look just like Auntie Pam." But he's not my dad. What is she doing looking like his people, you know? It's like, I feel it's like the elephant in the room but nobody talks about it.

Disclosure Process

My whole family knows and, you know, no one protected me. That's the way I feel, that by that point, we were so isolated from the rest of the family because of the abuse that was going on. When I got pregnant, that's when we moved from Chicago to Milwaukee. So my family, for the first seven years, seven seems to be the number, they thought my daughter was my mom's daughter because she passed her off as her daughter, because we were going to let her adopt her. I was, but something in my heart just wouldn't let me do it. You know, "Because you done made me stay in the house with this child every day. You done made me take care of it." Regardless of what has happened, she's still a part of me and she's mine, you know. Me, my mom, and my daughter all moved to Milwaukee although my mom's boyfriend didn't come right away. But as soon

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as I got 18, I moved out. When I moved out I had no idea where I was going or what I was going to do. I knew that she [mom] would take care of my daughter. I knew she loved her. You know, even though I knew things were going on in the house, I just couldn't, I didn't want to have my daughter subjected to the street. I didn't have any concern about my daughter being molested because, like I told you, I instilled it in her to be very opinionated [chuckles], you know. I listen to her so she speaks her mind. To this day she speaks her mind.

I told my [and aunt seven years later when I had told my aunt that was like five years older than me. I went back and I asked her how come I had to leave my aunt Lorraine's house. My grandmother told me it was because Saul had gave me some money. I must have blocked this out because I don't remember, but a girl and my aunt's boyfriend had tried to molest me. They had taken me to the hospital and find out that he hadn't penetrated or anything, but I guess my mom blackmailed him and told him, if he didn't buy her furniture and stuff she would report him to the police. That's how the new furniture came about. I never knew that, so my grandmother told me that she [Harriet's mother] pretty much prostituted me, you know. That's something I still struggle with. It's something I didn't even remember. I mean because of that [molestation], it took me a long time to trust men, you know, to get in a relationship. You know, with all that has happened within the family, how do you trust outsiders?

I told my daughter when she was 16. She was shocked but she was real open to it. Then I just gave her a little flashback, so telling her that "You remember me telling you to call me mom? That never forget that I'm your mom." She was like, "Yeah, I do

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remember that.” You know, because she thought she was my mom’s daughter for a while too. You know, but I explained all of that to her since we have gotten closer. At first she thought I was lying and stuff like that. Then I guess she got to looking at him and looking at my sisters. She’s like, “Well, yeah, there’s some truth to this.” It brought us closer when she understood why I always had her voice her opinion, and to have a voice.

Relationship with Children

I had my first child when I was 14 years old. My mom, even though I lived in the household, practically raised that one because I didn’t have any idea of what parenting was, but I did have an idea that I wanted to be nothing at all like my mom was. I mean, but I don’t hold that against my mom because she did the best she could with what she had to work with. You know, but now that I know, that’s my responsibility to nurture my children, you know. I’ve gotten a lot more patient. I think the experiences that I’ve had with my older children has taught me to do better with my younger ones.

My relationship with my children, it’s more open. When I was growing up I wasn’t allowed to voice my opinion, you know, children should be seen and not heard. I guess it stagnated my communication. I just didn’t want to bring my children up like that. I’ve raised them to have an opinion and to voice how they feel.

Well, we just interact, you know, we discuss things more, because there was a lot of lack of communication within my household [growing up]. Things were always assumed. You know, and I just really feel that communication was the best key to being open, and to keep the children open to talking, and not keeping no secrets.

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The most rewarding experience for me as a parent is just to know that I've done the best that I can do to protect them and keep them safe, as well as raise them, nurture them to be the best that they can be. The thing that I'm most proud of is that they do have their own opinions, and that they speak up for themselves because that's something I wasn't able to do as a child. The most challenging part of parenting is the rebellion. You know, I can explain my experiences and give my testimony, but you know, you still have to let them have their own experiences. You really just hope that they will learn from the mistakes that you've made, but at the same time, you have to let them make their own mistakes. I just try to keep my mouth closed and don't say, "Well, I told you so [laughter]."

Expectations of Children

Well, we're all early risers. I believe in structure. We'd get their clothes ready for school the night before. We'd have a routine. You know, because I wasn't brought up with a routine. I never knew what was expected, so I tried to have familiarity for them so they know what's expected at certain times of the day. That really worked well for them as well as for me. We also had family time together you know, where we'd get an hour and just sit around and talk about how our day went, and to just give them that personal time, to let them know that they were loved and cared for.

I let them know I approve of their behavior through affection and I give them praise. I encourage them, because I really do believe, us, as a culture, we need...we need...they really need to be empowered. You know, so many times we were shut down and told we're not going to be nothing, and, "You look just like your dad," and stuff like

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that. I just try to do the opposite because I know how that felt when I was growing up and just feeling I was never good enough. I just want my kids to be happy you know, for them to have joy. When I disapprove of their behavior. I tell them. I communicate that as well. I do let them know that they have choices, and with those choices there will always be consequences, whether they're positive or negative.

Hopes for Children

I would like my children to be spiritual, to have joy and peace because without those, everything else is turmoil. I think my children would wish sobriety for me, financial stability, and they are always talking about us being reunited. Knowing that me and my children can talk about any and everything without fear gives me strength. You know, I was afraid to talk to my mom about anything. No matter what they say I try not to be judgmental.

Parenting Philosophy and Challenges

I think my strength is my determination, and being persistent with my children to empower them. You know, if you keep telling them they are dumb, "you ain't going to be nothing," after awhile you start to believe that. You know, I try to build them up encourage them and let them know that they can achieve something, regardless of what anybody say. You know, the streets beat us down enough. You don't need to be beating down your own household. I think we need to prepare our children for that, you know. You know, she [imitating her mother] would say "Come here you little hardhead." Don't tell him that because he's going to start to believe that, you know, whether it's negative

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or positive attention, any attention is consumable to them, especially when they're very impressionable and young. You know and you don't want to tear down their spirit.

Well, with my boys, I don't think I can teach them to be men. You know, that's where the men come in at, I mean, I'm not a man, so I don't know how the first clue on trying to tell nobody else how to be one [chuckling], so not just men but responsible men, you know. To teach them to have values, so they don't have these four, and five, and six baby mommas and you know, just letting them know that the choices they make now affects them for the rest of their lives. You know, when you're young you don't think about those things. You think you're on top of the world.

Shit, I looked at them [her children], "like I'm going to be 40 for real [chuckling]? I don't feel like no 40. Like where did it go? But I can honestly say too, I didn't grow up until I was about 35, you know. So we'll say I didn't mature until I was bout 34 because my body was growing but my mind and emotions moved at a different pace.

I think other people would describe me as a loving parent. My frustration is with trying not to let my circumstance sabotage me or define who I am as a person. So, instead of me looking at myself as a victim, you know, I look at myself as a survivor. I look at myself as a kaleidoscope because there's more to me than meets the eye, you know. Sometimes people look at you and they think they know you. "You don't really know me. You don't know my struggle or what I've been through in order to get here today."

Intergenerational Values and Supportive Kin

Education was very important in our house. I think I got my morals and values from aunt Letha, my grandmother's sister. You know she was the one that instilled the

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spirituality part into my life. She had an active role in raising me. She raised me for the first seven years of my life. I feel particularly close to my grandmother on my mother's side too. I've always felt close to her because she was more open. You know, she never judged me. She loved me unconditionally, and her expectations were attainable. She expected me to get good grades, to keep the room cleaned. You know, to believe in myself, and forgiveness. My grandmother's expectations were reasonable. Education was important, moral values like, "don't let no boy be opening up your pocketbook, [private parts]" you know, those types of things [chuckles]. She had a very good work ethic, you know. She worked for everything. And she did teach me how to live, I mean, as far as, you know, having that structure of going to church, going to work, you know, having one boyfriend, you know, not being promiscuous, putting money up for a rainy day because you never know when you're going to need it. Besides my grandmother and aunt there are no other relationships in my family that I honor or respect. None at all. I know my grandmother's history. I can trace that tree. I'm just not able to trace my family's father's side of origin.

Family Migration

My maternal family came from Mississippi. They've all left Mississippi and migrated to Wisconsin, Chicago, and California due to the workforce. That's where I was born, in San Francisco.

Sibling Relationships

I have three sisters. Well, there is a 14-year difference, as far as my sister under me who is 25. The other two are 24 and 21 years old. No brothers. For the first 14 years I

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was the only child. My mom was *very* protective of me, you know, because I guess she was a wild child when she was coming up. She did not let me out of her sight. Then I felt like she waited 'til I got old enough to help her raise the other ones, because now her children and my children are in the same age bracket, but then I am the oldest grandchild, so [Laughs]. Being the oldest comes with expectations. Even though I was a child, and because of some of the dysfunction ability that was going on, I became the parent in most ways. Even though I was an overachiever, I always felt like I was just never good enough, because no matter what I did there was no praise, no affections, no hugs. It was just expected, to aim higher or at least that's how I felt.

Relationship with Caregivers

I would describe my childhood as one of survival. My mom and I, we're only 16 years apart. She was kind of like a wild child. She used to run away from home. You know, back in the days she was like 15, hanging out in the bar, being promiscuous. She had her own apartment at 16. She dated older men. So I understand her reasoning, but then, on the other end of the spectrum, by me not being able to experience things, I tended to be really gullible and fell for the first thing that drew me in because I had nothing to compare it to. My mom was abused and by me being a child at that time, I got to witness a lot of that. I knew that's something I would not tolerate. I just couldn't understand why she stayed. She was physically and mentally abused. By the time my sisters came along, all the abuse stopped, but I was still traumatized. They were able to move on with their life, I was like, "Well, what do I do from here?" Then it's like the elephant in the room. Everyone knows about it and sees it but no one talks about it.

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My mom used silence for power. I was just supposed to know by her looks and when I didn't guess right I was whooped. Now, had she explained what she wanted, and then if I didn't do it, and I got a whipping, I could understand that, but to just automatically assume that I'm supposed to know this, I'm only seven years old, how am I going to know it if you don't teach it to me? and, it was expected that I was supposed to do it right, and I guess that's why I really didn't learn the difference between what was right and what was wrong if that makes any sense. There was a hurt like I told you. Like, you know, she always had these expectations that were unclear but I've always thought if I could just make her happy, it would be okay but inside I was hurting myself, you know.

When I was upset as a child I isolated myself. I'd just go in my room and just day dream. I did a lot of daydreaming. Like I told you, my mom, she was really schizo. It wasn't anybody I could voice it to. Then my mom instilled what's going on in this house stays in this house. She wasn't affectionate at all. There was no praise, no acknowledgment for anything only negative behavior, you know. I think I can count on my hands how many times my mom has told me she loved me. It was my aunt and grandmother who told me. With my mom I was very shy, timid. I was a nervous wreck with my mom [chuckles]. My aunt and my grandmother, they gave me a sense of peace.

Family Resources and Challenges

It's so funny because right now my mom is the elder of the family. So everyone looks up to her for financial support, and if not, you know, they use the resources and stuff in the community. At the same time, when she was giving these resources, it's like everybody won't say anything against her, even though they know she may be wrong,

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because they know that she has something to meet their needs. So, if momma's mad at you, the whole family is mad at you, because they're trying to stay in good graces [laughs]. My mom's house is considered home for everyone because she is the only homeowner [chuckles] in the family. You know, that's the house when at holiday time, everyone goes to for Thanksgiving, Christmas, all of that, and Sunday dinner. That's the number that never changes. There are no barriers for anyone getting there either.

I don't look to family for emotional support. No, I don't. I mean, they try to be supportive but, you know, they're dysfunctional, so they don't really know how to give support. You know, if they don't have it for themselves how can they give it away?

Self Support and Professional Help

I've learned how to nurture myself, you know, through my higher power, through prayer, by words of encouragement, affirmations, and daily meditation. I started really getting into it [meditation] at probably about the age of 28 because I got tired of being depressed. And, you know, I wanted to hear certain things from family members. I didn't feel that I should have to tell them to say what to say to me. I'm like, well, why do I even keep looking for them to say this to me when I can say it to myself? You know? It took me a lot of years to realize that, you know, then, I was angry. Then, you know, I just had to realize, well, how could they give it away if they didn't have it? If it wasn't instilled in them, how could they instill it in me?

Mental illness, alcoholism, and depression run in my family. They're even angry with me for getting on medication, my mother. I can't keep living like this. They didn't believe in medication because you're supposed to be a strong Black woman. You can

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handle anything, but I believe in the opposite. You have to be able to allow yourself to be weak in order to be made strong.

You know, I've had to relearn some things. I really have. Just feeling the way that I was feeling and having all the resentments and the hurt gave me the courage to change. I knew that that's not my purpose. I didn't want to feel that way, so I started seeking out other ways and just exposing myself to different people and just thinking outside the box and not living in those old wives tales and stuff. I saw a therapist for depression and anxiety and I still go to support groups. I find them helpful. You know, that's what I mean about secrets will lose power. I mean sometimes you feel that you're not being heard, but just getting it out, and knowing that, even though your experiences are unique, we all have a commonality because we go through the same thing. Just knowing that, and not feeling so alone, I'm able to see light at the end of the tunnel and it helps me to cope better.

Parenting Support

Miriam Savers. She's from Parenting with Purpose, in Rivers Center. She mentors me a lot, and she's very supportive, as well as my pastor, John, from Peaceful Living. In addition to just going to church and stuff, you know, they have an open-door policy. I can call them at any time. They also offer 12-step meetings within the church. We have prayer group. We have women's issues. It's a lot going on in the church. I can also call Larue up at any time you know. If I have a need and I'm not able to supply it, she will get on that Internet and help me find somebody that can help me. They don't do any actual parenting of the children because my children are in Milwaukee right now. But if I'm

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having an issue that I don't know how to approach with my children they kind of coax me on what to say and how to go about it. My children are with my mother but I contact them daily, hourly [laughter]. They've gotten me put out of a couple groups because I forgot to turn my ringer off [chuckles]. So, primarily, is this a family arrangement that is setup while I'm in treatment and things like that.

Intergenerational Parenting

I feel like there's a void being separated from my children. You know, I feel empty. But I also realize that good things are yet to come. In order for me to be there and love them the way they need to be loved, I need to learn to love myself. If I don't love myself I won't be able to love them. They have forgiven me for some of the things I've done, you know, as far as the drugs, and all that stuff, but now they understand why.

The drugs started probably when I got about 25. I experimented when I was 19 with alcohol. Didn't like it. Never liked the taste of it. Didn't like the way it made me feel. I experimented with weed, and as soon as there was a drought with weed I tried crack cocaine. I fell in love with it the first time I had it. Even when I was doing the drugs, I knew that I didn't do it for the enjoyment; I knew I was using it as an escape to deal with all the pain that was going on. But my family tried to act like they didn't know why I did drugs because *they* never did it. But I can remember seeing them smoking weed and stuff [chuckles].

You know, smoking crack was the ultimate slap in the face to my mom. But I think she really liked me being sick, because as long as I stayed sick, she knew she'd have control of the children. You know, and I'm just now coming to the realization of the

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dynamics of that. You know, since I've been clean, I've been clean 14 months; my mom does not accept any of my calls, none of them. It's like, "How dare you get clean and want to be responsible. You know, I need this money for these kids" [laughs], basically, you know. But I thought I was loving them more by giving them away because she does provide stability, even though, that emotional stuff wasn't there. You know, I had been very unstable. She's their guardian and gets money for them through the state so my being clean threatens that. I won't have trouble getting my children back because I have talked with a mediator. She's been in violation of our court order for supervised visitation. She had told my daughter that she's ready to give them back, and stuff. She is having some health issues and she knows I'm not in a position to just go down there because of my parole being here. You know, so, everything is to her advantage right now. Supervision was setup for once a month and she was to supervise the visits. My parole ends early April. It's coming real soon. I can't wait. I cannot. That's exciting. It is. It really is.

Family Traditions Celebrated

Every Sunday there's a celebration for soul food. They [extended family] believe in every pagan holiday there is. I mean, I acknowledge Christmas and Easter, but I don't really get into the Halloween or nothing like New Year's, I don't get into that. I do acknowledge birthdays.

Loss and Separation of Family Kin

The first time I was separated from loved ones was when I was seven years old. My mom wanted me to come back to live with her and her boyfriend and I was living

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with my aunt. I was really upset because, during that time, I had never really spent any time with my mom so I really didn't know her. I didn't have no say so at all in the decision. My mom, she didn't care I was upset. I knew that my aunt wanted me to stay but I know that it was beyond her control because back then there was nothing we could really do legally. You know, everything was with the family because she finally had gotten stable, had gotten an apartment of her own. You know, she had been living from house to house, to house, to house. My aunt didn't think that was a good environment for me. Plus, my mom, she was real short-tempered with her being so young.

Adult Relationship with Caregivers

[Sighs] Well, I miss my grandmother and my aunt because they're both deceased now. My mom and myself, we're still at odds with each other. It's not a good feeling, you know, even while I'm here in treatment, you know, I wonder if my children are being raised in the same manner. I know they are. You know, I know she screens their calls and they know not to say certain things to me when grandma is around, you know, just little stuff like that control and they try to appease her. I believe my mom has bitterness toward me and that's hard [crying]. You know, that's what made me leave Milwaukee.

Lessons Learned from Childhood

I found that even though my experiences weren't always good, everyone has a testimony and a purpose and I'm still here trying to fulfill one [chuckles]. I think my children have learned to be open-minded, you know, to be empowered as well as inspired to live life to the fullest and not be afraid to live. You know, so many of us are just not living life, we're just existing.

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Forgiveness, Health, and Healing

You know its crazy but I actually forgave my him [mother's boyfriend]. You know, I'm able to make peace with that because he was sick, you know. He's changed his life around. By the grace of God he no longer drinks. You know, he doesn't smoke, he's not abusive. You know, he was a workaholic. You know, and I really feel that the only reason him and my mom stay together is out of obligation. There's definitely no love there.

I had always been a loving person and I started having this anger and resentment showing up in all areas of my life, and actually got a charge of a battery to a police officer because the officer touched me in a way that made me flashback to what was going on with me and I lost it. I do have a felony because of that. It was something I learned. I'm like, "I, you know, can't go on this way. I've got to forgive this man, so that I can move on. Otherwise I'm going to stay sick, " you know. I didn't do it for him; I did it for me. I think he realizes the turmoil that has cause everybody, you know, the heartache. You can just see the sorrow in his face. In turn, my mom, she's just been very bitter because of it. I think that's only reason he stays, or that they're together. I think she probably holds that over him. You know. The way he treated here and what he did to me, you know. I just can't see there being any love there with all that hurt and pain.

Cultural Pride

While I do feel a sense of pride in the community, being brought up in [the Midwest], I didn't have any pride in the community because it was like a war zone. You know, but when I moved to [the north], I got to see the diversity and cultures, and

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realized that we don't all fall into one category. You know, sometimes one apple spoils the whole bunch, but the longer I'm living, I'm learning to see that, you know, we can be a positive force in the community, you know. We're not all intimidating. Sometimes misunderstood. You know?

I believe it comes off that way because we've had to fight for so much, you know. We don't really have that many parenting leaving us houses, and, you know, those things. Everyone's pretty much being for themselves. I have noticed that even though we don't have that much, we're still rich in heart because we will come together as a people. With any culture, if you can't go nowhere else, you notice how the other cultures fall out with their races, they can always go to the leader, basically.

What Helping Professionals Should Know

Well, I think to watch for the behavior, you know, the withdrawals, the hopelessness, I mean, it's not always the drugs. You know, there's something going on. There's the trauma itself. You know, I feel that they should have empowerment and assertive classes for our people because I mean, if you don't know nothing but being oppressive, how are you going to convert from being an aggressive person to an assertive person if you're not given those tools. You don't even know you're being aggressive because that's the way you've been raised all your life. You know, how are kids going to know that it's not okay to be beating up on [their] girlfriend if they've seen that all their life, you know?

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Education of Community About Sexual Mistreatment Prevention

I think the more people talk about it and the more it's talked about, people don't feel like it's such an isolated incident, you know and maybe they should have more support groups or educate others that it's not, you know, that it's okay to talk about these things because, when you actually look at it, it's been going on since the beginning of time, since we were slaves. You know what I'm saying? When you talk about it then you're acknowledging it then once you acknowledge it then maybe you can do something about it but if it's ssshhh! it's going to keep on going on because nobody's standing up and facing the problem. I think you encourage them [survivors] to talk probably through motivational speaking to bring your awareness of it, and then support groups so that they don't feel so isolated or maybe hotline or something, you know. Maybe if they had more literature about it too. I mean, there's all kinds of things we could do. Literature can be distributed to churches because a lot of molestation is happening in the churches [laughter], yep seriously.

Final Reflection

Well, you know, like I said, I don't like what I've had to go through but, you know, I am here for a purpose. Everybody has a testimony and had I not gone through those things I don't think I'd be the person I am today, and today I like who I am.

Case Study #5 – Angela

An extended family member molested Angela when she was seven years old. She told her mother, who initially did not believe her but when one of Angela's sisters reported the same experience to her mother, she then believed Angela. Her extensive

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history of substance abuse, involvement in prostitution, and other criminal activity resulting in numerous incarcerations made it difficult for Angela to parent her children with any consistency. She relied extensively on her extend family network in parenting her children.

I'm 44 years old. My name is Angela. I have two sons, one is 20 and the other one is 24. I have parented my 20-year old 13 years of his life. Well his father parented him for the other seven years. Between his father and his grandmother, so we're still parenting him. He is not getting it [laughs]. Some of them don't get it, yeah. My youngest son's dad lives in a different state but when I call him and discuss things with him, he gets our son on the phone or he comes back from Alabama and says "Look, this is what's up". His dad is retired from 31 years as a foreman with the GM plant. My son is his only child and he loves that boy. He loves my 24-year-old son too. He sends them both money and all that. He's part of our family. He comes here to make sure that we're okay. My son is getting ready to be a father himself. I had my 24 year old all the way until he was four, so only four years but my mother took over the role but I was also there, present in and out. So I parented him [sighs] about 12 years of his life. He's incarcerated now.

My oldest one's father was a jerk and an alcoholic and he kept denying him [Angela's son]. We had five DNA tests and they all came out positive. [Reflecting on the dialogue with her son's father] you can't tell me that that's not your baby and you still saying that he's not your son but you want to keep in contact with him because now you're getting older. Now you're seeing that you were wrong. Now, Roy doesn't want to have nothing to do with him. And I said, "Don't do that. Give him a chance. He might be

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sick. We don't know what's going on in his mind, he was wrong. Now he's back to normal. He's been sober two years. Try to regain a relationship with your father, even though he's White, you are his seed, so you need to get some closure with that." Roy doesn't like that his father is White because he [father] likes to say the N-word a lot. That's when he gets upset. My son tells him all the time, "Well, why do you like Black women then if you're so racist?" Now, his father wants to stay in touch with him and give him money. He denied him for so many years. Now, all of a sudden he's changed his mind and he knows he was wrong. That's hurtful.

Sexual Mistreatment and Disclosure Process

An extended family caregiver who drove a Sunday school bus when I was seven years old molested me. I wasn't penetrated. I was fondled and he performed oral sex on me. I told my mom but she didn't believe me at first. I said, "I don't want to go" and she [mom] kept asking me why I don't want to get on this school bus. I said, "I don't want to go. I don't want to go." I would cry and fight. She said, "Why don't you want to go?" I finally told her. I said, "Because he touched me." She was like, "What do you mean he touched you?" I said, "He touched me with his mouth and his hands." She just looked at me and then she asked him and he said that I was lying. It happened again but this time it happened with one of my sisters and my sister told her then she believed me. Then she and our church pastor went to confront him and they found him dead in his apartment. It was a "hush-hush" thing. This was many, many years ago. He was old though anyway. No one said anything about his death. I think he just died in his sleep but he had a lot of pictures of kids. He was a pervert. He was sick. He was taking pictures and everything. I

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didn't know he was taking pictures because I had blocked it out. You know what I'm saying? I didn't know he was taking pictures. He was taking random kids to his house making them stay on the bus last and then go taking them to his house. [Imitating the offender] "Oh, I've got to stop here. Come on. You want something good to drink, some candy?" You know, we trusted him. After it happened to my sister, my mom believed me and then she took me to therapy and all that.

Effects of Sexual Mistreatment

I went to therapy but that's why I was really, really close about my son because even though I know that happened to me, he had pictures of boys and little girls. He was a very sick individual. People really didn't talk about little boys. They always talked about little girls. So I always told my son, "If somebody touch you in the sauna, somebody touch you in your private area, you tell me!"

Child Victimization Intervention and Education

We experienced my son and one of my nephews fondling each other because they had seen someone else do it at a friend's house and we had to address it. They were kids. They were tiny kids. My son was three and my nephew had to be about, shoot, he had to be about nine or ten and they seen someone else do it. It only happened once and he [nephew] admitted it. He was like, "I didn't know," he said, "I thought it was okay," and we were like, "No, that is wrong." It came up because my baby boy, or my 20-year old, he kept saying that his "pee-pee" hurt. I was like, "What's wrong with your 'pee-pee'?" He was like, "It hurt." I said, "What happened?" He was really advanced at three years old and he was like pointing to his cousin so I asked his cousin. I said, "What did you

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do?” He said, “I went like this to it.” I was like, “You’re not supposed to touch him like that.” I asked him where did he see that and he said, “we went to the overnight, we seen that on T.V. and we seen the other kids doing it.” I was like, “That’s not okay.” You know, monkey see, monkey do. Our kids like that. They’re going to see that so if you subject your kids around that, that’s why I tell my son, all the time pornography is *not* for kids. We had a discussion about it with my oldest cousin and my oldest nephew because they were at the sleep over too. They remember it. He was like, “I don’t know what I was thinking.” He said, “I just thought it was normal.” And I was like, “You were eight or ten years old. You don’t know nothing. You were still a kid yourself.”

He’s a father now too so he’s real cautious of that. He’s got two girls and two boys. He was like, “Auntie, I tell them all the time and I make sure they see the little videotape about unwanted touch.” Yeah, we’ve got the CD of that so we just pass it around to the kids so they can watch it in the family because, yeah, it needs to be on TV more. They have every other commercial about drugs, and cigarettes, so why not? [Chuckles]. My oldest son was upset that that happened to his younger brother. He was mad at his cousin for a long time but like I told him, he was a child and we talked about it openly and we, you know, settled it. We don’t talk about it all the time but it does come up. You know, they both went to therapy about it when they were younger.

Concern for Sexual Health of Children

My youngest son says right now that that’s what he worries about with his little cousin, my niece because she’s nine and she’s developed. I tell her every time I see her I say, “Ain’t nobody touch you, have they?” “No, Auntie, nobody has touched me.” She

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said, "If they do I'm going to punch him." I was like, "No, you punch him and then tell somebody too." She was like, "Okay." She's real developed that's why she doesn't like to wear dresses. She's the only niece I have. I have two great nieces but one lives in another town and one is just a little girl. My nine year old niece is an auntie too. Her niece is my great niece [Chuckles]. My great niece is three years old and she loves dresses. She's the princess.

All of her cousins are concerned, even her brothers are concerned because how fast she's developing and she's pretty. She is built just like me. My mom even says that. She says, "Man, she looks just like you and she's built, her hair is like yours when you were a kid." She's stout and she's thick. They just be like, "Uh-uh" because she be wanting to wear, you know, tight jeans and they be like, "Uh-uh!" [Chuckles]. She's a tomboy, and, you know, she likes to play with boys and you know how boys are around that age, ten and eleven. They don't know what's going on with their body and she don't know nothing about that. My sister don't let her know nothing about nothing. She wants her to be a little girl until she is ready to grow up. She likes dolls, and games, and books, and go get her hair and nails done. She like girly stuff, "Put makeup on me, auntie." I'm like, "No! You don't need make up, you got beautiful skin." She's like, "I want to wear eyelashes," and like, "I see Tyra Banks and all them. I want that kind of..." "No, you don't. You're not grown yet [chuckles]." She likes to play dress up. She's got a pair of little heels that my sister got her, and a purse. I got her a couple of purses for her birthday. You know, we want to keep her right where she's at until she's ready. We don't want her to get advanced because that's what it is like for girls. Like for me, I grew up

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too fast and I didn't have that little girlish thing, you know, my mom didn't have time to play dress-up with me.

Relationship with Children

I have a good relationship with my kids. I'm a real affectionate type of mother so I kind of like spoiled my kids. My oldest son was very jealous of his younger brother because his father was very much into his life but my younger son's father also took on the fathering role of my older son. He was very resentful so there is a little tension in there and he smothered me more than the younger one. The younger one's such a free-spirit and the older one is just like, he wants all the time I got. He's much more attached and he still is [laughs] even though he's incarcerated. He calls me every day, sometimes three times in a day. [Chuckles] I'm like, "What's up [chuckles]?"

I think with my oldest son, because I was involved in criminal activity and I allowed him to see some of that, that influenced his being slick and him getting fast money so that's where he got that concept. You know, as they say, it can trickle down, the cycle can trickle down and by then it was too late. He started getting in trouble and he was like, "Well mom you did it" and I was like, "Well, I was an adult, you are a child" and I said, "Even though, it was wrong regardless" and he just couldn't grasp that because he seen me struggling with being incarcerated. I've been incarcerated several times and my sons seen it but my youngest son has not been in any trouble, thank God.

My youngest son is a little slower than his brother because I was really sick with him when I was pregnant. He is just not into all that rebellious thing. He ponders things and thinks things through. He weighs his options. I could see it when a lot of times, I be

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like, “What are you doing?” and he’s just like, “I’m just thinking.” You know that’s good that he’s got cognitive skills. I’m not saying that it is always right [laughs] but he does think about the consequences where the oldest one didn’t care at one time. My oldest one was rebellious because he seen how I was, because I was very rebellious, but I think the resentment of not having that father figure there kept him searching for and grasping to the wrong crowds. He cares now. He’s much better, he always calls me for advice. “Do you think I should take this class? Do you think...” I say, “Whatever you want, I’m going to support you.”

Expectations of Children

The most rewarding experiences I’ve had as a parent are seeing my kids take their first steps, seeing them say, “Oh, my tooth is out!,” and seeing them get good grades and come home and say, “Mom, look it, this is what I did,” and just seeing them happier. Being able to reward them is a pleasant thing. The most challenging thing is when you have to discipline them. With my youngest one, both of us [mother and father] was there so we had to agree on what was. Well the youngest one really didn’t do a lot of things. He tried us. He was like a sneaky-type person and we would catch him. I wasn’t really into spanking and he [20-year olds father] was. I said, “Spanking, physical stuff, they can get that all day long. You have to explain what is wrong, what they did wrong.” So I kind of struggled with that. With my oldest one, I just told him straight because I seen that he had the characteristic of being hard headed. I had to tell him, “Straight up, this is how it is, and this is how it is.” He didn’t like it but there’s nothing that he could do about it.

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The way I was raised influence the way I parent. My mom was really strict. She wasn't having it, no ma'am. She would spank. I'm the youngest of four. My mom worked and she and my dad were separated when I was younger, like seven. My dad left her with just taking care of four of us. She worked two jobs and went to school at night. So, I didn't really get to see my mom that much, but my sister, I have two sisters that's three years older than me. Two of them are twins and one was my disciplinarian. She basically took me under her own wing and when I did something wrong she would talk to me but with my mom, she wasn't hearing that. She was like, "You know better." You know, because I did know better and she spanked me, straight out. She was like, "You're going to church. You need to tell God what you did and you're about to get a spanking." That had a big impact on how I parent my children. They say spoil the child, spare the rod. I think spare the rod. Don't just spoil them but you need to talk to them. I mean there are some kids that...you know, I'm not saying I ain't never spanked my kids, but I'm not going to go straight out and child abuse and all that. I don't believe in using extension cords and all that. I mean, tap their hand when they're younger or something but when they get old enough to understand, that's when you need to start really laying down the law.

You know some kids rebel, like I did. I rebelled because I thought, shoot, she [her mom] wasn't there anyway. [Chuckles] so why not [chuckles]? When kids get older I think you lead by example and then if they see me doing something wrong, how am I going to tell them that that's not right? Well, I did it myself. My oldest one, he followed in my footsteps. My youngest one listened to everything I said. He took it in deep

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consideration. He pondered a lot of things. I always would tell him, “Do not do what I do, what I do is wrong, its completely wrong.” Then he always asked me, “Well, mom, why you do it?” “Because fast money goes fast and I always thought about fast money.” I never thought about the consequences that it was, the ripple effects that it was on my kids because one of my kids is a product of me – my oldest one.

He’s very analytical. He’s just always a fast talker [laughter]. I see me in him but I keep telling him that, “You have to change your thinking.” It took me a long time to get it. It took me 22 years to finally get it, and four prison sentences to get it. I’m trying to instill it in him. “You’ve been away for so long. Take every class that you can about changing your thinking, cognitive skills, and conflict resolution, all that. Even take some college courses.” He is changing. I can tell in the way he responds to me getting upset about his younger brother being slow. He’s like, “Mom, he’s always been slow. You know he ponders things. He’ll come around, just give him some time.” So I see change in him but I wish it would have happened sooner and it would have saved him eight years being in prison. He matured in prison. They say some negative things that happen in your life can bring out a positive result and I think that’s what’s going to happen. I had to bump my head about four times but finally I got it and then addiction had a lot to do with that. I was addicted to marijuana and crack.

My 20 year old son is a pothead. Marijuana. Now days everybody smokes weed but I keep telling him it affects your thinking, it affects your memory. It slows you down. It affects your motor skills. They don’t tell you that but it does. I said, “You need to really go study it.” I said, “All these studies that saying on the Internet, you need to look

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at each one and read them because what they're saying is that it affects short-term memory. The THC, the chemical itself will affect your brain." It's over periods of time that it affects the brain, it doesn't just happen like that. The constant use, it stunts your brain. I said, "There's stuff that I can't even remember." I remember back 'til I was five years old. I said, "Now all that's coming back." I said, "But right now you don't hear nothing I'm saying."

Parental Strengths and Challenges

I'm spiritually grounded. That's my main strength. Number two is that I'm of a solid mind and I'm very much grounded. There is no room for no B.S. I don't pollute my body. I do smoke cigarettes, which I'm trying to quit. I try not to pollute my temple, because this is my temple. My mom is my strength. My mom and my sister really. I thought my mom was going to be hurt the day when I got out of treatment because I didn't tell her I was pregnant. I had to come clean with her with that. She was really upset. I think he was hurt too because she always told me, "Don't do drugs or anything while you're pregnant." My mom is a retired nurse. I talk to my mom three or four times a day. We pray on the phone, me, and my sister and my mom. We talk about God. We talk about active things that she's [sister] doing, the new laws that are being changed on March 1st about the healthcare. She keeps me grounded about the things that are going on in the legislature, the new laws, and just about our kids. I draw my strength from them.

I think my limitation as a parent is I just don't got time for any B.S. I ain't...it's no excuses, no nothing. It is what it is. It's cut and dry. It's black and white. It's either this way or no way. You know what I'm saying? You've got to live right. Ain't no in

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between. You know right from wrong. It's cut and dry. It's right there in front of you.

[Chuckles] Do you like that [laughter – question directed to me]?

They say I'm too easy on my sons [laughs]. My boyfriend says, "You just don't get it." He says, "You're too soft." My son has been disrespectful and not honoring me. My fiancée is like, "I wouldn't cave. That's why all this stuff is happening to him. You need to tell him that." My fiancée wants to say something but he has no right to jump in but he told him [20-year old son], he says, "I will not stand for you to disrespect her in my house. You need to leave." He has told him that several times. My youngest son has to respect that, but he was cussing going out the door and he says, "I don't care what you say." My fiancée said, "I'm not going to put my hands on you but you're not going to talk to her like that in here." You know, I don't say nothing. I just laugh because it's true. My son called to apologize to my fiancée and he was like, "I ain't talking to him. He don't get me." Yeah, he don't get it. That's he wants something [Angela's belief about her son's motive for calling to apologize]. He don't need to apologize to him [fiancée]. He needs to apologize to me. I know him like the back of my hand. He's only wants to apologize because he wants something.

Hopes for Children

Prosperity, spiritual guidance, and stability; this is what I hope for my sons. That's what I'm striving for my whole family or my mom. My sister's already have that. I have that but I don't have the financial stability yet. I want my youngest son to get it. [As if she's talking to her son] You can't just have a kid and think you going to live off of her. No, that's not it. You need to go back and get your education. You had a job for

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three years. You messed up on your job, okay, by your attendance, smoking weed and not being able to get up. Okay, now, go back to school and go get you a job. You can fix anything, so why not? Go back to school. Go to school for engineering.

Relationship with Caregivers

My sisters were trying to take care of me and themselves too at that time [during her childhood]. My mom was a single a parent. Well, she was separated from my dad. My dad wasn't no where to be found. He was too busy caught up in his drinking still. When he finally did get out of it, my mom was like, "Uh-uh, I don't trust you. You've got to get some years underneath your belt" but by the time I was already in my teenage years. I would go see my dad but I never told him I was smoking weed or none of that because I already knew what he would say. He would snap out. I'm the baby so when I would get in trouble, he would wire me money and stuff. He always wired me money. I called him every week, "Dad I need \$100 before 4pm this afternoon." That's when he finally broke down and said, "Are you on drugs?" I said, "Yeah" and that's when he told my mom to commit me, and they committed me. I've been in treatment four...five times and the last time has been the only time that I wanted to go. My choice, that's why it worked. What turned me around [stopping her drug use] was I just got tired. I wanted to live right. The battle within me and I really felt for my son. My oldest son just started coming at me with certain things and challenging me hisself. I also had major losses, three in one week.

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Losses

My granddaughter and my fiancée's mother, and my child, I was pregnant and I was using. I was on and off, dipping and dabbing it. My granddaughter died first and this was all in April. His [fiancée] mother died. Then they called me in and they said that my lab work had come out and something was wrong so they did an ultrasound and they said, "You're carrying a stillborn baby." So that in itself helped me turn things around and my son was already talking to me and saying, "Mom, you know you can't keep dibbling and dabbling." I wasn't getting high every day, I was doing it once here and there and once in a while but I shouldn't have even been doing that. That sent me into a whole 'nother spiral. Then I had a good man that I was getting ready to lose and all that just overwhelmed me and then I just sat and I said, "Well, it's time you grow up [chuckles]." "You got all the good brains. You got good stuff going on for you. It's time to grow up. Why not live right?" So I just made a choice and changed my life. That was in July of last year.

I mean, I've had six years sobriety and I fell off. You know, I dipped and dabbed with sobriety but this time it's a wrap [chuckles]. It's a wrap. I done did it already. I don't know what the life will bring you. I already know the ins and outs. Fast money goes fast and it causes prison sentences, and probably death the way the kids are nowadays, and all that...you know, all these young people, all these gang-banging people, killing each other, robbing. The economy is bad. People are...you know, you're liable to do anything when you're on drugs, or trying to sell drugs, or whatever. You know.

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My mom and God helped me through the losses. My mom never has done any drugs ever in her life. And my dad is a recovering, um, alcoholic. My dad would pray for me. I would run from him and he would send me money. You know, my dad is, um, an islander from a different country. He's deceased now but he said, "You know what alcohol did to me." He said, "Why would you even tamper with drugs?" I said, "Because it's different." I said, "You don't know the things that I was going through." I said, "Whatever the reason...I never said one day I'm going to wake up and I'm going to become that." I never said that. It just happened with the lifestyle I was leading and then being involved in prostitution. You know, I never woke up and said I was going to be a prostitute either. It happened. Getting involved in prostitution happened. I think the cause of that came when I was molested when I was a kid and my mom didn't believe me and then just how they glamorized it [prostitution]. I always said, "Wow, I want that [laughs]," you know.

After, you know, many years, my mom finally said, "I didn't raise you like that. I didn't raise you like that." You know, even my sisters would say, "Angela, what are you doing?" I'm the only one that has ever been... in my immediate family that has been to prison or involved in the law extensively, and hanging out with gang bangers. I just...my mom and God I guess helped me turn my life around. I think I had a divine revelation though, because I had a dream that my whole family had got killed, and I was the only one. I didn't have nobody and I said, "I don't want to live like this." A girl that my son impregnated was in the dream. All I had was the unborn child. I says, "Well, it's time for me to get myself together to be there for my grandbaby." I went through a whole week of

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just really trying to depict this dream. My mom told me to come to church so I went to church and I swear, the preacher was talking straight me. He was like, "It's time for you to put that past behind you; thought it was time to grow up and follow what's right. If you do what's right, and you do what's right by God, then nothing can go wrong in your life. Then I just said, "Okay, I'm going to treatment tomorrow." I called, and then I went to treatment [chuckles].

Supportive Kin

I feel the closest to my mom, my sister, one of the twins and that's it because my dad is dead. I felt closer to him as I got older but he's deceased. Oh no, and then I have a uncle, my uncle. He's in another state. I should also say [pause] let me not even exclude him because even though me and him are not no longer together, we have a child together, my youngest son's father. I can tell him anything and he will give me the best advice even if I'm wrong he's going to tell me, "You know you're wrong." With my uncle, I can call him and say, "You know, I'm struggling." He's like, "Come down here for a couple of weeks. You know, I'll give you a job. If you move here I'll give you a job." So he provides emotional support. My mom puts me on the right path helping me to remember what Jesus would want me to do. You know my mom is 84 years old. She has not always been a good parent. She'll tell you that. She say's "There's no such thing as a good parent. It's a everyday struggle." She says, "But if you know what's right then that's the way you should go." My sister, one of the twins, she is just like, "If it's not logical and if it ain't spiritual at the same time don't do it." That's where she's at. She said, "But if it's negative consequences then you better go with the right way." Yeah, she's the

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brain. She is the nerd of the family. She ain't trying to hear nothing. She wants to fight for every justice there is. She's on the Welfare Rights Committee. She went to the felony rally up there. She's just like, "There's people in our own country starving and they rather feed it to the foreigners. We help build this!" "We're descendants of people that built this country and they don't want to help us!" So she an activist [chuckles]. She's very smart. She knows the ins and outs of computers too. So she knows what's really going on. See, a lot of people don't know what's really going on. They think they're just living. No, there's a purpose.

Purpose

I think my purpose is to just...see, I use it in the biblical sense. We were all created to love one another, and to serve God and to serve one another without any hidden agenda. You know, just unconditional, but we do have the demands and laws of the world. We are suppose to obey the laws of the world that are set up and created. That does not mean that we should become of the world because we're all spiritual beings. I think its true. I'm trying to instill that in my sons. My oldest son gets it, my youngest son doesn't so I have to keep breaking it down. Well look how long it took me, twenty-something years to get it. So I'm trying to break it down to him slowly, in small pieces, so he can grasp it because he ponders stuff.

Family Traditions

Well, see, I was born Catholic. I was Christian and christened when I was a kid. I went to confirmation. I went to Catholic schools *but* I didn't believe—I questioned it because I was like, "Why are you always praying to the Mother Mary and saying all these

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hail Mary's? She ain't God." You know, and I started questioning that as I got older and my mom took me to a Baptist church, her church. I was already going to the Baptist church, and Sunday school, and riding on the bus, then I finally started understanding, and I started going to bible study and understanding it.

We believe in the resurrection, Easter. We believe in the birth but we don't believe that it was in December. [Chuckles] that's symbolism of society or Christmas. Christmas is man made. Jesus was born sometime in June [laughs] because those are the colder months in that time period in Nazareth, in Bethlehem, in overseas period. I believe in Juneteenth. A lot of people...African cultures say that Juneteenth is the celebration of African freedom or something I heard.

Lessons Learned from Childhood

The lesson I learned from my childhood is listen to your inner being when you know things are not right. You know by the way your value system is and your belief system. You know to do what's right and then everything will fall in place and by not listening, it will get you nowhere. Rebellion gets you nowhere. I could have saved a lot of my heartache. A lot of things that I went through I could have saved. You know, I put myself in a lot of life-threatening situations and I've got the scars to prove it. One of them is across my face, you know, from not listening to my inner being. Morally and value-wise I didn't listen. I went thinking that I was all that and, you know, in the limelight, and all that. No. That's not what's up. I got cut in the face by a girl that wanted my product and my money and I wasn't giving it up. She got like 18 months in jail and a year in probation and that's it and had to pay my medical bills, that's it and that's not cool. They

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didn't charge her with attempted murder and they should have but it was Black on Black and the lifestyle I was living [drugs], you know. When you're in that fast lifestyle, drug lifestyle, anything liable to happen. People rob you. Luckily I didn't get shot because they were coming. She just happened to get there first. Another crew was supposed to be coming.

I walked to the police station and stood outside, banging on the door with my face cut open. No—I had to take a cab down to the hospital. No one answered the door but it was God letting me know that when you're not doing what you're supposed to be doing and living right, and doing wrong things, wrong...you're going to get...the consequences are going to be wrong. If you're living right, and doing what's right, and think before you do things, then everything else is...every action is a reaction, whether it be positive or negative. Wouldn't you prefer the positive than the negative? And then there's...sometimes there is some negative but you need to move on from that and learn something from it, say, "Well, that didn't work." If you were in the wrong, admit that you were wrong, so you can clear your conscience. I shaved 12 years off my life in and out of jails, workhouses, and prisons. Now, that's not what's up. What helped me stay alive? God and my mom prayed for me all the time. Sometimes when I was traveling to sell product or prostitution, I would call my mom, say, "Mom, what you doing, what the kids doing?" She'll be like, "When are you coming home?" "I'll be home tomorrow," or something or she'll say, "Well, your boys want to talk to you. They want to see you, so, I'll be..." You know, if my mom said the boys want to see me, I was on the next thing smoking coming home.

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Education of Community About Sexual Mistreatment Prevention

If parents that have experienced it speak up, and even the children that would take a risk and say, “Look, I am a victim of sexual abuse from an extended family member, incest, whatever,” like Oprah. She blew everybody out the water and she was not ashamed. You don’t have anything to be ashamed of because you didn’t do anything wrong. It’s not okay. It’s not acceptable. Like there is some cultures that go and marry cousins and have sex with cousins, but that’s not okay. It’s not okay.

I think people need to be more educated in the Black community and say, “Yes, I’ve been this...” A lot of people act out their frustrations on what happened to them. Like me, I acted out. I went in, um...because I didn’t...my father was not in my life and because I thought that was cool, so then I got involved in the prostitution and look at how it trickled down.

If I have a granddaughter I am going to tell her. I had one but she passed away but I am going to tell her, and I’m going to make it very clear to her, that this is not okay and I need you to tell me that and this and I think they need to be more public about it. There is some places and schools that they do have certain subjects about it but they don’t get intense with it because a lot of kids don’t understand and they might say, “Ooh, it’s gross,” or some parents might say, “Oh, no, no.” No, it needs to be brought up. You bring up drugs, and “Here’s your brain...” I just seen a commercial before leaving the house, “Here’s your brain...,” and a little Black kid’s running into, uh, something and his dad’s just scolding him, and then his friend came up and said, “Well, here’s your brain, that was you smoking weed, that’s what happened, and you could have been dead.” Okay,

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well, why can't you make a commercial about that [sexual mistreatment]? You always hear about priests having sexual misconduct with kids in the Caucasian community, coaches. Even if they're authority, it's unwanted touch. It's okay to say no. I don't care if you are a authority figure. You are and you have no right to touch my body. Even like, I shared with my kids what happened to me. I shared it with my boys.

Case Study #6 – Shirley

Two men she followed looking for weed raped Shirley as a teenager. In the Job Corp at the time of the rape, Shirley reported the incident and was blamed for following the men. New to recovery with an extensive history of drug abuse, Shirley has very little parenting support in cultivating her relationship with her adult children as a newly sober mother.

I'm 45-years-old and I have five children. My oldest is a boy, he's 25-years-old. My second is a girl, and she's 24-years-old. My third is a boy, he's 21-years-old. My fourth is a girl and she's 19-years-old, and my last is a girl and she's 15-years-old. I work for the library. When I started four years ago, I was a security guard and now I'm a clerk. I love my job. I love the work that I do. I struggled a lot with my sexuality because I was attracted to women but I never expounded on it until three years ago. You know, I'm more comfortable with being with a woman and so that's where I am today.

Experiences of Sexual Mistreatment

When I was in the Job Corps two men raped me. I was 16 and that was my first sexual experience. The authorities there made me feel like it was my fault because I followed them to go find some weed. So nothing ever came out and nobody ever talked

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to me about it. “Well, you shouldn’t have followed them.” That’s was all I got. Later, it was my kids’ father. Having sex with him was horrible. When he and I got together, I got with him because he was kind of influential and he was much older than me. He dressed me and kept me with money in my pocket. He didn’t give me a chance to love him. I never fell in love with him. He was just there and then after the money left, the cocaine was there, and he was just still giving it to me. Even with my youngest child’s father, him and I got a little close but I mean, I think I got close with him directly after my breakup with my ex. I realized that he was just there for comfort. It was disgusting towards the end of our relationship. It was so disgusting. Sex with him was really, really disgusting. I mean I would cringe when he touched me and he wasn’t such a bad guy.

Disclosure Process

I never told my mom about the rape when I was in the Job Corps. I don’t know why. I told a friend years and years later. I never even told my daughters. They don’t know that. It was horrible. When I got there [Job Corps], I was excelling at everything and after that [being raped], I just rebelled so bad. I don’t know why I was rebelling like that. I think because, don’t nobody care. I never said anything and I just dealt with my feelings about it by smoking weed.

Effects of Sexual Mistreatment

I had this idea, “Okay, when I get into a relationship with a man, I’m not going to let him hit me. That was my biggest thing but the verbal abuse was horrible and we were so very verbally abusive towards each other. It wasn’t just him; it was me also. Our older kids found the weed, and we got into some physical altercation and I decided to leave

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when I stabbed him inches from his heart. He actually stopped breathing and they put me in handcuffs. I went directly to my baby's father, actually the same night. I spent 12 years with my kids' father and 12 years with my baby's father and the verbal abuse...it just...always thinking...not knowing that abuse was abuse, was abuse any way you look at it. With my baby's father it was the exact same thing. He took care of me but he did more of the little things that really count, that made me stay with him.

I didn't deal with my feelings and emotions from those relationships. I just medicated myself. I'm just now beginning to know who I am. This [the interview] is actually healing for me because it seems like the more I talk about it, the more I become aware of my feelings about things and I can deal with them today especially learning what your truths are, what your beliefs, your values, your morals are and how to respect yourself, how to love yourself and I'm learning so much about myself. Things that I actually like.

I've only been sober 72 days. It's weird. It's crazy. It's trying to feel normal. Waking up in the morning and it's only been like a couple days since I don't wake up in the morning and think about having a drink and I still think about it every day. Yesterday was my very first Mother's Day sober. It turned out to be an incredible experience. I went to church and even though I didn't get any gifts from my kids, I got the biggest gift of all. I got a real spiritual awakening yesterday and it felt awesome. This is a brand new life. I'm ready to do this. I'm ready to do this or die because I got to the point, when I would drink, I mean, I would just look over the fact that it's going to feel good. When I take a drink, or two, my head is not feeling good, while I'm drinking but I keep on drinking

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until I'm drunk, like this is not a normal feeling. Then I would start getting really bad nosebleeds. My daughter's like, "Mom, something is wrong. You're drinking too much." That's when I knew I couldn't wake up and not want to drink.

This is really, really a big chance for me because I couldn't do anything socially without drinking. I didn't want to socialize sober. It's like when I stopped doing the cocaine I just really traded the cocaine for the alcohol. I just got tired. I didn't want my 15-year-old to go through what my other kids had to go through so I had to let the cocaine go but I just put the cocaine down and picked up the alcohol more.

Relationship with Children

I think the rape experienced influenced my relationship with my kids by making me a little bit too overprotective of them. My kids were so open with me especially my two oldest, they are so brutally open with me about everything. You know, my daughter came to me when she was 14, like, "Mom, you need to take me to get birth control pills" and I did. Even my 21-year-old son told me, "Yeah, I'm having sex" when he was 14-years-old.

For about five years of their lives they lived with their dad's sister because he actually called Protective Services on me. His sister didn't have any kids. I still had to do the mothering thing. I still had to be there for them on a daily basis. I still had to comb my daughter's hair, and you know, help her get dressed for school, and help them with their homework. I still had to do the motherly things, it just I wasn't in the house with them.

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Right now, we [children] can't get close. My oldest son is in the Armed Forces. My second daughter lives here but in another city. My third is living in madness. He's just breathing and walking, and my fourth, she lives in Toledo. My fifth daughter is here with me but we kind of have a sticky relationship. She opens up very little to me. She talks more with my oldest daughter than she does me. I'm not sure why. I guess it's a teenage thing. I don't know. I guess she feel more comfortable sharing things with my oldest daughter even though my oldest daughter tells me everything, but I don't want to break her confidentiality with my oldest daughter so I kind of wait 'til she bring things to me. I guess the way my mom related to me, that really influenced the way I relate to my children.

When my children were younger and I wasn't high, we bonded. I would read to them and we would play games. When sober, I was a lovely mom, telling them I loved them, you know, lots of hugs and kisses. When I wasn't sober, the TV was their best friend. The TV was their mom. I just put them in a room, made sure they had some children's program on. For four of them, their dad was pretty much there helping raise them and he was a big part of my drug addiction. He was in my life for 12 years. He was nurturing to the children. As nurturing as he could be, and he's still involved in their life right now today. I think he taught what he knew.

Parental Rewards and Challenges

The most rewarding experience for me as parent is seeing my kids succeeding. With the exception of my 21-year-old, I have three with high school diplomas. My son is in the Armed Forces and my daughter, she have a nice job in the city. My 19-year-old,

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she have two kids but she graduated high school and she lives with her dad and my youngest, she's a really good kid. She loves school. She's in all kind of after school activities. She's in Circle Group and she just loves it and for the most part she's kind of grounded, but, you know, she is still a teenager.

What I'm most proud of is that my kids still love me after everything I put them through with my drug addiction. What I find challenging is that I wasn't there the way I really wanted to be for my children especially for my 21-year-old. I was at the worst stage in my addiction when he was a baby. Right now I'm really struggling with that part. I did him an injustice by not being there and I really feel guilty. Now that he's an adult, he don't care about nothing. He don't care about anything. A lot of time I feel guilty. I'm trying to let that guilt go because he's an adult now and he's making his own choices, but it is still hard. He lives with me sometimes and sometimes he lives on the street. He can be gone for weeks and then he'll come back. I will always open my door for him, you know.

Expectations of Children

I tell my kids when I approve and disapprove of their behavior. For example, I really disapproved of my oldest son when the second year he was in the Armed Forces and he was already getting married with a baby on the way. I thought he was young. He's in the midst of getting a divorce with three kids now. My son's children are five, three, and a baby, she'll be a year old soon. I don't have a relationship with the grandkids. They live out of state. I try not to give my children advice as far as their relationships but I do anyway. My daughter told me that she really appreciates that I don't pass judgment on

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her relationship. My 19-year-old, she have two girls, one is two and the baby is a couple months, maybe five or six months. I kind of bonded with the two year old until she moved away to Chicago. My 21-year-old, he have a one year old daughter and I bonded with her. They just left here a month ago.

I have changed some things in the way I parent my children but my love for them stays the same. As far as buying them things, I've changed. Because I felt so guilty about not being there for them I wanted them to love me so much, 'til I would just shower them with any and everything I could just to let them know that I loved them. I was buying them gifts more than I was really mothering them. That changed when I let go of a lot of the guilt. I know my past is my past and I can't change it. "Ya'll accept me as I am and I do the same. I accept you as you are." My kids accept me as I am, pretty much. It wasn't such a bad thing. They respect me in all aspects.

Hopes for Children

I hope my children are financially secure. I wish that I can leave something behind to say that they are really proud of their mom....and stay connected with each other. Stay close. I think my kids would wish for me that their mom live forever [Chuckles] and to be financially stable and have healthy relationships. I know they tell me all the time, "Mom, please don't die before I do."

Family Traditions

We celebrated all the major holidays, but from the time when I was 10 until maybe 13 my mother started practicing being a Muslim but we never really stopped the traditional celebrations like Christmas and things like that. We never had a religion. We

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never went to church and none of that. My mother started practicing Muslim because my stepfather's sister was Muslim and by me living in her house, we had to practice it. When I turned 16 [chuckles] she told me if I didn't go to school I had to get out of her house, so I stopped going to school. She sent me to the Job Corp, when I would come back, she was saved and into a Baptist Church. I stopped practicing the Muslim faith, I didn't like the religion. The more I learned about it, the more I disliked it. I didn't get back into the church until in my 30's I got baptized when I was 32-years-old.

Supportive Kin

The only people that I depend on are my children totally if I need help with anything. My strength as a parent is just that my kids now that I'm there for them and I'm hoping we can talk about anything because it seems like that's the only thing that I really have is my children. I've never been close with anybody in my family. I've never had a strong bond with anyone because growing up, I was always that kid that always forgot about even though I was the oldest and had to do most of the things. It seemed like "Oh I forgot to do her hair" You know, things like that, or I just had to sit down and don't say anything, So I detached from a lot of my family and even around my aunts and uncles, I mean I would just be there and wouldn't say anything. I was the weird one because I didn't talk. I didn't interact, I was just there. I started smoking weed at 13 to relieve myself of the feelings that I was having of not being loved, inadequate and low self-esteem. I didn't think I was pretty and my body developed more maturely at a very young age, and I just felt awkward.

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Childhood Witness to Domestic Violence

I think the fact that, at age 13, my mom had sent my brother away to live with a great aunt, it seemed like it just allowed my stepfather to just do more harm to her. I felt like, what if my brother would have been here? You know, I didn't have the courage to stop it myself. I think had my brother been here, he would have had more courage than me. My mom ended up dying of breast cancer and when she got sick, you know she had no fight left in her. He didn't stop abusing her until the day she died.

Relationship with Caregivers

Well, my mom is deceased and she's been deceased for about 25 years. I grew up with my mom and my step-dad. He wasn't physically abusive to us (children) but he was fairly physically abusive to my mom, and me, I'm the oldest of six. I endured everything that he put on my mom. Me and my mom never got a chance, because she died of cancer, to sit down and ask her why did she put herself and us through that. She left here without me really knowing...I know she loved me, because she, I guess she took care of us, made sure we ate, and had clothes, and things like that but we never got that bond of, "I love you mom," and "I love you," you know, telling me that she loves me, we never did that. So I try to tell my kids I love them every chance I get.

I thought my mom didn't really like me. By me developing quickly, my mom just kept me clinging to her. I mean, I couldn't go anywhere, there's always something for me to do in the house to keep me from going anywhere. As far as I can go was out on the balcony or maybe I would sneak away with some friends to smoke some weed. I really thought that she really didn't like me because I would look at her after one of her

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beatings and I would just look at her and she wouldn't say anything, just put her head down and turn the other way. She never said, "I love you", "You look pretty." I got that from other people but I wanted it from my mom.

My mom didn't care if we did homework or not, if we did or we didn't as long as we get them passing grades. I think I was okay with her as long as I wasn't out there in the street with boys and hang out in the streets at all times of the night. I know the weed smoking, after awhile she got used to it and, you know, she didn't try to stop me anymore. She wasn't okay with me not going to school but I wanted to get away and she said if I stopped going to school, she's going to put me out of her house. I quit going to school. I didn't know she was going to send me all the way to the Job Corps. I didn't know what I was going to do but I knew one thing, she was putting me out. The educational part of the Job Corps was really, really good.

I really love my mom and if I could do it over again, I would make sure that she knew it and I knew it from her because I know that she loved me. My stepdad came into my life when I was 5 years old. He was a heroin addict and my mom didn't smoke cigarettes, didn't drink, you know, wasn't a shop-a-holic.. He would smack her, beat her and take her in the bedroom and they'd be in there for hours on end. He didn't stop beating my mom until the day she died. He would come and get her pain medicine and we had to call security to put him out of the hospital.

My grandparents knew what was going on but what could they do short of killing him? They would call the police and everything but he would be right back there. He never really said anything to us. My mom would just say, "Let me handle this," and, you

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know, “Stay in a child’s place,” you know, “Don’t say anything.” Then like, our Christmas toys, we would have to hurry up and destroy them before he sell them. Yeah. My mom would put up a Christmas tree but we had to take the Christmas gifts to my grandparents house until Christmas day where we can open them up because he would take them and try to sell them for drugs. He never got sober and he’s dead now. He was hit by a truck. He had no funeral, no nothing. He got hit in front of my aunt’s house. She called his dad and he went down there and viewed the body and that was it. Nobody went to get the body, claim the body, or anything.

My real dad was an addict and he was in and out of penitentiary most of my life. When I finally had turned 23, 24, I was getting close to him and he was killed. Somebody shot him. We didn’t have a strong bond. I was his oldest daughter as well as my mom’s oldest daughter. I was really trying to connect with my dad and let him know that no matter what, I still loved him; “I still want you to be a grandfather to your grandchildren.” All of that took place in all of maybe three or four months before he was killed. I went to the funeral for the most part. His side of the family thought we were trash because we grew up in the projects and they grew up in nice homes, and cars, and so we were just trash to them. I hate that I really didn’t get to know him well.

Losses

The first time I was separated from my mother and stepfather was when I was 16-years-old and I was sent to the Job Corp. I was trying to stay there as long as I could but my momma got sick, her cancer has progressed and there was nothing that they could do about it. I was at the Job Corp for 18 months. I became her sole caregiver. By that time

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we had moved in with my grandmother. My brother was off in another state, so it was the rest of us and I had to steal. My aunt had passed away and left her four kids to care for.

So her four, and my mom's five, so there was nine kids in the house. Well, I was 18 but I was still a kid. So I still had to step in and be the big sister to everybody. Still had to do what I'm told to do. Nobody never asked, how was I feeling about anything. You just do it because that's what you're supposed to do and I did. I would get very angry about it.

Because weed was my thing; if I'm not smoking me a joint then I have to go upstairs and change bandages. Sometimes I would get very angry. It was hurtful to see...I'm going to cry, to see my mom in that condition because her cancer was on the outside. It was really really hard to see her body deteriorate like that. My grandmother was there but she couldn't do the physical things. You know, she would fix our food and stuff like that because my siblings, they were just too young. I've always been a caregiver. I think because of my position as a older child and being a girl. I didn't deal with my feelings or emotions at that time, I just stayed on and helped.

Addiction History

I stuffed everything, everything and got high from the time I was 13-years-old until two months ago and I'm 45 now. The longest stint I've ever been sober was six months. In addition to weed I used alcohol, cocaine, and heroin. I stopped using because it was affecting my work and I love my job. I love the work that I do. I had stopped the weed, although I still smoked a joint every now and then but I had a pretty bad, really, really bad alcohol problem. Really bad. Around the time I was 13 until I was 20, my choice of drug was just weed. When I was 21 I just wanted to hang out with the

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grownups. I wasn't really a heavy drinker. I would drink, I was a social drinker until the day I was introduced to cocaine then that was my biggest challenge and my drug of choice. It was nothing but cocaine, all about cocaine. Crack cocaine. I have a long way to go but I've overcome some really tough barriers. I've really overcome and knocked down over a lot of walls in such a short time, so I know I can do this for me and I want to do it for me.

Parental Challenges

I have a hard time with discipline. I mean it's really, really, hurtful because had I disciplined in the correct way, I feel that, you know, things would have been different. I would tell them that some thing wasn't good and then reward them.

Words of Wisdom About Parenting

I'd tell a struggling mother to just know what your feelings are, know how to feel, and know what those feelings mean. Understand your feelings and your emotions and how to put those feelings in perspective. My parenting wisdom to the community is I am big with nurturing in my heart. I mean, love each child. I mean, that's all you can do, is love a child. You know, if my child is doing something wrong, I would want a parent to scold them but in a way that is productive to them.

My children, today, couldn't do the things that I see other kids do. No they cannot. Other children are disrespectful to adults and things like that. My children can't do that. [Imitating talking to her children] If she tell you to get your black so-and-so somewhere and sit down, that's what you do, whether you're right or wrong and you let me handle the rest. Being a security guard, I've seen the worst. No matter what their race

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is, children are all the same and I deal with, like, 50 different races a day in my job. You know, and I've dealt with kids of all races and they're all the same [Chuckles].

Education of Community About Sexual Mistreatment Prevention

Talk about it. Get active, Start a group. Get information. I want to start, you know, groups for women that's been sexually abused and abused drugs. I really want to get that going in this community because I know there's a lot of it going on here and, you know, they say, you know, I don't want to stereotype things but everybody is not in with coming together as a community. People of different races don't come together as a community here in this area. Everybody is off to their own separate race.

Stop Sexual Mistreatment of Women and Children

Make people aware that it's happening, that it really is happening today, every minute. You know, open people's eyes to the realization that it happens and it's happening to kids every day. If I could put up a banner out there I would. I didn't know the extent of it until I started getting information on it.

Final Reflections

You learn a lot about yourself when you can wake up every morning and remember what you did the day before.

Case Study #7 - Barbara

Her aunt's boyfriend sexually molested Barbara when she was 12-years-old. When she was 16-years old, she told her adult cousin about the experience. Plagued by depression most of her life, Barbara credits her children with saving her life because they are her sole reason for not ending her own life.

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I have two children and one expecting. The four-year-old is a girl and the two-year-old is a boy and expecting is a boy. I'm twenty-six and I have five sisters, one half-sister and four biological sisters, and two brothers. I'm the middle child. My mom and dad live here. My mom was born and raised in the south. My dad was born and raised in the Midwest. I was born up north and so were my brothers and sisters. One of my four sisters lives here and the aunt whose boyfriend did that to me lives here with her nine children. I have a half-sister from the dad's side. She has a different mother, so.

Sexual Molestation Experience

My aunt's boyfriend sexually molested me when I was twelve. It was unconsensual (sic). I remember it just as plain as view. I know what happened in details. He was the father of two of my aunt's children. That was the first time it ever happened to me the first and the only time. If my aunt would have come just a couple minutes earlier she would have caught him in full effect. Her and my mom was going somewhere and they let him take care of us. He made me get in the tub with my cousins. Now, at twelve years old, some girls reach puberty, and I was budding breasts, and pubic hairs and he made me get in the tub with my aunt's other five children. He laughed at me. They were all crowded in this tub. It was one boy and the rest girls. And he was whipping us all that day and making us lay down. And then he pretended like he lost the belt, so he made me go find the belt and closed me in the closet and did what he wanted to do. "Yes it's in there, look for it. Dig for it." [Imitating her aunt's boyfriend]. He knew not to have vaginal sex with me, so he did anal sex.

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Disclosure Process

That [sexual mistreatment] affected me, I think like my whole like emotional and mental stage, because I tried to tell someone, but wouldn't nobody listen to me. And it was like, okay, what's the purpose of keep bringing it up. And that affected me in my whole life. I always knew about it, and I was always afraid to tell it until the time I finally told it, and I told my sisters. But they never, we were so close like we had a bond that we never tell on each other. If there's nothing else we did, we made sure we did that. But, the first time telling an adult was when I was sixteen. I told my cousin. She got me drunk and we got all emotional about how we all were mistreated and abused by my grandmother and she has five daughters and two sons. We were all very much close. And her children have lots of children so, yeah. She gave me a drink and it came out. Yeah. It's like she didn't force me to tell her but we were all reminiscing on how we was raised and how we grew up and I meant to tell it. It actually didn't slip out. I wanted somebody to know this is what happened. She burst out in tears and said, "Why you didn't tell me?" I felt supported because my cousin's like a mother to me. She taught us part of how being a young lady's taking care of ourself and watching out for me on account of the sex and things like that. Oh yeah, I respected her very much. I still do actually. My children love her and her children.

My brothers found out about what happened to me three years ago. They're upset about it, but it's too late to be upset. When I seen the predator walking down the street from prison and he wanted to speak to me, and I didn't speak to him and kept walkin' and my brother's wanted to know why I behaved toward him like that and I told them. I hear

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he went to prison for sleeping with underage females, fourteen year olds, but I don't know.

I can't cry no more. Like I cried long enough. I can't even cry for this. Until now I never like had a opportunity to share like this. I, myself, personally, like, all White people are not the same but I don't trust them. Like I can mention it, like, "Yeah, I've been sexually abused," or, "Yeah, this thing happened" but to give details, no.. I did with a pastor, and I gave details to the pastor and his wife before. They were my foster parents and are great people, African American people. They live up north too. I feel it's easier to trust African Americans depending on their nature [chuckles].

Rationale for Nondisclosure

We weren't allowed to tell the White folks anything, so I didn't get any kind of professional help or support. You didn't speak to it. And I kept my, you might as well say, we all kept our parents out of jail and out of trouble. Yeah because I kept my mom out of trouble, and I so badly wanted to tell her because I knew the White folks were out to help me but we kept her from jail, so. I don't know why were afraid to tell. That's just something I always wanted to know why do children be afraid to tell? Some children do lie about unnecessary things, but the ones that it [sexual mistreatment] really does happen to, they never get help for it. Oh yeah, another thing, I was so like, I am family oriented. I love family and that was one of the main reasons why I didn't tell too. I couldn't stand to be away from my family. I couldn't do it. I can't even see how I would live without some of them. I thought if I said something I would be taken. That's why I'm so strong-willed when it comes to my kids. That's a bond you can't break [chuckles].

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I didn't tell anybody when I was younger because like my family, we was like dysfunctional and like I noticed the family was dysfunctional as I became of age to understand what the family was going through. Like it was... I wouldn't say incest, it was like sisters sleeping with each other boyfriends, fights, being with children, or my mom's children, like my aunts and their children. It was a lot of gang-banging, brothers back and forth in jail, some of their children too. Dad completely out of my life, mom completely out of my life.

Expectations of Children

I call my babies a blessing from God. I asked God for my babies and he sure have gave them to me because I felt unloved. Under no conditions was I loved. When they do something I disapprove of, I talk them about it. I let them know that that wasn't right. I have my own way of disciplining my children. I tell them. I don't hit their hands in here [shelter], they don't allow you to hit them. I won't abuse my children. I won't like physically punch, or kick, or slapping. I won't do that. That happened to me. That's the talk of the family too. "Barbara don't whop her kids," Oh well. I get mad, or upset and frustrated, and I say, "I don't have to beat my kids because ya'll want me to [laughter]." So like I'll go like this, like show them a finger or I tell them the police is coming. They're scared of the police [chuckles]. I don't know. I wouldn't beat them. That's why they do the things they do. It's because they know I'm not going to whoop them. They all like, "you let your children get away with" No, I don't let them get away with anything. It's just the way you discipline your children, the way you were disciplined and I was *beat*, not disciplined. I was abused.

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I'm not going to say I'm strict. I'm strict on them [her children] being around certain people. I don't trust no one around girls period. I don't trust a man, period, to watch my daughter, to touch her, to hold her in a certain way. Like my brother? and my uncles? , my mom's , brothers? it's a different feeling towards them than I will have toward any other man. My daughter feel like...you know how kids say anything. Like sometimes they say the wrong things, and you like take it out of proportion? I had a couple of few episodes where my daughter said something, but she didn't mean it like that, but she's very intelligent. She's a smart girl and I always tell her to tell me anything, whatever, and so no. I don't trust her around men, and around little boys neither, I let her play with them, but to a certain extent. Her brother? That's different. Yeah she can play with her brother, he's two-years old. As he gets older, I will feel the same, but I'll reassure them that whatever happens, you got...that they need to let me know, because I don't want anything out of the ordinary to happen, like incest or be touching each other the wrong way. Yeah, I'll make sure they know that. I know Bridget know, because she's old enough. She's about to be five, so I let her know like if somebody touch her like, just to let me know. Like with her brother, I think I told her, children know what the sexual— what the private parts of the body is but you know at the young age that they are now, I think its safe to let them know. If they don't know then, like I say, they'll do anything out of the ordinary. I trust her with her brother as they become older. When they become older as teenagers and adults, I trust that they won't encounter sexually with each other, or touch each other sexually because I never had that experience with my brothers.

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Relationship with Children

I'm not going to say I'm a perfect mom because I'm not a perfect mom, but I'm an excellent, I'm a great mother and I get the job done. I will be a perfect mom in the future once my stuff gets together and I'm in full effect to do the things I need to do to take care of my children. I would consider myself a perfect mother [chuckles]. What drives me to be an excellent mom, and a perfect mom is the abuse in our families and great, diversity between family members, and the sisters and brothers. And what I mean by diversity, like some were treated special, some were treated wrong. Some cling to each other like white on rice [chuckles]. A lot of them, the way they treat each other, like my aunt, she never like gave up her children. But the other four aunts like left their children. They gave them to the county. I just hear stories from the family members about what happened and so it is obviously true because I never met these people they were talking about. I never met them before.

Some people don't have open ears to try to do what's best for their child. Like I was telling the psychiatrist, like, honestly, I live for my children. Without them children, I don't think I'd be here right now. I say that with truth and honesty. I'd have no other way of saying these things. If I didn't have no children, I wouldn't be a survivor. I don't think I would've especially with my personal problem. I would have somehow ended my life and I told her [psychiatrist] that because I always been depressed and lost. Like I said, I know what I'm here for, three reasons [her three children]. I guess I asked for one too many blessings [laughter]. Honestly, I did.

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Hopes for Children

What I wish for my children is to have a great education, to always have me to look to to turn to whatever is needed, whenever they want me, to never disown each other, dislike each other, to talk down and degrade each other as siblings. My three wishes is because that's what me and my siblings went through, degrading each other and arguing with each other. I want them to have a great education because none of us has a GED, none of my mom's seven children and my brother got his through prison, and my other brother got his by choice because child support made him. I think a lot of them [family] respect the things I do now. Like a lot of my family members tell me I'm a great mom. And I respect that because honestly, I feel like whether I have a job or lack of a education, and try and push and I'm a keep pushing until it's done, completed. I never had a paying job before and I want a different life for my children. So my children can't follow the same footsteps as me. When you have nobody showing you the way of it, the path won't be open for you and I'm going to open a path for my children. Yeah, I'm going to make sure they're always going to have me to turn to. I think my most rewarding experience as a parent is sticking by my children, not giving up on them.

Relationship to Caregivers

Right now my mom is still negative but like some things I do and don't say to her, I would never disrespect her, or hit her, or curse her. My mom always told me I could never have children; I could never bear a child. She was lying. She said the doctors told her that and I always thought that if I'm menstruating like the doctors had told me when I was at checkups, they're telling you, "you can have a baby." You menstruate, you

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ovulate, but I was the only teenager who never had a baby, like the rest of the teenagers, until I was 22 years old to have my first child. My 15-yearold sister had a baby. My sister that's right under me, she had a baby at 15, got pregnant at 15 and had one at sixteen. Then the baby – baby sister, not the dad's daughter but the mom's baby girl, 13 years old and had a baby. So I'm most proud of my motherhood first and foremost, me becoming a better woman. I changed my whole persona. I was a wild young lady before I had my first child. When I say wild I mean by like I always thought I could never love, I could never be with one man and I lived that lifestyle until I became impregnated with my first child. I think of her as a miracle baby still because my mama reassured me that's impossible, negative, a real negative woman.

When we were kids this man, we used to call him fish lips. He always used to be drunk [chuckles], you know there were a lot of people coming around my mom and, you know, he'll tell her, "I'm not going to call you Geneva because you're evil. Your name is evil." Every time I stand there he used to say I was so young and I figured out why he used to say it so much. Because he used to sing to her and be, you know, very much a gentleman but he was also an alcoholic.

I love her to death but I just set boundaries and limitations and how I talk to her and how much time I spend with her because I believe she let it happen to me, happen purposely. She knew about it, like that was the first time I'd been sexually abused, but like from her it was physical and emotional abuse. I had a psychiatrist when I was in Besanu Oaks Girls School too, three different people who had seen us and talked to us. And I used to tell him about these visions as a child, I have of being abused and you

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know, they actually let her know this was what I was discussing with them. You know how they are, they want to know “Where were you at during this time, and how come you didn’t know these things were happening to her?” There was no word from her she got upset. She was upset with me most and foremost. But I still, like I say, kept her out of trouble. My mom always told me that I was mentally retarded when I was a child because I was receiving SSI. Family. They still saying like, “Girl, you’re crazy,” and on and on. Okay. It’s something she led me to believe when I was a child. I don’t recall her saying these things to my other siblings.

My mom use to treat me as her niece, Alice, her sister that’s here now that I’m most closest with. She use to treat us different from Tena, Shena, and Amy, basically saying we were her ugly children. But she’ll come get them and then take them out to town with her with her boyfriends and stuff. So, Alice, she’s like me when it comes to mama. She’s telling her that she loves her. Like I’ll bring up, like when we have conversations, I’ll bring up stuff that happened to us in the past and she will always deny it. But now she see how mom is too. Like she always thought she was being treated differently. But mom brainwashed all the girls. They’re very much brainwashed by her. But some of them were following her footsteps. They tell lies. My brothers are like [pause] they’ve been traumatized by her. You know men, they say men are stronger. I think women are stronger than men. But I don’t know, I think it’s the power, I don’t know. I have very intelligent brothers. Them growing up as young men knew what was right and what was wrong. Well, not my oldest brother, that’s her baby, her first baby.

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She treated my older brother different. He's 30 now and the one that's under him, he's just made 29. Well, he be 29 tomorrow? Thursday? no Friday. He'll be 29 [chuckles].

My mom tired to take my childhood away from me and tell me I couldn't play, or couldn't run, or do jump rope, or be in the drill team or whatever because I had severe asthma. I still did that as a child and I still had to deal with asthma. But in some episodes, my mom used to say to me, "I told you not to be running" and I mean wow. "I'm not taking you to the hospital." But like I had stopped breathing like I had near death with the asthma was so severe. It was very severe. That's why I say there's many a things that happened to me as a child why I consider her evil. My heart is different and I think that's why I'm treated differently. Really, because a lot of people in our family are the same, like they remind me so much of each other.

My mom was like recently in a episode at my auntie's house like going to them, "I heard you don't whoop your kids?" [Imitating her mother]. I'm like, "so, I'm not going to beat them like I was beat." "Who beat you? [In a mean tone mocking her mother's voice]. "Uh, h-e-l-l-o!" [chuckles]. "I'm not going to go back and reminisce and tell you who beat me. You know who beat me, you did" [chuckles]. She was the type that get mad at her boyfriend and hit us, or find something to be mad at us about and whoop us. We was little then [chuckles]. My sister will tell you like, "Man, she hurt my feelings." Me, I never faulted them and never swore at her, never cursed her, never disrespected her, but I have told her on several occasions how I felt as I became an adult. She didn't expect that comment from me because I was the retarded one.

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What my mother does now is portrays being crazy to receive SSI [pause]. There's nothing wrong with that lady, absolutely nothing wrong with her. It's a disorder, my auntie telling me about, hypochondriac – a person who believes in their lies. That's her 100 percent. But I don't think she should receive SSI for that. Why would you want to give somebody SSI who thinks their self like that? You believe in your own fibs, lies, and stories, and I don't get it. I mean, why would you give someone SSI like that? Absolutely nothing wrong with that person.

Grandmother raised me with over twenty-some children, grandchildren on her own. When I say dysfunctional, very, very dysfunctional. Like most of my siblings don't get along. Just a lot of things that goes on within the family. And like I figure it's most, because my grandmother's part of it too, right, they - I thought it was a thing that the grandmother was the...that...the eye of the family, the heart of the family. And she didn't do her job, she didn't play her part. She didn't do her role. I don't...my dad was in prison, and he would have loved to be a part of my life but my mom kept him in prison, and she was twenty-five with seven children herself. She always came with ... Like she...only way I describe my mom is evil. And she has her own way of doing things, and if her needs are not met, if she can't have things to go her way my mom like get upset and do things the way she want to do. So dad's staying in jail now.

I remember very good times with my dad. Yeah, I was close to him as a child, but he was never around. My wish was for him to be around most of the time.

Dad used to come around with lots of gifts, and, ah...he used to keep us involved with his side of the family. I don't know much about his side of the family, because once

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my...his mom passed away, it was like I never turned back to they side of the family. So I never really got a chance to know anyone on that side of the family. I know more of my maternal family now not paternal family. I wish I would a got a chance to know my great...my [paternal] grandmother and because my mom's family is dysfunctional, very.

If I would a like had a more closer personal relationship with him [dad], if he wasn't in prison so much, then maybe I think he would a made me a better person actually. I mean, not saying that I'm a bad person, but the way I was raised and brought up, I went through the different path in life instead of the one I chose as a teenager, and then as an adult. He's a great guy, not only because he shows the ways of being a father but mentally and emotionally, and spiritually he was a great help.

My grandmother is what you call money hungry. She's only in it for the money, but she still took care of us. I wouldn't call it raising, with being raised, there's a lot of tender love and care. Being taken care of, they just do what they have to do, just because they're being paid to do it. My grandmother was being paid. I was receiving SSI. And, you know, back in the day, getting welfare was more simple than it is now. There was a lot of welfare coming in – food stamps and cash for all seven siblings because my mom was in and out of the picture. You know, for a while she [mom] was receiving assistance and she left us. We were abandoned, all seven of us in Georgia county. So...I don't think like being young is an excuse for leaving seven children behind with no one to care for them. The oldest was eleven, the youngest was ten months. So.

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Supportive Kin

I felt close to my father but he was never around. He was a good-hearted man, a very warm-hearted and generous man. My sisters, my best friend, Mary and her mom, a Christian woman are other inspiring people in my life, other than my mom, that took care of me. The only way I look up to my cousin, Anita, is because of things she taught me as young lady, how to be a lady when it comes to men, and not to let them use me. I respect her for that part.

When it came needing some kind of support like food, clothing, transportation or whatever everybody came to grandmother. But grandmother, like I said, she took care of us but she didn't raise us. And what I mean by that was she clothed us, made sure we bathed, made sure we had our hair combed, made sure we went to school. She did her part as a mother but beyond raising us, no.

We need to keep our children, me and my sisters and brothers, we all have like three or two children. We're trying to work on keeping our children together as one home. But we also need my mom and our dad to participate as their grandparents because, you know, a 100 per – no, not a 100 percent, I'd say 75 percent of the time. Not that the other side of the family is always there for your children like my children's paternal family. They're not there, neither their maternal family. They know certain people, you know, so.

Adolescence

I wasn't a drug abuser. I was actually the sweetest girl in the...Like, I was a little older than all the sisters so and brothers, well, my brothers, they were in and out of

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Bethesda a lot and detention. Bethesda is a school for boys who misbehave and they were in and out. So we barely seen them as children, but we knew they were our brothers and things. As I got to middle school, I started like hanging out with other kids. But I still hadn't tried drugs, cigarettes, nothing. Just go out and fighting and what we call the hood things, like going on in the hood. It was just like a lot of theft, that's like from stores and things like that. I had no choice about stealing because I wasn't being taken care of. I had to do something to attend school. I didn't want to be raggedy looking. A lot of things I done, I taught myself, like the talents I had like with hair styling.

School/Prison/Boot Camp for Girls

I went to a girl school at fourteen from fighting in middle school. This is when my mom started getting in trouble with the state. I was only supposed to be there for a year. I actually stayed an additional six months because my mom – evil – her name is Geneva (laughs) she told the re-integration social worker that I couldn't come home because my brother was being charged with sexual assault. And I'm telling him like, I know my brother wouldn't touch me, and I know that's untrue, that my brother had raped somebody, which it was untrue. It wasn't true, but he was still charged with it 'cause it was consensual sex with a minor, so he was charge with statutory rape of some unknown female.

I had what was called a re-integration social worker in Besanu Oaks Girls School, and that's in Savannah, Georgia and a treatment social worker. They were supposed to help us with getting released and making sure we get the proper care and, you know, specially when we at home. I was so anticipating coming home and yeah, I thought it

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was just being evil. Like why would you be mean towards my brother and towards me, suffering all this, and be in pain. Like I said, I made the wrong choice by fighting in school, but I really didn't feel like I needed to be in prison for that situation. Yeah Besanu is a prison. It be like a boot camp for girls. They considered me angry, so I was on a unit called, they had different units for different stages of emotional and mental development. I was put in an anger management unit called Phoenix because they thought I was so angry and dangerous to society. And when they sent me there, it hurt my feelings, it's like dangerous to society? [surprised tone]. I'm only fourteen. Like I wouldn't harm nobody, not even a fly [chuckles]. I'm dangerous to society? Really? But it also involved a teacher.

When I was fighting with the girls, the teacher, like she restrained me instead of, the policies at school was to make sure there's two teachers in the same area when there's students fighting and both of the children are being restrained. But only I was restrained, and the girl was still fighting me. So I fought the teacher off of me, and made a mistake and hit her and that got me in trouble. And she went forward in like pressing charges, and I'm like wow! Okay.

Family Traditions Celebrated

There were no family traditions or celebrations growing up and me and my sister talk about that right to this day. We went to church though and it was our choice as children. I can't believe that though, like it wasn't mom pushing us, "Go to church" or grandmother pushing us, "Go to church." It was just us as children. I'm Christian. I've got to keep God close to my heart as my protection. Sometimes when there wasn't food

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in the house we'd go to church and eat, church for clothes, church for school supply, you know.

What Community Should Know

Being a mother is the greatest gift you can get from God. Mothers should hold on to our pride and our womanhood as mothers. Follow your dreams and continue your education because that's what's going to get you through in life. I don't think welfare is going to last forever. I honestly don't.

Lessons of Motherhood

With the single women and first-time mothers, or second, third-time mothers, we have to be strong and we have to learn from our experiences whether they're good or bad. It's up to us to be the key person of our family, whether we're single, married, in a relationship with a partner. We have to know our innermost desires as mothers and as women. So I'm going to get some birth control. I'm going to become a better woman, and an excellent mother. Learn how to trust myself with or without a man, learn how to love myself with or without a man, learn how to respect myself with or without a man, learn how to treat myself with or without a man. My children watch me be abused. Never again will they ever.

You know some women cannot do it without a man. It's mostly black women honestly. Like I say, I have experiences in my family, friends, associates and it's sad. People look down on us. They love to look down on African Americans. I hate to be judged by my book cover. You have to read the book before [chuckles] you judge it just by the cover and the title.

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Education About Sexual Abuse Prevention

Not everybody tells the truth about being sexually abused but you have to have open ears, and you have to listen, and you have to watch your surroundings and who you bring around and learn the people you know and trust the people you know. You never know, it can be the one closest to you, you know? It does always end up being the ones closest to you. I don't care if you've been knowing them for years, you still have to trust your inner thoughts and inner feelings, you have to believe in your children, learn and trust your children, listen to them. Learn them even if they telling a lie. When they're telling a lie, that's part of learning your child. You have to know when they're lying and when they're not.

Case Study #8 – Nina

Her uncle and two cousins (brother and sister) sexually molested Nina when she was between eight and twelve years old. Afraid to tell her mother about the abuse at the time, Nina waited several years before disclosing her experiences to her mother. Nina's children were primarily cared for by her mother due to her 20-year struggle with drug addiction.

I am 41-years-old and have three children, two girls and a boy. My oldest daughter is 24-years-old, my boy is 23-years-old and the youngest girl is 19-years-old. I also have eight grandchildren. My oldest daughter, I would say she has three because she has her own and I count her two stepchildren. My son has one. He just had his first child. My youngest daughter had four children but she has two that are living. So all together I have eight but two are deceased. I parented my children off and on due to my addiction. I

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was caught in addiction for over 20 years so my kids were mainly with my mom. They were back and forth from me to my mom. I've been in recovery six months this round. I had two years before this and I relapsed for eleven months and now I'm clean again.

Sexual Mistreatment and Disclosure

I was molested between the ages of eight and twelve by an uncle and two cousins. The cousins were brother and sister. I didn't tell my mom at the time. I don't know why. I don't know. Scared. I was terrified of my mom coming up. Maybe I thought she wouldn't believe me anyway, or maybe I just was too scared to tell her something like that. I think I was just too scared. You know? I didn't know if she'd get me for it. Who knows? You know, yeah, it was crazy. I don't know. I wasn't threatened. Nobody threatened me, you know, like, "If you do this, if you tell, " you know, they didn't do that to me, you know. I don't know why it stopped when I was twelve. I think maybe because I got older. Maybe they got scared at that point that I would say something.

I brought it to my mom some years ago and she claimed that she knew then I brought it to her this time and she acted surprise. My mom seems to forget a lot. Well, my mom's had a couple of strokes, so maybe she really does not remember certain things because I know I've got to do all her paperwork and stuff for her now.

Intergenerational Sexual Mistreatment

My mother's ex-husband molested my youngest daughter when she was three years old in my mother's care. At the time when it came out, she [mom] was like my daughter was lying. It's like, how does a three-year-old lie about something like that in detail? So, I was pissed at her [mom]. I hated her for that, calling my daughter a liar

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about something like that, you know and 'til this day she [mom] don't talk about that stuff. My mom won't talk about it.

Well, my daughter's getting therapy and, you know, stuff like that now for it but I think it has something to do with her having kids so early, that and her dad not being there and stuff too because my daughter, I mean, started having kids at twelve. She was messing with 30-something year old men. You know, so I'm already knowing it [molestation] plays a big part. Like now, she would never mess around with no guy that's her age. If they're not not like my age or something, she won't mess with them and it's sad to see that. It's really sad and they you think about all these pedophiles, you know. You know she's young, even when she was 12-years-old messing with these older men, you knew she was a baby [referring to older men]. It's like you know?

You know, I blame myself for that a lot because if I'd been there, things would have played out different and so, you know [sighs] so I had to do a lot of self-forgiveness with myself. In order to forgive these other people and things like that, I had to do a lot man, that was tough work, real tough work. I worked hard to get to where I am today, to be a better person, you know, for myself and society, a better mother for my kids, a grandmother for my grandkids, a better daughter, a sister, you know, auntie, and whatever else. I had a lot of hard work, and I still got a lot to do.

My son also was raped, by a female when he was younger. That came out just last year. The year before last he disclosed that to me, repeatedly by a teenager girl who lived in our building, you know. He was in my care at the time. She was in the same building that we lived in at the time. You know, they'd go out and play. The boys would go out

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and play and stuff so I'm thinking he went out to play with his friend, he was playing with his friend or whatever, you know but he never said nothing. He never said anything until like last year. I think he brought it up because I told them [her children] about my stuff. I talk to my kids about everything, you know. They're my best friends too, you know. I told them to just let them know about some of the things that kept me stuck, you know, that kind of stuff, like some of the things that I was running from, and trying to medicate and hid, and stuff, you know, that kind of thing.

We were all shocked when Aaron said that. When he brought that out, It was just like, oh, I felt so bad. I just didn't want my kids failing their kids. Do not fail your kids. You know, everything's not going to be perfect. You know, I don't know what normal is but just please don't fail your kids, always make yourself available. Make sure you know where they are at all times, then you can't allow everybody in your world and everybody to care for your children, you know because the closes person with you will hurt them, you know?

Effects on Parenting

I think it [experiences of sexual mistreatment] made me want to be more protective over my kids. I think that I looked at everybody crazy that came in contact with my kids, because my family did this to me, you know so it made me leery about who my kids were around when my kids were with me. I'm very protective over my grandbabies too and I get on my daughter about that, my youngest daughter. When she wants to go, she wants to go, so she'll just let, I feel like she just lets anybody watch them. Whoever watch them, she's out of there. You know, and that pisses me off. It

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really does. My son's very protective over his daughter already. He ain't even seen her except pictures that were sent to him. He won't even allow us to get her until he comes home. You know, he's just very protective over her and then Aretha [oldest daughter] is too with Roy. She's very protective over him too. She don't let anybody watch him.

Influences on Parenting

I think my mother influenced how I wanted to be as a parent because she was so abusive to me that I always wanted the best for my kids. I always said I would never be like my mom but I was. I wasn't physically abusive to my kids but I was mentally and emotionally by not being there for them. I ended up still being like her. My mother was very physically, verbally, emotionally, and mentally abusive to me when I was a child and it carried over to my adulthood too except for now I speak up for myself today. I don't allow her to abuse me. My feelings behind her abusive behavior are what would keep me stuck in addiction too.

When they were little, I did a lot of things with my kids. I guess to keep them busy and burning energy. We'd get up, we had breakfast, probably watch some cartoons or something together then we'd like head to a park or something or if there was snow outside, we'd go outside and do the snow angels or throw snowballs. I always did different things with my kids, activities with my children because that was one thing my mom didn't do so I tried to interact with my kids. You know, we talked too and my kids, like now, we can talk about everything. We do. We talk about everything. It's a way my youngest says it, goes about it, you know, I kind of pull her teeth a little bit but then she'll get started and we'll talk.

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Relationship with Children

I have a good relationship with my son and my oldest daughter. My youngest daughter, I can tell she has anger issues related to my addiction and not being there like I should have been. The most rewarding part of being a parent to me is the unconditional love that kids give you regardless of anything. Like, I know my youngest daughter has some anger issues but I also know that she loves me regardless too. It's just the way that she presents herself that I know that there is some anger. Her anger is not like just directly towards me, but I can just tell she's so bitter at a lot. I know my kids love me unconditionally because they tell me they like having me around. They call me all the time and you know, they reward me with saying nice things to me like "Oh, you look really nice," or, "I'm proud of you mom," you know, stuff like that and then not only that, them trusting me with their kids is a big piece for me. When I was using [drugs] they really didn't want me around their kids. They would come around but they really didn't want their kids to see me like that and I didn't either. I didn't even want my own kids to see me like that but they wanted my time. I would stop long enough, you know, to go see them because I was a runner. I don't like being around my family at all when I'm using. I run from everybody that's closest to me. I think I run because of the shame of using. My oldest don't like to see me hurt or cry, her or my son. They don't like to see that. It's like "Stop crying. Stop. You ain't got to cry. Don't mom, stop [chuckles]." You know, they don't like to see me hurt so that's another demonstration of how much they care about me.

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What has changed in the way I parent my kids is the quality time that my kids always had needed, I give to them today. I offer them advice and being available for them, you know, and being sober I can be available. I'm available at any point in time for my children and grandchildren. I make it a point to be.

Parental Pride

I'm just proud of my kids period whether they are right or wrong. I love my kids and I'm proud of the fact that my kids are so forgiving and respectful. They're very respectful kids and nonjudgmental. I'm just proud of the way my kids turned out, period. I think the way my kids are has a lot to do with my mom. She treated my kids different from the way she treated me. She wasn't abusive to my kids the way she was with me. I worried about that because I know what misery I grew up in but she wasn't abusive to my kids.

I also contributed to the way they turned out because when I was around, I was very nurturing to my children.

Parental Challenges

My youngest daughter is my biggest challenge. She's like I said, she's got some anger issues. I also see her like going down the same road as me, as far as materialistically giving her kids everything, but time-wise, I don't see that she spends a lot with her kids. I'm constantly trying to be on her about that. I think that Ashley is my biggest challenge as a mother.

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Parental Strengths and Limitations

Let's see, [sighs], I think I would say my compassion and my communication, and coming to an understanding, a neutral ground with my kids is my strengths. I would say my limitation is the disrespectfulness. I do not play, my kids being disrespectful, not just to me but to nobody.

Expectations of Children

I expect my kids to be all that they can be. I support them in whatever decisions they decide to make but I totally don't expect them to waste their lives like I did. I expect them to make something of themselves and it don't even so much have to be for them but for their kids. I expect them to be the best parent they can be and to always be there for their children, regardless. So far they are doing fine except Ashley. I had a problem with her. I know she loves her kids to death but it's like, you know, I see her doing the same thing as my mom did, as far as materialistically being there for her kids but the time-wise is not clicking good with me, the way she don't spend that much time with her kids, you know. I know she's young but it's like, you know, "you signed up for this. Nobody told you to have those kids this early." You know, she's only 19-years-old. She'll be twenty in November, and so it's like she wants to party, party, party, but it's like, "you've got plenty of time to party. You've got to raise your kids. You know, every now and then it's fine, but constant? No." See my granddaughters [Ashley's girl's], when they're around, they're so clingy. You know, they want to sit on my lap. They're three and four. On turns three today, they're three and four and they want to be on my lap. They're hugging, and rubbing me, and, you know, kissing me, you know and I give it back to them. It's like,

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you know, you can tell that they're thirsty for it, you know so that's what my time with them consists of when they're around. It's like they get attention every now and then from Ashley but not like where their cup is getting filled. I get my cup filled through my grandkids, you know. They love me unconditionally, no conditions whatsoever, you know. I don't got to answer to them or anything like that, you know what I mean? We give and take from each other.

I get my cup filled when I'm around my kids because they make sure I get my cup full. They give me a lot of attention when I'm around, even the little mean one, Ashley [laughs]. They do. They do. I feel real good when I leave them, whereas before I used to feel so empty and, you know, like, "Damn," you know because I was doing wrong. Today I'm doing right and so I like being around them and stuff like that and I feel good when I leave.

There are some things I disapprove of that my children do. Like my oldest daughter's a stripper, I totally disapprove of that. I know it comes with the lifestyle. I've been there, done that, when I was younger and I totally know what all goes with that and I'm not okay with that, but it is her life and, you know, she has to make her own decisions and her own choices. Only thing I can do is put it out there that I'm not comfortable with it. You know, it's all I can do. My son, he's in prison but this is from a case when he was 15-years-old. They wanted to charge him as an adult, so now he's doing his time and ended up doing a penitentiary time anyways. He's out in August, so I'm not approving of that. See, like my daughters could survive on the street; my son can't and he is, he was a big follower and that's how he ended up getting this case. You know, I don't approve of

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him being a follower and I'm hoping now, since he's been in prison this time, he's had this baby since he's been in prison, so he hasn't got a chance to hold her or anything. I'm hoping that will change him, his view on things and stuff like that because he's not gangster or anything [chuckles] like that you know but he was a follower. My daughters are more street-wise than my son is. My son is not, he's very book smart. He's very intelligent. He's so intelligent; he does dumb things [laughs]. They're [daughters] fighters and, you know, that kind of thing. My son, he's not. They all finished high school. And then like my youngest daughter, the time that she's not spending with her kids she's seeing multiple guys and, you know things like that I don't approve of that at all. You know, they smoke weed. I don't approve of that either, but, you know, I did too, you know, for many years but, you know, they've got to make their own choices until they come to grips with it. I did it, smoked crack cocaine until I was done and we could all want them to stop but they ain't going to do it 'til they're ready to.

Hopes for Children

I would like to see my kids financially stable, and mentally and emotionally stable as well. I would like to see them raise their kids in the right manner having respect for people. Respect is a big thing to me. It really is. They know it too. Outside of respect, I would hope that my kids learned to be there more for their kids and know how important the nurturing is and the praises that you give your children. It plays a big part in how they turn out. It really does. I think my children learned to stick up for themselves being parented by my mom, to not take any crap from nobody [chuckles]. I mean, which is kind

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of good. I mean, it's good, so you don't get walked all over but yeah, I think that's the biggest thing [chuckles] that she could teach them [chuckles].

Relationship to Caregivers

My mother had me when she was 16-years-old. She treated me and my brother different coming up. You know, kids aren't stupid; they know the difference. I think the difference in treatment has something to do with my dad. My father was whorish. He slept with a lot of different women. I have a lot of siblings that I haven't even met through my father. I'm 41-years-old and I've only met one but I just got in contact with three other ones so I'm trying to go down there [the south] so that we can meet because I haven't been back home since I was 18-years-old. I look totally different from my mom and my brother. They're very dark-skinned. I'm light-skinned. I look like my dad. They're slender [mom and brother]. I'm from my dad's breed of bigger and I think it has a lot to do with the relationship with her [mother] and my father.

I won't knock her [mother] for taking care of my kids. My mom always gave me material things. I had everything but her time, nurturing, and love, and stuff; no, I didn't feel. We have a good relationship now but every now and then she'll throw a jab and I get her right back because it's like, you know, it's never what you say, it's how you say it, so I get her right back. It's like, you know what, I'm not standing for that today. I had to get her yesterday, on mother's day. She is [chuckles] a piece of work. She said something and I was like, "No, I don't have it," or something. Well, she said, "well, I raised your kids." I said, "Yeah, you ain't going to keep throwing that in my face. I dealt with that already. Next. Try something else." You know, where as I would have used that

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for an excuse to go relapse or something because I get to thinking about it and dwelling on it. No, I came to grips that she done that [took care of her children]. We all know that. Like I told her, "Everybody knows that so try something else." I can cope with things today, you know what I mean [chuckles]? Whereas before, I would use that stuff as a meal ticket to go relapse, you know, or whatever, but not now.

My grandmother was very nurturing to me. That's where I got my love from and I use to hate that because I was back and forth from my grandma's to my mom's. As soon as I got comfortable and stuff, here come my mom again getting me. It's like, this is terrible. It was so sad and terrible, my life and it's like I didn't want to be there because she was just so mean to me all the time anyway. It's like, why would she just leave me there? My grandma is very loving and nurturing and to this day she just is. She's like, "I always believed in you. You need to believe in yourself," and you know, yeah. She's 87-years-old, I lived with her 'til I was about 13-years-old and then I stayed with my mom from 13 'til she put me out at nineteen. I think my grandma was trying to rescue me. She knew what was going on but you know, I tried to get taken out of the home plenty of times. Children Protection back then wasn't like today at all.

My brother still lives there [chuckles]. They still live together. I don't know, I think she wanted to put me out a long time ago. Just, I don't know, because I started sticking up for myself. I wasn't allowing her to do the things she did to me anymore and it's like, she was trying to take over my kids and all kinds of stuff. I was like, "No. These are my kids. You can't raise my kids the way you did me," and you know, that kind of thing. It was just it was time for me to go anyway.

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Losses

Beyond my grandmother, I respected my aunt Lilly. She was my grandmother's sister. She committed suicide when I was about 14-years-old. Depression actually really runs in our family. With me knowing about depression and getting professional help with mine, but you couldn't tell my family that. She drove herself off a cliff into the Mississippi river. I was really hurt behind that. Yeah. I was really devastated behind that. Nobody saw any kind of clue that she was depressed because [sighs] unless you're educated on depression and Google things like that, you don't know, and a lot of us in the African American community don't see that stuff, you know. Then, when you try to bring it to somebody it's like, you know, they're like, "What? Please. Whatever." You know, they don't believe what you're saying and stuff like that. It's like, you know what I mean? Like they think it's cool sitting on a porch with a 40-ounce, ice cold 40-ounce in the summertime. That's not cool and they think that just because they smoke weed, its just weed, they're not a dope fiend, you know, type of thing and that it's okay. You know, and it's not. A drug is a drug, you know, no matter what.

I don't know how I dealt with my aunt's suicide. I really never even really thought about it 'til just now and its sad because I know back then I just was hurt. I was depressed. I mean, I 've always been depressed and so I just got into a deeper depression, but now I just thought of it. Just brining it up, I haven't even dealt with that and you know, start talking about it with my psychologist about it and brought up some fumes.

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As an adult I lost one of my grandchildren. She was six months old when she passed. She's a twin to my oldest granddaughter. She died of SIDS. outside of that I haven't lost anybody.

Partner

I ended a ten and a half year relationship with my ex; I couldn't do her no more. She was supposed to be in recovery, but just because you stop using doesn't mean you're in recovery, and she'd been clean for like seven years, six or seven years you know, but she's just a big liar, a cheater and she had always been there for me through everything when my family and stuff was even never there for me. She was always there for me but it's like, you know, that kept me stuck for convenience, and its like, you know, when I sobered up this time and really started working on my core issues, I realized that I wasn't in love with her anymore. I love her, will always love her but that doesn't mean I have to stay with somebody that I'm not comfortable with being with, you know, and that I don't trust. I don't have to be there just for convenience and I've come through my own skin, where I don't mind being alone today. So, you know, I had to just end it on that note. It was just you know, not for me. I love my freedom. I love being single. I'm a very private person and I think it's because I had to be in the limelight when I was using all those years. You know, I was very popular and that type of thing, because I kept doping. You know, so they love you to keep doping, stuff, and money. I don't like being around a lot of people. I like being alone.

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Drug Use and Domestic Sex Trafficking

I started using cocaine when I was 19-years-old. My so-called best friend and her mom, I walked in on them doing it and I ended up, you know [snaps her fingers], it was like, “What is that?” I wanted to try it, being curious and then liked it, liked how it made me feel, how it took me out of my misery, you know, yeah. I used for over 20 years before I stopped. I’d say off and on for 20 years because I did it for many different reasons before. This time I did it [stopped] because I wanted to. I wanted it for myself, no parole, no probation, no child protection, not trying to save a relationship, not to shut my mom up, not because I was homeless, you know, and not trying to do it for my kids. I did it because I wanted it this time. I got tired.

I was involved in prostitution and stripping to have somewhere to lay my head. I’ve done it all. I’ve been a pimp, you name it. I’ve been raped. I’ve just always been a hustler and you know, I’ve been a dope dealer and all that. I’ve just been a hustler. I love fast money and I love really nice things. Today I’m not that type of person. That’s why my house is so empty [chuckles]. You know, I’m trying to live different and some days it’s harder than others. I want to go back to my old ways with certain things but I have everything that I need, so I’ve got to keep reminding myself I have everything I need but I just love, I love money, you know.

Family Traditions

[Chuckles] I don’t really have too many good memories about family traditions because, I mean, I have some memories but they’re not good ones because on my mom’s side of the family I was an outcast to them, a straight black sheep to them, except for my

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grandma. You know, and I don't know what it was about me that I just felt so lost and lonely as a child. I was depressed all the time, didn't want to be here on this earth. Period. I just wanted to die when I was a kid and you know, because they have their family traditions where we got together for like Christmas and Thanksgiving. Christmas they'd get together and exchange names for gifts and whoever got my name, I never got a gift. It was just sad. I was just talking about this yesterday to my stepsister and it was just terrible. I never wanted to go around them people because they're not friendly people and I still don't to this day. You know, and see, today, I'm so headstrong where I'll give them a piece of my mind and to avoid all that, you know, before I end up steppin', having an out-of-body, I just don't go around them. I just don't because I could just read them their rights on how they've always made me feel. It's like, how could you do that to your own family? It's just sad but they say your family is the first to hurt you in most cases [chuckles]. You know, I am a big witness to that, hands-on. It's just like, wow, I mean, I think I got my big compassion at heart because I used to get lost in people until I got in recover. It's like I would give, give, give, give, give. I know how to say no today. I've got boundaries today. I know how to do this and do that. I got all that from my grandma because my mom was so bitter, you would think I'd be this mean, evil person but I'm not. I'm totally opposite because I didn't want to be like her too. Maybe that had something to do with it too. I didn't want to be like her. She was so miserable all the time, mean, my mom's mean. She is and I know she has some issues where she needs to see a therapist or something but you can't tell her that, you know.

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Family Communication Dynamics

My mom is 57-years-old and I'm 41-years-old and I ain't never talked to her, I mean to help explain how her behavior affects me. I'm sure she wouldn't if I sat down and talked to her because our family, I grew up in a family where you just don't talk about nothing. You know, you don't talk about nothing so you just grin and bear it, bite the bullet, whatever, and keep going. You know, you don't talk about anything but I bet you if I sat my grandma down, just me and her, she would disclose some things to me because it could run real deep with my mom. It can run really deep. I just think it's sad. I look at it, and I try to view it different, whereas I used to think she was just this evil person, now, well, being in recovery, I look at it as like it's really sad. She's in a lot of pain and she needs some help, you know.

Coping Strategies

I've got a psychologist, psychiatrist. I've got a therapist. I've got two sponsors. I've got a recovery coach. I go to meetings. You know, I do what I need to do for me. All my friends are in recovery. If I wouldn't have gotten in recovery, I wouldn't have known. I'd still be out there all messed up too. Now, you know, because it's deeper than just putting the pipe down. Recovery runs deeper than that. You know, it's about the behaviors, it's about touching, getting down to the core of your issues, all that kind of stuff. So, you know, I work on all areas of my life today and it's like because that's what I need help with all that. I've got, suffered from all kinds of abuse issues. You know, I do and I've been the victim and I've victimized, so you know, and I refuse to do either one of them anymore today.

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Familial Socioeconomic Support

It would have to be a tragedy to bring us together. It's so sad. It has to be a tragedy to bring all of us together and it's like emotionally they're there. They have their picks on who they're there for financially. So, you know, I don't socialize with them people. It's sad but I don't. I'd be around my friends, like my friend had a gathering yesterday for her family. My friend lives downstairs and it was really nice to see how her people came and it was, you know, but if I had something nobody would show up and it's just sad. I used to say stuff behind that stuff. Today, I've accepted it, my family, for who they are and it's like I keep them at a distance to protect myself.

When I was a child my mom busted her butt for us. We weren't on welfare. She busted her butt. She did but [chuckles] she never let you live it down, you know, but it's like, "that's your job [chuckling]. Hello? I didn't ask to be here." You know, so she always wanted the best for us. She came from a big family, and struggling down south so she always wanted the best for us, you know. I mean, I can remember times when my mom didn't eat to make sure that me and my brother ate. You know, yeah she was a good provider that I can say. She was really nurturing to my brother, it was just me. It was [chuckles] you know, no.

Family Migration

My mom's side of the family is originally from the south. My mom and her siblings moved to the Midwest. The rest of the family is still in the south. I've been here since I was five years old. The neighborhood I raised my kids in was pretty nice. It was

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South Town back in the '30s and '40s and, you know, I lived in the suburbs, so it was a pretty nice area.

Childhood

I don't know what five words I would use to describe my relationship with my mom when I was a child. I don't know, [sighs] man! I don't know. I hated my mom. I don't know if I can answer that one. I hated her. I hated her when I was coming up. I was very unhappy, lonely, depressed. Shoot, that's about as far as I can go with that one. I have nothing nice to say if I go back to that. [Pause] Phony [laughter]. It was. It was phony. I didn't fit in anywhere. It's like you know, I didn't fit in; the dark-skinned girls didn't like me because I was light-skinned and then [pause] I just didn't fit in. It was terrible. It was frickin' terrible, man. Oh my goodness, then, when I was around the Caucasian girls, I wanted to bully them. so it was like, you know, I didn't fit in nowhere. It was terrible. Yeah it was phony.

If I had five words to describe my grandmother, I'll use nurturing, loving, she understood me [sighs]. I don't know. She was compassionate but I think she felt sorry for me too. Yeah. I had a tough upbringing. You know, that's okay, I expected, accepted it, you know. I'm not that person today, and won't be the same person tomorrow, you know. I don't care. I have the help that I need. Don't got a lot and still have a lot to go. When I was upset as a child, I had a notebook, that I would write "Dear God" letters and it's like journaling but I would address them to God and yeah, my mom, she would go through them, read my letters, you know, because she was terrible. No matter where I hid it she would find it and you know, I used to catch her in the middle of the night going through

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my purses in the bathroom. You know, she even snuck in my room, got my, my mom was a trip, man. She was terrible but yeah, I would journal, pray, you know; too scared to talk to anybody about it because she, you know, would always tell me, you know, what goes on in her house stays in her house. You know.

The first time I was separated from my mom was about six-years-old. My mom moved out because she got a job and wanted to be near her job but we moved out of my grandmother's house into our own place. It hurt moving from my grandmothers. I loved being around my grandmother. It hurt because it left more room for jabs from my mom, you know. It hurt. It was scary. I just didn't understand why she [mom] didn't leave me with my grandma. She didn't want me, so I just, I've had to talk to her about that too. You know, but she just don't talk about shit! When you do bring it up, she gets angry, you know. She's not mentally there to accept hearing things. She's in denial about a lot of stuff. I felt like telling her how I felt as a child, you know, how she made me feel. My grandma didn't like it at all when we left. She used to talk to my mom a lot but, you know, my mom, she's grown and it's her kids and you know, my grandma would try to get me as much as she could, as much as my mom would allow her to, you know. I started acting out, and stealing, and smoking, experimenting with cigarettes and weed. You know, my mom used to smoke weed back then. I'd take her roaches, and take some of her weed out of her bags, and take a can of beer, and I started experimenting, I started being rebellious to a certain extent because I was terrified of her. I knew she was coming with an extension cord or something, you know but yeah, I did it.

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Lessons Learned from Childhood

[Sighs] I've learned that [chuckles] my upbringing was very dysfunctional and that, oh man, that there is help out here for whatever it is I need help for. I was cheated out of a childhood.

What Professionals Should Know about Helping Parents

I think I would probably tell them to make sure that the person is very, very comfortable being a parent. I think that professionals should let them know that there are resources if you don't know what you're doing, that there are plenty of resources. Make sure they give them all the resources that they need because in this state, I know there's a resource for everything, everything here and let them know that they are not alone because some people feel afraid to even disclose anything that they're not sure about.

What Community Should Know

Keep up with your kids. Interact with your children. Know where your kids are at all times. Praise your kids. Love them. Tell them you love them every day. Give them a hug. Spend more quality time with your kids and less money because it don't even be about that.

Education About Sexual Abuse Prevention

I think the best way to educate people is going through the schools. I think having functions to educate people, I mean, even if you've got to offer something up because some people come because there's something [chuckles] like a luncheon, a dinner, or something like that and workshops. Have some kind of incentive for them, that catches people's attention. It's sad but it's true, you gotta catch some people's attention.

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How to Stop Harm to Women and Children

[Pause] Stop harming women and children? I don't know. Maybe, I don't know, just listing some of the effects and let them know some of the effects that the harm does to women and the children.

Case Study #9 – Mary

Mary is a 42-year-old mother with four children, three girls ages 26, 22, and 21 and a boy 23 years of age. Her uncle repeatedly raped her when she was 11-years-old and at 13-years-of age she was pimped by her mother to a domestic sex trafficker known to her family as a friend. He prostituted her in the streets at night along with other girls and made sure she attended school during the day. He fathered her first child. When she was 24-years-old, Mary was raped by a stranger on the street. An Italian man who solicited her fathered Mary's other three children. He also cared for the children for about two years while she struggled with an addiction to drugs.

Intergenerational Sexual Mistreatment

When my grandma died, my mom took me to go live with my uncle Kenneth down south. He repeatedly raped me for a year down there and I called home and tried to leave. When I would tell my mom what he was doing, she'd act like she didn't believe me, you know, or something and she kept saying "well, I'm going to get to the bottom of it. I'm going to talk to him" and she never did. She would say she's going to send for me and she never would. Uncle Kenneth had a roommate who took me and put me on a plane back home. Uncle Kenneth's roommate was real, real, cool about it. He said, "yeah, I was wondering what was going on in that room, when I would see you naked, and sad,

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and crying.” I told him and he was like, “that mother fucker.” He said, “First of all, baby, we got to get you away from here safely so play it off like everything’s going straight,” and he was real nice. He called my auntie Nadine and she sent for me to come back here. When I got back here I told my auntie Anita and she was like, “Baby, I believe you because he’s done this to all us girls.” They never talked about it so the thing was with me, when I was telling my mom, she already knew what he was doing so why the fuck would she send me down there? That’s what I don’t know. Yeah, all his sisters, all my aunties but they act like it’s normal in that family and will not even talk about it. My auntie Anita, she used to talk about it to me all the time. It’s like it was normal in that family so that shit ain’t normal to me!

When I came back my auntie Nadine told my mom that, “you need to do something with your daughter, she needs a place to stay so my mom took me to my own apartment when I was 13-years-old and told me and George [19-year-old family friend] to stay there and I just had to go to school. She paid the rent and everything but she was giving me assistance from the welfare started at that time but I had to be in school. She didn’t live there. She lived with her boyfriend. George had all kinds of little runaway girls there and my mom didn’t care. He’s my oldest daughter’s dad. I worked the streets at night for him and went to school during the day. My mom got the apartment because our families [Mary’s and George’s families] knew each other and they knew what we was out there doing. We’re talking like the early ‘80’s, you know, and nobody cared what nobody was doing. She [mom] needed to make sure I stayed in school because she needed to keep receiving her check from the state. When I was about 24-years-old I had

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gotten raped when I was on the streets one day. My mind just snapped, you know, and it just took me back to my all that happened with my uncle and stuff so when I got about 30-years-old and stuff, I started seeking some changes. I went and got some help. I went and seen a psychiatrist. Before that I didn't deal with it.

Coping and Meaning Making

I broke it all down with the psychiatrist that's how I got medication for the abuse. The only person I talked to about it was my psychiatrist and I had a therapist. I had post-traumatic stress disorder, that's what I was diagnosed with and I was on Geodon, Seroquel, Trazodone for sleep, and Triplexa. I'm only on one psych med now, I don't have to take all three. I'm dealing with it more now, you know. I'm doing a lot of writing that helps me deal with it. You know it takes a lot of the stress off. Sometimes I like just sit back and read. I love to read. I got my book in my purse right now [chuckles]. I love to read. I read all the time. Not forgiving helps me continue. Maybe I'm thankful for the way things was because I don't know if I would, maybe I'm here for something that somebody, one day going to meet the reader, or hear something that's going to help them, you know. If I didn't experience it, how could I write about it, you know? That's the only good thing about it. I don't know but I still don't have the answer to the question, why me? Remembering use to keep me sad a lot, it doesn't do that no more for me. I will never forget and I try to forget. I don't know why I have to keep remembering. Maybe I keep remembering for a reason. I just can't explain it [chuckles]. Remembering keeps me alive. It keeps me going. You know, it makes me to where if I'm ever in a situation like that again, I can remember, "Is this where I want to be?" before I get that far, get

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there again, you know. I know the feeling of when a person's fittin' to do that to me because I remember how it started, you know, just the remembering I guess.

What it means to be a survivor to me is that I went through it. I'm still here. It didn't tear me down. It didn't break me apart. It didn't kill me. You know, I survived through it all. What keeps me going is reading my bible, reading my daily words. Church. I don't go every Sunday but I go and talk to God. My faith.

Influences on Parenting

I think being abused sharpened my parenting skills because I wanted my kids to have the life that I watched on TV growing up. I wanted them to have a Brady Bunch life and if they couldn't have that, at least a Good Times kind of life. Like the show Good Times, you know, you might not have much but we're going to stick together and I also liked that movie Holiday Heart. I mean, I can get some pieces from just stuff like that, you know what I'm saying? Yeah, I want my kids to know everything about everything but I want them to be respectful of themselves and others foremost I just want them, you know, you don't just judge people right away.

I was very particular with my girls, you know. Yeah, like around family when I use to go over and visit, like especially around uncle Kenneth. He's always saying, "Oh, come sit on my lap." No, she won't be sitting on your lap, you know and my grandson and my granddaughters *love* him. Oh, they're crazy about their uncle Kenneth. My granddaughter's just a thick little girl, no, it's not going down so I don't see much in letting her stay or talk with him alone but, I mean, I said, I don't care that that's there uncle, he ain't did nothing yet, and he's not going to so, you know, she can even know

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who he is, as long as he ain't violating her. My mom, she was just silent and my uncle Kenneth stayed with her a couple weeks when my oldest daughter was staying there [at mother's house] and I told my mom "Well, Anita can't stay here and you know why." She said, "Girl, don't nobody do none of that no more." I said, "she won't be staying here." My mom thought I'd take Anita permanently cause back then she tried to get a check for her.

Relationship with Children

Oh, me and my kids got a good relationship except my oldest daughter. Well me and her, we have the best relationship but everyone says we're too much alike, so it's always a battle with her but the rest of my kids, we've got a good relationship. What makes it good is that we can call each other. They come by to see me. They know the things I've been going through in my life, of course, I know they being nosey [chuckles] and that's okay. Well my oldest daughter, she just act like she's just better than everybody else, so when they [siblings] try to call her, you know, she'll talk to them but she'll blow them off. You now, she's got four kids herself and she is a working mother. I don't know, she just wants everything to go her way, if it don't go her way it's like, I don't know. I'm on my way to her house when I leave here. I basically go baby-sit my grandkids because she want to go out and party, that's like the only time she call me, so at least we have a relationship. Some people don't have a relationship, that's the way I look at it.

I look at the way my kids might carry themselves, their attitudes to determine how I would come to them. The way they talk to me, you know, is most important because

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kids can be mouthy and if you already know they're mouthy, so you've got to know how to come at them in a different way so they don't be mouthy. Yeah, so it's a lot by the way they talk to me. Then, and I guess just, I just observe them. You really get to know a person, just sit back and observe, and listen to them. Then you'll know, you know, what to say to them and what they might expect to say back. Yeah.

Rewards and Pride in Parenting

Giving birth to my first child was the most rewarding experience I had as a parent. Wow, that was something to me, having my first baby. I mean, all my life, growing up, I was raised by my uncles and mom's boyfriends and stuff after my grandma died. When I finally did give birth, I was with my friend at the time and her dad was actually the one who took me out on the streets when I was on the street so when it [the baby] was just something that was mine, you know, couldn't nobody take this from me. It's not never going to leave me. I get to finally take care of somebody that's going to appreciate it, you know, that's the way I looked at it, instead of taking care of all these niggas and stuff. Sometimes my mouth might get a little dirty just [chuckles] because I get mad [laughs]. Yeah so I know I ain't gotta take care of these niggas no more, this is something that I can love and it's going to really love me back. So, giving that birth was just, it hurt at the same time but I was just so excited because during my whole labor that's when I was giving my birth that's what's going through my mind. "Oh, it's just something that's mine. It's going to love me. It'll never talk back to me, it'll never hit me, it'll never leave me, you know. This is like a part of me." So yeah, birth was a lesson for me.

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I'm really proud that every one of my children, regardless of what I was doing in my lifetime, as raising them growing up, the prostitution, and drugs, and all that, I have very smart kids. "One thing that I love you for Mom, I'm just, I don't care how long you stayed out or how long you was out, we always had breakfast, clean clothes." You know, and they went to school and I can turn off the T.V. sit down with them for a minute, when it's just me, but I feel this is when I didn't have no man. I'm so proud that they all graduated from high school. None of them are on assistance, every one of them has a job. I got two in college now and my daughter has four kids but she's in the Army. She been working a paid job since she was fifteen, and she's been out of the house since she was nineteen, and yeah, I just kind of hate that she's so, they call her "Black-White girl," sort of like that. You know, because she grew up in the suburbs and stuff and all my kids did but she was like more like, she's like me, that's just the thing. "Because you have it like that, but you're losing the best thing. You know, you're trying to impress your friends and other people when you should be trying to get with your family. " She's just another nigga [laughter]. Yeah, she going get [laughing] hers. Yeah. Okay. That's all that is.

Expectations of Children

When my kids were little I started writing little short stories to my kids cuz it was in me anyways and teaching them, you know, and always talking to them, listening to them, you know, saying words just like that thing that comes on TV now, when your child sees a word, clap, you know clap. I was doing it with my kids way back then and that is true, that does work. Kids get real smart like that. I just wanted my kids to be educated. I didn't want them to be dumb. I didn't want my girls to think they had to

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depend on a man for nothing. They can use their brain, they got skills, you know, do something with your life. Don't be in the streets. Don't do what I did. I didn't lie to my kids about what I did because they're going to hear from somebody because everybody knows mother G. You know [chuckles] that's my nickname everybody know her, or Dee-Dee. I mean, I had little kids telling me, "Ain't you that lady that give out dollars?" We be on the block and I be like, "Yeah." "Well, can I get a dollar?" and know what he's doing seeing me always waiting and that ain't cool in somebody's neighborhood. I don't want my kids doing that. Thinking back to that, that shit is *crazy*.

I guess I expected more from my older daughter than my other kids. I'm a person who likes to read. I love education. All I watch is like education so it's always been like that with me and I guess I wanted my daughter to be just like me. I expect my kids to really focus on something in life that's going to benefit them, something that's their passion, you know, instead of, like my daughter's been at her job since she's 15. She's 26-years-old now. My other three kids, they done had about four different jobs, four or five different jobs, they're bouncing. They're not understanding, you know, they're not sitting down, really doing, just taking any old thing just to get some money in their pocket. If you start doing that, you're going to be doing that all your life. Focus on what you want in life, make it your passion and go for it.

The 21-year-old and 22-year-old still stay with their dad and they're working and stuff. I told the 21-year-old, "you gotta get out of my house, you go to work, you've got to get out my house [chuckles]." That's just how it was. You've got to go. I can't take care of no more grown people. They grown when they hit 18 years of age. No, my kids

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ain't still babies. They stay with me I'm finna start telling you what you need to prepare for. Now high school and all that fun is over. It's time to start real life now and if you ain't ready by 21 you better find something [chuckles], you cannot be here and I already told them that. They only thought it was funny but I be so serious. I be like, well, I be so serious and I'd be like, "No, serious, you've got to go [chuckles]," so they went to stay with their dad.

I always tell my kids, "What a good job you are doing, that I'm proud of you. You know, you did it." When I disapprove of what they do, I don't tell them nothing, I just don't talk to them. They get the silent treatment because I don't want to hurt their feelings so I don't say nothing, don't want nobody to be hurt. I don't know, I tell you, I'm just a caretaker.

Hopes for Children

I hope my kids get their life right with God that would be my foremost wish. I wish that they would keep family first because family is *so* important and teach your kids everything that there is to know about life and especially education. Educate your children on life itself. Let them know of their roots. I think that'll be important and let the study all cultures, not just your own because when you study different cultures you even learn more about yourself. Little do people know that, you know. Stay open-minded. I really want them to get educated on the things that I did in my life that they disapprove of. You know, get educated about why I did those things, instead of just going out and telling other people, know what a person went through, you know what I'm saying? You know, and don't think a person just wakes up one day and say they want to do these

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things. What happened to lead a person to do certain things – basically stuff like that, you know. Ask why. You know, just ask why. Why and what. You know, like why it happened? You know, I'm writing my own little book though too about things like that.

Parental Strengths and Challenges

Well one of my strengths, strong points is that my kids are around me and I am a honest person. You know, I'm straight, I mean, I'm not going to lie to you. I'm not going to sugarcoat nothing. If you really want to know, you want a real answer, I'm a very honest person. I don't mind saying what's on my mind but another strong point of mine is [sighs] I can just like read a person and just know their aura. You know, and I just I guess I take to people a lot and I need to stop doing that because to me that's like about boundaries and right now, I wonder do I really have any. I need to work on getting more boundaries; they're very loose [chuckles]. Worrying too, that's all, worry.

Relationship with Grandmother

My grandma raised me from the time I was born to the day she died when I was about 11-years-old. I would see my mom on birthdays and holidays, or special occasions. She [mom] wasn't there like that. All she ever bought me was gifts. She was never there. She was off doing her own thing with her own man. My mother never taught me a thing. Living with my grandmother was beautiful. Mind you now, you know, my grandma is basically the root of what I learned about keeping house and taking care of my kids it came from her. My grandma was a real lady. We went to bible study, everything. She didn't smoke. She wouldn't drink. She chewed tobacco but that's it. She did not wear pants, she couldn't. She talked country [chuckles]. I grew up going to church. I never got

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to wear pants because little girls wear dresses. I had to be in the house when the streetlights came on. My grandmother came to my school conferences. She came to teachers' meetings. She us to go to PTA meetings, she baked cookies for our class sometimes for Halloween and Christmas parties we had in school. My grandma died too young. She was like 54-years-old when she died. Little boys weren't allowed in the house on the weekends. We could sit out on the porch and talk and play you know. I couldn't spend the night nowhere until I got of age. I had to be like about nine or ten years old before I started sleeping over. I used to have this little girl from church come spend the night at our house like on Saturdays you know because Sunday everybody go to church on Sunday. I remember, my cousins used to spend the night when they lived up there all the time. The boys would mess with the girls until grandma made up a rule, if you're still going to come for the weekend, you're going to church on Sunday and you're getting up Saturday morning to wipe her walls so they [chuckles] stopped coming over [laughter]. They stopped coming over. They'd come up for the day or something, leave, and come back the next day. Yeah, people stopped spending the night that was funny when that started happening.

Relationship with Mother

You want to know the worst part of being raped by my uncle? The worst part for me is when I had told my mom, she was like, "you probably deserved it." I don't even know why she's so nice to my kids and treat my kids so nice now. She's trying to make it up to my kids what she did to me but it's too late now so I don't know, that's just who she is. I just let God take care of it. I pray about it, pray about it. God going to take care

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of her not being there for me, doing what she did to me. I talk to my mom. I respect and love my mom, you know.

I talk to my mom every now and then. I talk to my kids, because my mom try to tell my kids a lot of bad things about me. I don't understand that. When they was little though and she used to try to tell them when they was little like when I was doing my little drug stuff, I'd tell my mom, "should I bring the kids over for the weekend? I'd go out I the street and do what I'm doing and I know that their at my mom's house I might not come back for a couple days after the weekend and she be year. Oh yeah, she talking in front of them to somebody else and they be overhearing. "She be out there doing them drugs and getting high coming in and out some nasty man's car." You know my kids hear that. Kids act out on stuff like that too. She ain't changed. She's still the same. She loves to see me doing bad so she can run and tell or call everybody. You know, that's the type of mom she is. She's something else [chuckles]. Now my mom goes to church but she still gossips and all that other stuff. She's better than what she used to be, I guess.

Kid's Dads

I hooked up with my daughter's dad, George and this girl name Melba when I stopped going to school after my grand mother died. He told us that he supply me some money and that's why he chose me. He walked me to Division street, told me how to flag at the cars and stuff and then when that money started coming in and as we got, you know, this game going then we started seeing other little young runaway girls. So they was like, "Let me get a hotel, so everybody have some place to sleep in. Well only White girls work during the day and Black girls work at night, you know. George said because

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on Division street during the day, the Black girls are known for being on the street so they see us every day and they stop you quicker and plus, you're around with them too. So White girls, you've got White school kids coming and going to school and so they just look more normal. So we did it like that for awhile then we moved downtown. We started working down there Black and White because clubs were down there. So all the young girls just worked making money. They down there making a lot of money staying in motels. We were by cars and the list goes on. George was a neat freak so he was always saying that women are to keep their house clean, keep the laundry done, you know, keep themselves up, you know, and stuff like that.

My three youngest kids' dad, he's Italian. You know, and he had money and stuff like that. He basically took me off the streets and gave me stuff and was giving me the things I wanted but to me, it was still prostituting because that's how I met him. You know what I mean? That's how I met him but he was just, instead of me being on the streets, we were just together even though when we were in our relationship having kids, every time he wanted something, I wanted him to get me something. You know, so I learned that about myself too and I don't know why, I just, I don't know, I always wanted my kids to look nice, you know. I used to see his friends' kids come over and stuff like that. I mean these kids were well-dressed, you know what I'm saying?

Parenting Support

My oldest daughter went to my mom at the age of 12 till she was like nineteen. That's when I was getting into drugs and my other kids had went to their dad [the Italian man who solicited Mary]. The youngest three stayed with their dad because I wanted to

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do what I wanted to do, you know. Especially me and my fiancée. He [the three youngest kids' father] was like, "My kids ain't going nowhere." I said, "What you mean your kids ain't going nowhere?" He said, "You can go where you wanna, my kids ain't going nowhere." We lived in the suburbs and there was times I'd come over here for, you know, like a weekend, stay with my family or one of my friends and my mom, she'll keep my kids and stuff, and I go over there and just get high and then he [kids father] be knowing, you know, what I'm doing but he know I don't do it at home because I don't want to think about it when I really come over here, I just get all hyped up about it. So, yeah, he got tired of that shit and was just like "I'm taking my kids." I said, "We gonna go to court for it." With him having as much money as he had, he could have really just won the case but no, he just told me, "When you get it together just come home and the kids will be here." I came home after a year and a half later. My kid's father is about my age. I'm 42-years old and he's 46- years- old.

Supportive Kin

My mom and my daughter would borrow each other's money and stuff, and my mom would watch my daughters kids or her kids come to my mom's house and spend the weekend with her so they kind of have each other's back. I think my daughter feels like she needs to help her grandma because there ain't nobody else helping her and she's old now and stuff like that, you know, so yeah they got a relationship like that. My cousin Nancy she always opened her door up. When I needed a place to stay when I was homeless and I was out on the street, I could always go to her house no matter what, I don't care what time of the night it was, she always opened her door.

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I don't talk to no one in my family because all they do is run back and tell your business can't trust them so I don't get financial or emotional support from nobody except the state. I use to go to sober clubs and parties. You know, and to be honest with you, I had a few tricks there that turned out to be a friend of mine for over 20-years and we're still friends to this day and I call to just talk to them, that's how close I stayed in contact with them. You know, people like that, a couple of them.

Losses

When my grandma passed away that was the first loss in my life. My grandma died in 1986. She died of open-heart surgery and it just affected me because I didn't have nobody and I just lost sight of everything. It's like I was invisible, like didn't nobody want me. Mom didn't want me. My aunties and people discussed me after the funeral, "Well who's going to take Mary?" is something I heard them say. "Well somebody need to call her mom, you know, because I've got such and such kids," and this and that. There was always my auntie Nadine and them has always been there for me on a regular basis though. I don't know, it affected me a lot, like I mean I didn't go to school for like two years. You know I was just like getting by in school. I didn't have nobody to talk to. I was on the run. I started prostituting. Yep. When I stopped going to school, they, you know, they'd get in touch with the parents. My mom was like, "You've got to go to school," so I never went to school so my mom told them that I ran away from home.

Another loss I experienced was a turning point in my life. I got in a car accident and my friend got killed. We were drinking and driving and that right there, you know, that just took the cake for me. I went to prison for vehicular homicide for five years. I

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did a lot of soul searching and went to treatment and all that. Prior to that I stayed medicated [drinking and drugs] everyday and I didn't have nowhere to go and, I'm not kidding, I had no income, I'm telling the truth. I would go into a store, steal clothes, go into a fast food restaurant, washing up, cleaning up all the time, and changing hairdos. This went on about a year and a half. I didn't know what it meant to be separated from my kids at that time because I was medicated all the time.

Family Traditions

We have family traditions but its only the immediate family like my auntie, my mom's sister and her kids might just have their dinner and then us. While my other aunt and my other uncle and his family stay together. Yeah, ever since my grandma died, family time is just harder now. She kept everybody together. She'd start cooking like a day and a half before the holiday and she'd be up all day and all night cooking. She made pies, you know, she'd make Christmas dinner. She was making cakes. She was making muffins, everything from scratch. You know, she used to do this all by herself so I'm use to it being like that and she'd call the family but she had to get us all at the table in the house, you know. Pieces and pieces of different types of family show up but that was good enough. You know, everybody always come together. We never had big family reunions or nothing like that but when she died the family kind of fell apart. I started going with my mom, me and my kids because her and her sister fell out, her brothers don't get along or one don't live in the state but every now and then they get together. Maybe one of her sisters might drop by or my daughter's friends that know my mom, you know, now they will come by. It's just immediate family. I mean it's not a trouble but we

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don't really celebrate holidays anymore. They're not even fun anymore because it ain't like it used to be and I don't see my two youngest kids, they is at their dad's house or they're out of town with their dad's family because their families have big holidays, I mean, you know, the family's all there.

When my grandmother was alive we everybody used to get together and we'd go to the park and have a big picnic, you know, I mean and we had a big barbeque and all different parts of the family be there, my auntie and her fiancé. Her uncle Larry, his kids, you know. Yeah, it used to be [chuckles] like that. It ain't like that no more. I guess everybody's getting old now and then but you've got the grandkids to show off, you know because I show them mines. My babies are beautiful. Ooh we have some beautiful grandkids.

Education of Community About Sexual Mistreatment Prevention

Talk about your experience. I think that's the best education you can get from that type of situation. I'd just let them know. Let me start with my uncle. The best thing I would say is, "How could you do this to me? I'm just a little girl. I'm not ready for sex. I'm your niece. You're supposed to be my uncle. We don't do these things. It's not right. You hurt me. That hurts."

Case Study #10 – Aretha

Aretha is a 28-year-old mother of three children. Her daughters, 13 and 6 years of age were living with her at the shelter at the time of the interview. She also has a 10-year-old son who lives with his father. Aretha relocated to another state after suffering years of intimate partner violence (IPV) with her children's fathers.

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Intimate Partner Violence

I was in the abusive relationships for 9 years and the first 2 -3 years it was okay and then afterward it became abusive but I would rather go through being called out my name than stay with someone who hits me and threatens my kids. We had a four-bedroom apartment. I had moved out of a relationship and into a home with him. He felt that I should send my oldest daughter to be with her dad. I said, “no, I’m not sending my child nowhere”. If I send her to Atlanta she going to be even worse off. She is going to stay right [laughs] here with me. He kept wanting to control my kids so we fought about it and when he threw that garbage on that off-white carpet, I lost it. At that point, I thought he was going to kill me, he did it in front of the kids so I had to push the kids away [laughs]. I lifted my kids through the window so they could get out of the house and I eventually got out and went to a shelter. It took a lot of energy. Things were quite messy. I haven’t been stable since that household. I had all my personal belongings stolen but I’m coming to a crossroads with myself and I’m ready to grow. Some days I get some type of repercussion from doing what I did, or [laughs] maybe God is preparing me for something. You gotta crawl before you can walk. I stay in contact with him because he’s my youngest daughter’s father but he’ll never live with me again or anything. He offered to help me but I said no. I’m starting to get established with my kids and we get together and travel beyond this state and Georgia. I want my children to be happy.

During the relationship with the abusive dad of my six-year-old, sex was like more of a chore than sharing of an experience; not in the beginning of the relationship but when I moved in with him. [Laughs] because he’s just a negative person [laughs]; I

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never really talked to anyone about it. I have some apprehension because it feels a little embarrassing. I'm laughing but I'm not laughing because it's funny. The most difficult aspect is moving on and trying to establish another relationship. It's made me worse, bitterness, sex drive off; I don't enjoy it anymore, it's disgusting.

It hasn't changed my relationship with my children or how I parent them; it actually made me better in how I discipline them because I try not to whoop them anymore but talk instead.

Relationship with Children

I don't know how I would describe my relationship with my kids [laughter]. Pretty good. I'm hard on them [looked sheepishly] about their behavior mostly [laughs]. My 13-year-old is a teenager. She's into body piercings, facial piercings; the in-crowd. I was a young mom with childish ways and that influenced how I relate to my kids. We can sit and play with each other until they cross [laughs] the line. Crossing the line is like [laughs] they will say something like "your hair is nappy," then they'll go, "you ugly, you fat," [laughs] or something like that. My youngest [laughs] she's a firecracker; I call her that because she has a bad temper. She says what's on her mind without thinking. I'll try to verbally chastise her but it's really only her father that can control her. He's 300 pounds and looks intimidating so all he's got to do is raise his voice and he'll give her a scare. My 13-year-old is sneaky. She does a lot of stuff behind the back. I catch her up and I talk to her. I started at an early age. I had her at 15-years-old.

I found out she was sexually active when I did the laundry and noticed her underwear weren't looking right. I kept threatening her, like "Tell me what's going on." I

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took her to the healthcare clinic at the shelter and they did a urine test on her and she had Chlamydia. She told me she became sexually active when she was 12-years-old on a trip to Atlanta with family.

When I approve of their behavior I sit down and talk to them about the good deeds they've done. I'm in an online school so we [children] do our work together. I show them that they are loved and cared for; there's no state involvement in their lives. When I separate from my kids sometimes I feel a relief; I use to cry around my children so it's a relief at first then after a day or two I start missing them. Yes. I got a lot of dysfunction, oh! [laughs], in my head sometimes.

Hopes for Children

I want my kids to be successful, healthy, happy, stable and take care of themselves, for me and God to still be there for them. They like materialistic things so I think they'd want to be dancers, have a big house, cars, and my youngest want to be a White girl. Yeah, I don't know what's her deal. She's talking about long silky hair the last four months [laughs]. She's the only Black girl in her class. Yeah [laughs]; I hope that my kids learn they are all they have. I want to instill in them to watch out for self, nothing is given without a price, be stable and take care of business even though it's like kind of continuing of a family trait [laugh].

Education

I'm studying healthcare administration at the University of Phoenix online so I study with both of my children. I'm trying to apply what I'm learning to life and my children.

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Health

I was diagnosed with high blood pressure. I gained weight when my daughter was 2-years-old and became manic depressive [laughs] and I'm on medication for anxiety attacks. I was eating a lot and now I'm trying to change what I eat now, but the urges come out.

Losses

I lost my mom when I was 16-years-old. I knew my father but he was on drugs. I left my mom's family when I was 18 years of age. My cousin died of a brain injury and they shipped her body back to Atlanta for the funeral.

Relatives

My mom has five brothers and five sisters. My aunts have like 10 kids apiece [laughs]. I took care of their children and paid her \$400.00 to stay in a room in their house. Sometimes they would give me an outfit or tow from the Family Dollar, that's about it. I cleaned up their house and took care of their kids. I didn't get emotional support from them. I didn't have any other adults that I was close too. I miss my grandmother because my guardian didn't reinstate me in school after I had my baby at 15-years-old. I did get my G.E.D when I was 15 years of age but they wouldn't let me go back to the regular school.

I moved in with my uncle and paid \$150 less in rent but the verbal abuse continued and the emotional abuse. I dealt with it by going in my room and crying, talking to my friends, or on my own. It didn't feel right to go through that process, you know.

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Family Assistance

How does my family respond when someone needs help? It's not going to happen. Depending on who it is, my aunts and their kids will get from different resources – selling drugs, selling their bodies. I'm not in their immediate family so I have to look elsewhere. I'm the black sheep of the family and if you aren't in the immediate family you don't get anything from them. Their obligation is to their own children not others. After I had my baby, me and my mom and baby lived together we were clearly on a fixed income. My mother's brothers and sisters knew she was sick but they didn't help because they weren't going to get any money for it.

Support Network

I have two best friends from childhood. One is ghetto fabulous but the other one is not so that's why me and Twana kinda click better, but that's the way it is. I still love her, that's my sister. When it comes to support in parenting my kids, its me, myself, and I. I raise my kids so they aren't lacking in morals like other children. I'm keeping my faith.

Relocation

I moved here in 2004 and back to Atlanta in 2005 but came back because I wanted to get away from my family. I have a male cousin here who is a few years older and I stayed with him for awhile but he was trying to make me check in with him. I mean, I moved with another cousin [laughs] and "I don't need you to tell me I need to report to you everything I'm doing and with who" [laughs]. I mean, I can see if he could sit me down and give me some suggestion, but otherwise "you better go on and get outta my face." I got my own place, got a job within three weeks of being up here. I went in

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my savings and got him a greyhound ticket. I got tired of him tell me this, that, and the other. I was tired of struggling in Atlanta with no help. My resume was sporadic because of inadequate childcare. I came here to give myself and my children a better chance [laughs].

Strengths and Challenges

I think I'm patience, not hot tempered. I'm not going to go off the handle; people can say stuff about me [laughs]. I learn on my own. I don't want to be boastful but that's my technique of leaning [laughs]. I'm there for my children through thick and thin. They are not going hungry. I care for my kids and they are taken care of. I think [laughs] that a limitation is that I'm too nice. I put personal priorities on the back burner; and don't receive from others. Passiveness is my down fall. I'm coming to grips with this to respectfully tell someone they are out of line. I think I'm more understanding of my children and the emotional trauma from moving a lot and other things. A lot of people say I teach my children good manners but we can play too much. Yep.

Relationship with Caregivers

During my childhood, I watched my mother get beat up by my dad. My mother died of lupus. It was a two, three, four-year process. She was vegetative. Before she got sick life was good. My mom witnessed a murder and had a stroke when I was 12-years-old. My mom walked with a stroke. She had three strokes total. My dad was using crack and would come to the house for money. He would beat my mom for her money. She kept getting sicker and sicker [laughs], that's all. He would scare her when he came in the house and that's what cause her to have another stroke. It was only me to care for my

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mother but we had a fairly decent life before the strokes. The five words I would use to describe my mother are [laughs] loving, short-term, understanding, trusting, and unconditional. I'm closer to my mom. She was always there and I never questioned her integrity. The five words I would use to describe my father are abusive, nothing, selfish, manipulative, and liar. My grandmother [maternal] died when I was 10 years of age, she was funny. I didn't know my grandfather but he got killed [laughs], shortly after my mom after messing with another's man's woman.

When I was upset as a child, I would talk to mom. I would tell her how I felt and she would tell me it would be alright [laughs]. She would tell me what to do to deal with stuff. When my mom had to go to the nursing home after the door of the apartment was broken into then my aunts and uncles decided that she needed to stay in the nursing home. I was going through a lot [laughs]. I had to move to the south side with my aunt and I would beg people to give me money so I could go see my mom but they would say no. I didn't get a chance to see my mamma but once on mother's day [laughs] and then her funeral on October 19, 2000. I didn't see my father after we left the house.

Parental Influences

[Laughs] I don't know what influenced the way I parent my children. Knowing that I was not loved by my aunties stopped me from moving on in with family and relationships; being stressed with caring for my mom. Some of these things I saw in the relationship with my daughter's father. I'm not sure what influenced my parenting behaviors. I don't know. I wanted to know I had some type of support system. I had two friends who were willing to extend gratitude but only so much.

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Parental Strengths and Limits

What gives me strength as parent is just the willingness to overcome; the want and need for better opportunities; a better life; oh constant thing I'm going through now [laughs] really. Cutting all ties with negative people in my life. Extreme homelessness for almost a year, only temporary work; and without a permanent job I can't get a place [laughs].

Lessons from Childhood

[Laughs] I can't seek from anyone else what I'm not willing to give myself; reading, hearing from other people; coming to terms with it. Hard to find love for self.

What Helping Professionals Should Know

Get the full background on how and why a person parents the way they do. Avoid child protection in your life, check the emotional background of the parent's state of mind.

What Parents Should Know about Parenting

[Laughs] Watch your children, pay attention to what they do; instill morals in your children, teach them to respect their elders, no fornication on buses. Now that's basically the parent's job.

What Community Should Know About Sexual Mistreatment

Get the people who have experienced it to talk about it. People take heed to true stories better than statistics so they can go and prevent their children from going through it.

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How to Stop Harm to Women and Children

Be willing to admit it; no one is perfect; get professional help; let neighborhoods know that these people are moving in.

Case Study #11 – Henrietta

Henrietta, a 34- year old mother of three children, two girls and one boy, fifteen, one, and three respectively, spent a decade in prison for selling drugs. During her imprisonment, her grandmother cared for her children. Her mother was incarcerated at the same time. She was raped, at age seven, by a man known to her family. A person known to the family also sexually abused her daughter when she was seven years old, while Henrietta was incarcerated.

Experience of Sexual Mistreatment

Well, I was raped when I was seven. I had told my mom but she didn't believe it, so I had told my grandma and my grandma took me to the hospital. The person who did it was an adult about 30-years-old and I knew him. The police got him and put him in jail.

Effects of Sexual Mistreatment

I think I started getting more exploited by boys as I was getting older so the rape had a bad influence and I never dealt with it.

Intergenerational Sexual Mistreatment

When I was locked up my oldest daughter was molested. She was about 7-years-old. Now since I got her back, I just don't let her go nowhere, I just be close to her and I don't know, I guess I'm afraid right now [laughs] for her. Her dad's aunt took her to the hospital and stuff and they told her not to testify against the person who did it so the

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police let him go. The first time I asked my daughter about it, all she be doing is crying and stuff but she doesn't talk about it now.

Relationship with Children

I would describe my relationship with my kids as adorable [laughs]. No I don't want to expand on it. What influences how I relate to my kids is being a good parent and showing them right from wrong. I guess looking back on my past of how I was raised is the type of thing that influenced me I'd say.

Expectations of Children

I just expect them to grow up and not follow my footsteps, be better than what I am. I let them know I approve of their behavior by giving them a high-five or tell them, "all right, good." I approve of the truth and not taking stuff. Ask for it. Not just lying to anybody. I tell them how much I love 'em. I may not be there, but I am when I can for them. I take away the T.V. and make them read a book or tell them to "lay down, go to sleep" or something when I disapprove of what they are doing. When they wake up, we going to try to forget what happened [laughs].

Hopes for Children

I want my kids to grow up and go to college, be responsible and take care of mom [laughs]. I want them to always have a positive attitude and mind frame, not saying what they can't do when they know they can do it and staying out of trouble and doing what they gotta do to have a good life. I miss my kids when I'm separated from them and I'm ready for them to come back.

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Parental Pride and Challenges

I'm most proud of being a mom and the most challenging part is doing it all by myself with no father in the home. I think other people would describe me as a hard working and loving mother, doing it by myself. My kids are a strength for me and God too.

Relationship to Caregivers

I feel the closest to my grandmother but she died when I was in prison. I would describe her as caring, loving, helpful, dependent, an angel. I feel close to my grandmother because she raised me. She was there for me. She was like my mama and dad. It was hard not being there to help her raise my daughter when I was in prison. My grandmother gives me strength, God being in her. My grandfather died when I was fourteen. I feel like my parents just had me and just gave little bits of themselves. I couldn't get along with my mama or my dad because they were on drugs so they gave me to my grandmother. I also feel close to my youngest sister and my cousin and my kids of course [laughs]. With my sister it's just sister love, that's it [laughs] and the same with my cousin, cousin love. He's my first cousin, so we're tight. I count on my brother, he's older. He's forty-six.

Support Network

I count on my older brother for money and support, but nobody helps me raise my kids except my grandma when I was in prison. I ask different agencies for help too.

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Family Values

What I'll say is I was taught, "Take it to the Lord," because if I got it, I'll give it, but if I don't, I mean, only God can handle situations like that.

Family Traditions

We don't celebrate no family traditions.

Relocation

I had got out of prison and I just wanted to start a new life so I moved here. No I don't visit my family back home.

What Parents Should Know About Parenting

I mean, being a parent is hard, but you have to do it. You just got to do it. I mean, just lead the kids, no matter what they going through, just be there for your kids, let them keep seeing you be there for them.

How to Stop Harm to Women and Children

They [offenders] will do it [sexually harm others] if they want.

Case Study #12 – Josephine

Josephine lives with Sojourner, her partner of five years. They were legally married two years prior and care for their four children together. Josephine continuously parented her second child but let her family raise her first-born daughter due to her struggles with drug addiction. Josephine is in treatment addressing challenges related to her experiences with chemical misuse and sexual abuse. Josephine was sexually molested by her uncle and two cousins as a teenager.

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Experience of Sexual Mistreatment

When I was sexually abused, I didn't think it was abuse because I was kind of a little older. I was like 15 or 16 and I kind of knew what I was doing but, you know, I was sleeping with two of my cousins, and then one of my uncles but he's not blood related; he's my aunt's husband. So, we're coming here [agency in which she receives services] and doing a group that they have against the sexual abuse of women and that's how I became to realize that I was being victimized. You know, that just wasn't okay. I can remember the first time. We were sitting on the couch in the living room and wasn't nobody home but us [Josephine and her cousin] and I always played with his ears, you know and he said to me, "Something's going to happen if you keep doing that," and, you know, I wasn't thinking nothing of it and then he started to touch me and all that stuff. I guess my little hormones got excited and we had sex and this carried on for months. He was a lot older than me. Then I had another cousin who was much older than me too by about 10 years, at this time I was using drugs and then the same thing with my uncle; I was using drugs and he, one night propositioned me, yeah, they were father and son and were both aware of what the other was doing. I don't know if anyone else knew about it, I'm pretty sure they probably did though. With my uncle it went on about a month and with my cousin, it happened twice.

Disclosure Process and Intergenerational Sexual Abuse

It stopped when I moved, but I never told anyone. I told my sister not too long ago, maybe about two years ago but she didn't want to know who it was, you know and she explained to me that, growing up that it happened to her too from some of our family

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members. I don't know, it was just something we talked about. One day we was on the phone and I brought it up.

Effects of Sexual Mistreatment

I still believe that I was the bad person in this and responsible for what happened because I was older, I guess and I knew that I could have said no. I had a choice and I chose it but it made my parenting a little difficult. I was very overprotective with my son. I didn't really like to leave him with people, because I didn't know what they would do to him. He stayed with people like friends, like my God-sister. I was even a little paranoid around my, at that time, when my son was young, my significant other. I don't know. You know, even though I knew that, he would do nothing to my son, you know, I was just still paranoid You know.

Coping and Meaning Making

I think that if I had said no they'd a took it anyway. They'd a kept going, yeah. They wouldn't have stopped. I go to therapy now. I've talked about it in therapy. I think the hardest part of surviving the abuse was holding it in and not sharing the shame and guilt. I think it played a part in my addiction. Well being out on the street, I say, and prostitution, you know, was a part of my addiction too but going through some of those classes that was offered at [agency] that I've done before, you know, it taught me to start believing in myself and loving myself more and looking at myself differently, that I am worthwhile, and I do deserve to be okay, that I am worth more than 20 dollars, you know. Even though my addiction has went up and down, I haven't had to turn a date in about

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three years, four years, I haven't prostituted myself. I've been sexually abused but I haven't abused no one sexually.

I hear people in treatment and stuff share, you know, that they was molested as a kid, you know, by family members when they were younger and like if, you know, the lights and stuff goes out they scared because that's when people came in to touch them and hurt them that way and I feel so much empathy and sympathy for those people. I feel really bad for young kids that it happen to, very, very, you know, sad and I be wanting the perpetrators to go to jail or somebody to hurt them but when it comes to me, I don't feel that way. I think it's just because I were older when it happened but I didn't want to sleep with my cousin. I didn't want to give my uncle oral sex.

Relationship with Children

I have two children, a boy almost 19-years of age and a 12-year-old girl. I'm 40-years-old. I have two-step kids too one is 22 and the other is 18 also, both are females. I have a pretty good relationship with my kids. We're pretty open. We have a firm relationship. With my son, I can discuss just about anything, you know, his feelings, sexual preference, all kinds of things. My daughter is in Texas with family. I talk to her from time to time but not very often but my other two kids, my relationship with them is pretty open too. I really only raised my son because my girl was raised by my family due to my drug use.

Expectations of Children

I just expected my son to be respectful. I taught him how to clean up behind himself, to straighten his room, things like that, you know, take baths, keep his personal

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hygiene and appearance up. You know, be up in time for school. He was kind of pretty responsible as a young child, you know. When I approved of his behavior I would just tell him, "You did very good." I didn't reward him for good things, you know, or bad things. When I could afford it we'll go out and do something or, if not, I just tell him, you know, "Thanks for picking up, and you know, thanks for cleaning up. That helped me out a lot." If I disapproved of things that he did, I would tell him, "I'm not okay with that, you know better, we've been through this." Yeah. I approved of him hanging out with his friends, playing games with them. I approved of him telling me what was going on in his life, talking to me about anything. I disapproved of him not being respectful and just lazy [chuckles] because sometimes he could get kind of lazy, and don't do nothing. Not listening and doing what I ask him to do is disrespectful.

Hopes for Children

I want my son to be in any work field that he absolutely loved, something he loves to do and to be a responsible parent. He's got a child on the way. This is my first grandbaby. I support him in whatever he likes to do. I want him to have a good relationship with his kids. I would say a good father, and a good man to his kids, that's all. I wish he got how valuable family is, he's just like, very independent. If he needs help, he won't call and say he needs like if we have extra money and we want to do something with him, I'll call and say, "Look, I want you to come and pick up this money and I've got this for you." He'll say, "Well, no mom, if you need the money, you keep it. You know. I don't need it. I'll be okay." You know, I told my husband, I wish our other

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two was like that [chuckles]. Please, my other two be like, “Come on, mom, we need, mom, we want, mom, can we have?” but they’re great kids too.

Parental Pride and Challenges

I’m most proud of just having a relationship with my kids and trying to teach them good morals and values. I think some of the challenges are due to my addiction. I was addicted to chemicals. Crack cocaine was my drug of choice and those were some challenges I faced in raising my kids.

Parental Influences

I guess I kind of parent the way my mom used to parent us. I really didn’t play a role in parenting my 12-year-old daughter due to my usage. I had her ‘til she was up ‘till 11-months and then she went home to Texas with my family and my family’s been raising her ever since. With my son, my mother and my experiences with sexual abuse influenced me.

Close Relationships and Addiction

I feel closest to my mom and sister. I got one brother but [chuckles], you know, we’re two of a kind [laughter]. I’m the baby. I don’t know what makes them close, they were just always there. They were always there, mentally, emotionally, all that. See, I was always able to explain however I wanted to, the way I was feeling even if I was angry, upset, mad, whatever it was, you know, I was able to say those things. There wasn’t nothing that pretty much we couldn’t talk about, you know. It wasn’t like, what’s done in this house stays in this house. No, if it bothered me, if something went wrong, I told except when I started to, you know, when I was sexually abused. I didn’t think it was

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abuse because I was kind of a little older. I would use the same words to describe my relationship with my mom and my sister; loving, caring, supporting, encouraging, and firm [chuckles]. When I was addicted and my drug habit took full effect, you know, my sister, it really hurt her. You know, and sometimes she used to say to me, if she's hurting or if I'm in treatment, that I robbed her of having a sister. You know, she hope I get it together because I took her sister away. Yeah. You know, and she used to wonder a lot, was there anything that she may have done to cause me and my brother too, to be addicted to chemicals and it was nothing like I tell her, "Don't ever blame yourself for nothing like that. You've always been, you know, the best sister, the best mom. You know, whatever I needed, you did exactly what you had to do. It was just that I made some decisions and choices in my life and, you know, it had nothing to do with you." Yeah.

My brother's addicted to drugs. Yeah, my sister's not at all, actually. She's the responsible one, the successful one, you know. Yeah. Yep, me and my brother struggled with chemicals. I'm still in recovery right now, I've used years [chuckles], let's see, ah, 20, 18, 20, maybe 21 years because my son will be 19. Yeah, I used two years before he was born. I had him at 21. Yeah I was able to continue to care for him, it wasn't the best of care, I could have did a whole lot better, but yeah.

Besides my mom and sister I've got a lot of cousins, and aunts, and uncles that I feel close to. I think we had a really pretty close family. I've got lots of cousins I used to spend time with in summers.

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Childhood

I think I had a great childhood. It was pretty wonderful. I didn't have any bad, traumatic things happen until my mother passed away, you know, just the death, but I think growing up in the low income housing, though, ah, my mom gave us everything we needed. We had everything we needed. When I got upset, as a child I would just be angry. Sometimes I'd fight, yell and scream. I had wonderful friends. I fought a lot when I was a kid, when I got like in, mmm, fifth grade, sixth grade. So it taught me to be kind of, I want to say defensive or um, that's the word I would use, is defensive. I fought about people picking on me or saying things to me, you know, thinking they could boss me because I was smaller, so yeah. Overall though, I had a pretty good childhood, you know, even despite the fact that my mom drank, you know, The only bad memory I may have of my mom is, ah, when I, we had a bible study thing, every summer we would have it at the church. In our parking lot is a church. It was in our parking lot and this particular day was my graduation day and she was too intoxicated to comb my hair so my brother had to do it for me. I mean it was, it was cute. I was, you know. It wasn't my mom. My mom didn't do it pretty-pretty. I mean, you know, he did what he could as being a boy and not, you know, but that's the only bad experience I've had with my mom, not, you know, being there for me. It was a bible study because, yeah, me and my God-sister and them used to go every summer. I want to say I was bout 10-years-old. You know, we still had that picture but my sister's basement got flooded, so she lost a lot of all our pictures, pictures of my mom and yeah, so a lot of memories we don't have to see anymore but we've got them in our mind, you know.

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Family Traditions

We celebrated all the holidays, had Sunday dinners together, we cooked, I went out trick or treatin' when I was a kid. We celebrated them all. Valentine's day we really didn't do but we celebrated my brother's birthday on Valentine's Day. Pretty much every holiday we would go out, like the ones in the summer, we'll go out and we'll barbeque. You know. Thanksgiving, we cooked at home. We had a good time. We had great family things and still do today with my family here.

Family Values and Beliefs

When I was a kid, growing up, I used to fight my brother a lot. I was taught that if someone doesn't hit me, then to walk away but if someone hits me, then to fight back. I was also taught growing up that I practice now is never go to bed angry and mad. My mom taught us that, you know which was kind of hard on my brother because I found my mother dead at the age of twelve and the night before that my brother and my mom had a disagreement and he woke up and went straight to school and he never got a chance to tell her that he was sorry. You know.

I keep in touch with my family but my son is totally the opposite. I don't know where he got it from because I didn't raise him like that, you know. He loves his auntie and he refuses to just call people [chuckles], you know. I said, "Where did you get this from? I don't understand it. I've never raised you like this." I still try to keep in touch with my family members. You know, and I call home and I talk to my sister and she'll tell me what's going on with certain people. My son is so different from what I raised

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him as, you know, to keep in touch with his family. He said, "I don't know, mom, I just don't call a lot of people."

Loss and Separation

Yeah, she [mom] was 49 when she passed away. Hardening of the arteries; she was an alcoholic. I didn't know what alcoholic and all that stuff was back then. Yeah, alcoholics and hardening of the arteries; it's how my sister raised us, from that.

My God-sister is the reason I'm up here. Ah, I say we had twins because, see, I lost two important peoples in my life at the age of 12. My God-sister had a twin sister, which we hung out together every single day. We're only five months apart. We grew up as babies, you know, in the same playpen, crib, all that stuff. My twin died in January of '86 and my mom died in March of '86. We all use to do everything together. We had great times. We'd, you know, take our jump ropes to school, play jacks, you know, Chinese rope, we did all of it. Yeah.

The first time I was separated from my mom was when she died and I moved around a lot when I was 21 off and on from my sister when my addiction was really, you know, taking off. The other separations that stands out for me is from my kids; I felt worthless and hopeless about that.

Family Assistance

My family helps the best way they can. I can say, when my addiction was really bad, you know, they lent support and words of encouragement. My sister's always been there for me through everything. My family raised my daughter. They helped a lot. If you had it, we helped. If you didn't have it, then we'll try to figure out how to get it.

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Proximity of Family

I was born and raised in Texas and came here because my God-sister was coming up here. I stay in touch with my family in Texas. I talk to my sister and I call my cousins from time to time. I haven't been home in about three years. I'm planning to go some time this year. My sister hasn't been up here, yeah, because I was not really stable. I was in a lot of facilities for treatment and things like that. My son lives in a suburb here right now with a friend of his. He'll be over next weekend. I get to see him a lot. He rode down. He's very responsible. You know, he goes to school, everything. He's going to college, you know. So, I did fairly well.

Strengths and Limitations

The things that give me strength I guess are the people that's been through what I've been through or had what happened to them, when they share their experience, and their hopes, it gives me encouragement. Listening to other survivors. I don't think nothing limits me from doing anything. I'm back into my sobriety freshly for almost three months. The longest I've been sober is eleven months back in 1998 or 1999. I think my addiction was a big barrier, you know. It started when I was 19, that's when I was sleeping with my cousin.

What Helping Professionals Should Know

I use to think timeout was just a bunch of crock. I used to be a spanker. I used to spank my kids, but I learned now that taking away privileges helps instead of screaming and hollering, and yelling all the time, take away privileges; that's what was one of the most biggest helpful things to me from parenting classes.

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How to Stop Harm to Women and Children

I don't know how you stop sexual abuse. I think if someone's making you feel uncomfortable, or touching you, or doing something to you that 's uncomfortable or feels wrong to you, is to go and share that with somebody and not, ah continue to just hold it in.

Case Study #13 – Sojourner

Sojourner is a house supervisor in a transitional housing program serving the needs of women and children. Her father sexually and physically abused Sojourner for six or seven years beginning at age nine. Sojourner's sister cared for her children until they were in their teens when they were returned to Sojourner after obtaining some sobriety after several years of drug abuse that started when she was nine and consuming alcohol.

I have two children. Drienne is 22-years-old and Elsa is 18-years old; I'm 38-years old. I had 19 brothers and sisters but a few died; me and my twin brother was the last two. I'm like the second from the last one and my twin brother was the last one. I'm from the south but I came here after several of my sisters had already moved here.

Intergenerational Sexual Mistreatment

It [childhood] was very stressful, I was depressed, scared, alone, frightened. It was not a good childhood memory. I still have bad dreams sometimes. I got molested at the age of nine up until I was what, 15 or 16 years old and I got beat daily by my dad. I blamed my family for a long time. I blamed them because when I was telling them what

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was going on, they didn't want to believe me because I was drinking every day and doing stuff and it wouldn't happen 'til at night, until everybody was sleeping, in the dark.

That's why I don't sleep in the dark and nobody believed me and they just like, you know, that's something that you just don't talk about it. It was very frightening. I didn't have a good childhood. It was a very embarrassing childhood but I made it through.

I was molested by my dad and I left home and try to stay with a friend but he would call the police and they would bring me back home and I'd have to go through it all again and at the age of 17 I left and I never did come back because I was 17 and there really wasn't nothing the police could do at the age of 17 because I was almost 18 years old. I think my sister's didn't believe me because they were scared because he was a violent drunk and he'd always want to pull guns, always want to fight and, you know, I think because they were scared or something. My older sister Gina, she basically tried to protect me, because she knew it happened to her but it's like she wasn't much older than me. She's a little older than me, she's 40-something now, I think. She was like trying to protect me but then she was out drinking a lot, and going out and stuff so it really would happen when my sisters would go to night school because they had to watch my mom and then they had to watch us, and they would go to school at night so that's when stuff happened. I was left alone.

He [dad] said if I tell anybody he was going to kill me or something, you know. I mean, I thought one day he was. I mean, I had to go to school with my eye swollen and all these different types of stuff, and scared and you know, it was, very tragic.

Traumatized mostly. I didn't feel nobody even cared what happened to me and it led me

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to drinking more, doing more drugs to cover up the pain and the hurt and then I had this one friend. We've been friends since we used to go run away together. I stayed at her mom's house and her mom was like, "I know what you're going through," and she said, if he come near, she was like," No, she's not going nowhere, she's staying here," and you know, and then after awhile he just left it alone.

Coping Strategies

I tried to stay away from home and stayed drunk where I could keep people from asking me about my past because when people are drinking they're not going to really talk about your past. You keep buying them drinks and, you know, just keeping them drunk. I dropped out of school when I was 15 years old because I had a baby and then I went back to school, and I dropped out of school again, well, I didn't drop out again at 19, I just went to school pregnant but I talked about it to a teacher and she was like one of them neighborhood lady, but she was my school teacher. She got the welfare involved and all this different stuff. They went to doing investigations and stuff like that. He [dad] never did serve time because he was mostly like, the police and people were afraid of him. They didn't testify against him. It was just my word against his and all that stuff so they didn't do nothing but one of my older friends, he was like a real old man. I used to go to his house and drink and hang out. He was like, "Well, the police didn't get him but God going to make him pay for it." So, he later on, before he died, he kept drinking six months before he died and then he got, well like two years before he died he quit drinking, then he caught lung cancer. He got really bad, sick. It got where he couldn't talk. He couldn't even move. His body couldn't do nothing. My family got mad at me

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because I didn't really care. They called me to come go see him and I didn't really care if I went to see him or not and I didn't. I didn't go and then he died and I went to the funeral but I just went, I didn't really care if I was there or not because I was going through the emotional pain that that same man that told me that God would take care of him, he was at the funeral. He said, "I told you God would take care of that. You see, God like that." You know, you don't believe that old people telling you stuff that you have to really wait and believe in. He died on my daughter's birthday in December. He died before my mom.

Impact of Sexual Mistreatment on Parenting

I think the molestation effected my parenting. I think it got me more protective because when I got them [children] back I really didn't want them out of my sight. I didn't want them outside. I always wanted them in the house with the door locked. I would go into a panic mode if they get out of the house or if they're gone too long, or if, I mean, maybe they were at school. You know, I'd be sitting there waiting for them. They a minute late, I'm calling the police, panicking, you know, thinking something done happened to them, somebody done raped them, beat them. You know, it was pretty messed up for awhile. I had to learn to trust. I still don't let her [oldest daughter] go nowhere but she go, right there, to that house, right there but I don't really let her be all outside because I'm scared for her safety. Well, they say deaf people, they stronger but, I mean, she can't hear and she be wanting to walk to the store, do all that other stuff and we don't let her do that. We'll take her where she got to go. Then she'll holler, "Well, I'm going," but you still can't go nowhere. You know, I just don't want her to get hurt

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because people do crazy things out here. That was the only difficult part [of the sexual mistreatment], and me thinking that, if I tell this person, this person is going to tell that person, and you know, but it wasn't like that, it was just my assumption.

I think if I hadn't of talked about it or didn't, I mean, let it out, I probably would have been going crazy, or in a psyche ward, or something because it was driving me crazy and the dreams was getting worse and worse. I had to get a hold on my anger. I was real angry and mad at the world and I was mad at my family for a long time because I felt that there was something ya'll could have done but you didn't because you didn't want to talk about it, or you were scared, or, I never did know why they didn't do nothing. they just, well, my assumption.

Relationship with Children

When I first got my kids back it was really stressful. It was hard because I'd been on drugs for a long time and I didn't raise them. It was like, "You can't tell me what to do. You wasn't there for me." There was a lot of talking back and, you know, they thought they can just do anything because I was on drugs, and had just got them back. "You ain't my momma. You don't tell me what to do." Yeah, it was stressful at first but I got a case manager, and then we went to family therapy and everything's got pretty good. We graduated from family therapy and we got along good.

My sister down south had my oldest well since she came home from the hospital and well, actually, I had both of them since she came home from the hospital but my sister took care of them mostly and I got them back when they were 15 and 19 years of age. I use to get them during the summer starting five years ago. My youngest, she was

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staying with me but she went back down South. She had a weed problem. She didn't want to stop smoking weed. She didn't want to go by the rules of the agency where I'm working my program so she went back to stay with my sister. I'm trying to get Drienne back into vocational rehab at the vocational center so she can get a job. I mean, she draws social security for her disability but she can work part-time so she's workin at doing that. Drienne cannot hear or talk.

Parental Pride

What I'm most proud of as a parent is that I got them back and we're getting along and I don't have to try to buy them, you know, and I always wanted them back but the drug was more important than they were at the time.

Expectations of Children

If I approve of my children's behavior, I just won't say nothing to them. I just let it go but if they did something that I don't like I'll tell them, "Look, you know, we don't do that." I disapprove of drugs in the house, I mean since I've been sober, bringing all types of people in the house and not wanting to get up and clean up, not wanting to do nothing, don't want to go to school. You know, my 18-year old, she quit school when she got back with me, she wouldn't go back to school and you know, I tried to tell her, "you know, you need your education. When you try to go to college, or anything, you ain't going to be able to go to college." So, and she refused to go back to school but now I think she's trying to get her GED or something.

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Parental Strengths and Challenges

Well, when I first got them back I was on like, about \$203 in food stamps and \$203 in cash so it was hard to, you know, feed them and stuff 'til I got the assistance going and all that stuff but I maintained. It was a struggle but I went to food banks, I went to case managing, I mean I would do what I had to do and waiting on a two-bedroom was really very stressful with two teenagers but I maintained though. I guess I'm very determined. I got strength from God and going to my meetings, talking to my case manager, taking my medicine for depression but mostly praying and giving everything, turning everything over to God though. I take Welbutrin and I take Seroquel for mood swings. I've been on medication since 1995.

I mean, I really care a lot about kids and I just want them to be, you know, happy. I want to sit down and talk to them, you know, tell them about drugs and the alcohol and what it can do to your life and make sure they're on the right path to going to do what they've got to do. Most kids these days is really something. Yeah, all these teenagers, they have them babies back to back and then they don't know what they're going to do with them. If you ain't raising the first one, why would you keep having them?

Hopes For Children

I wish my youngest daughter would get her GED and get her a good job, or either go to college and I wish that Dianne could get some kind of study or something for her to talk. I always wanted her to talk. That was my wish. She knows sign language. She graduated from Tumhold Senior High School. You know, though, I want them to grow up and don't let nobody run over them and be successful, live on their own and don't

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depend on nobody to take care of them and stuff. My baby, she's a little momma's baby.

All she do is moan and whine all day long. She's down south. She always whine about something.

I think my children learned right from wrong. They learned that they can talk to us about anything. They don't have to be afraid. They know we want the best for them and we try to tell them what's right instead of what's wrong, and want them to just be successful because we are not going to be here forever and they're going to have to learn to take care of theyself. I try to tell them that don't depend on your mom for everything because one day you're mom ain't going to be here. You're going to have to do it yourself.

Drug Use History and Childhood

I started drinking alcohol at the age of nine and I started smoking cocaine at 21 years old up until I was like maybe 28 or 29 years old. My dad always drank alcohol and I just drunk it. My dad was an alcoholic, he was always drunk and he just set it down and we just started drinking it and then, at the age of 15, I think my alcohol picked up and I was using it daily and it progressed over the years. I started using cocaine after a relationship breakup. I was in a relationship then I got out the relationship and it was a hard breakup and then I felt alone and it was offered to me and I liked it. I shot up heroine one time and I snorted cocaine for three years.

I had bleeding ulcers and every time I drank I ended up in the hospital. I ended up in the hospital and it was just that one day; I woke up and I went to detox and when I went to sleep, it was a couple of people, and when I woke up it was a whole bunch of

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people and a locked door and I knew I didn't want to be locked up and I just stopped and then the doctor told me, if I didn't stop, I wasn't going to live another year because of the bleeding when I drank, and coughing, and throwing up blood and stuff so I just got tired of it. It was getting sick and I was getting sick of my drinking but I didn't know it.

I feel great about my sobriety because its been a struggle but I've made it through, I mean, the depths, the jubilations. I mean, it's a lot of stuff have came across me but I managed to stay sober through it all, you know. It get hard sometimes but I don't think drinking is going to solve whatever I was going through.

Supportive Kin

My sister who took care of us got a big heart. She is caring and she is good to talk to. She's like been there since I was born. I mean, she always taught me out a way of life, she spoiled me too. Like everybody go to her. She's been a mom for a lot of people.

I felt close to my best friend's mother and her family. I basically like stayed with them when I was younger and running back and forth to their house and at age 17 I just stayed there, moved in with them, and we all grew up together as sisters. My friend's mom made sure I finished high school; I graduated from high school.

Losses

I'm closest to my sister who died three years ago. She had asthma real bad and she couldn't be around no smoke or no kind of nothing but that one day, they gave her medicine and all that stuff that they normally do when she start coughing but just wouldn't nothing work that day and they think it was something it had to do with her husband but he didn't want to have no autopsy. He just wanted her buried and done and

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he married this other lady like a month later and, you know, so it was never realized how she died. You know, I still think about it a lot. It bothers me sometimes, a lot, the not knowing because my brother died two months later. He died of full-blown AIDS. I never did know how she died and they never discovered how she died. They just buried her and that was it. We just decided to let God take care of that but you know it still hurts a lot, it still bother me a lot.

I had another brother who died in a gang-related issue. They killed him and threw him in the creek, down south. He had just turned 18 years of age. They never did find out who killed him either. It's another murder unsolved.

Relationship with Caregivers

My sister, the one that raised my kids, she had to take care of us because my momma went blind when we [twin brother and her] was three months old and she been blind ever since I was born so she didn't really never see me and my twin brother. She saw the rest of them but she didn't never see us. She had a tumor on her brain. They [doctors] said it was going to kill her or either leave her blind and it left her blind. She was the type of lady, she would tell you, just give it to God and, you know, she always just sat around and listened to church music and people didn't know if she could see or if she was just being around because she can tell by your voice who you was, or if you get close to her she can tell you some color when the light is on, and you know, different things, count money. You know, and different things. She did not really talk too much. She just sitted there.

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When she first went blind the state put us in a foster home so my sister and them had to work and get us out the foster home. I was there almost a year when we were first born. It took them a while because my momma was blind, they was not like really older. They was like 14, 15 and the stated didn't want, you know, them raising a child at that age but they finally gave us to them.

My mom was a person who never complained. She always was listening. She is a very spiritual woman. She talked about God. Everything was like God way. If you give it to God, you can do this. If you put God first you can do this. You know, it was always like maybe more church because my momma's daddy was a preacher so everything was based like on the church. You know, some things you just didn't do, like drinking, and hanging out, and partying, and stuff, that type of stuff you didn't do, and go to church, and serve the Lord, and then, you know, that type of stuff.

My dad, I don't know, he was just a mean, selfish, violent, ungrateful damn animal or something.

Child's Father

My oldest daughter's father lived in the same town and we had a connection just for a little while because I knew he wasn't going to be able to do nothing, and I had to depend on my sister and them, so his family wasn't going to anything and they didn't come in picture until my daughter was almost seven, eight years old, before they even acknowledged that was her grandchild and then her grandmother died a year later after she found out that she had a grandchild. She [father's mother] really didn't deal with my daughter because she really didn't think she [daughter] was her grandchild. I took my

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daughter to her funeral but, she really didn't know who her grandmother was. I just told her who she was. She knows who her daddy is and her uncle but they don't really never say nothing to her.

Family Traditions

We celebrated holidays. You don't wash clothes on Sunday, you know, a lot of different stuff. That tradition goes back to the olden days. You didn't wash on Sunday. That was the Lord's day and you relax, go to church, and that's what you have to do, don't wash clothes and New Year's you don't wash clothes. I grew up going to church and I still go sometimes. I mean like a couple Sundays I haven't been but I just started back going. We celebrate Christmas and Thanksgiving too but a lot of holiday's that, you know, around December and January, you know, my family get pretty sad because, mostly it's been a tradition, like around starting in December or January, and February and March, most of my family start dying, you know and we get very sad sometime around that time.

The most respectful things we did were going to church and everybody visit on Saturdays and, you know, you get up quick in the morning because everybody visit on Saturday's and holidays and birthdays. People start showing up, so you have to be up and ready. My aunties would come over and bring dinner and everybody will just sit around and eat dinner and because you know, people worked through the week, so you only see them on the weekends. So they come over on Saturdays and sit around, and talk.

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Socioeconomic Support

When somebody in the family needs help they respond pretty quickly. We always try to help each other, you know. You know, it's a struggle. If the other one got it we just call and she'll call one. If I ain't got it, then they'll call the other one, then, the other one gets it because, you know, you never know when you're going to need some money so pretty much we help each other out. Yeah because momma left a house down there, a three-bedroom house, with 41 acres of land but we all signed it over to my sister, the one that raised my kids, because we was all going to be up here but sometimes she can't make the house payment and she'll call me and I'll help her with the house payment, you know, make sure we keep the house payment going and so it won't get behind, and get it paid off. These, appliances like T.V.s, I take them down south and put them in the house, try to keep the house up and doing the remodeling and all that stuff.

Lessons from Childhood

I learned that you don't have to use alcohol and drugs to cover up things. You can always get help and talk about it and try to help somebody else before they go through the same or similar thing you went through and with me going to school to be a drug counselor, I'm learning a lot about addiction and why people get hooked on drugs and alcohol, and all that different type of stuff. They cover up feelings, and emotions and stuff like that and they have stuff that's happened to them and they're hiding, and they keep on relapsing, and you know.

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What Helping Professionals Should Know

First of all, you have to talk to kids and see where their mind's at, give them a lot of talking to, let them know you care and let them know it's okay to talk about anything with you. You don't have to hide nothing. You know, whatever you want to talk about, a boyfriend, you know, and a lot of kids committing suicide because they're not mixed up with their sexuality, they're just scared to tell their parents that "I'm gay or I'm lesbian." I don't care what my kids are, they're still mine, you know. You know, it's just the way it is, if you know where your child's mind's at, you can almost know where you might need to do something. They might need some depression medicine, you know. You have to talk to them and see where their mind's at, what they're going through. Talk to them every day. Say, "How're you doing? What're you going to do today?" you know. See if they've got something positive going on, you know. Kids sit around all day, just sitting there and you ain't asked him nothing. He ain't told you nothing, be thinking about something and just ask him what he's thinking about, you know. Hold kids accountable for stuff.

Educating People about Sexual Mistreatment

Actually, be careful who you bring you kids around. Get some background checks, you know because you can be with a man 10 and 15 years and then just the 11th year he can molest your child. He can do anything, you just think you know this person. You're comfortable with leaving your child with him. You know, but you don't know what people are doing, going through every day. You just know them because you've been with him 10 years. You think you know. You don't know people. People do things,

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and you be like, “Oh, he wouldn’t do that to me. He loves me.” No, he don’t. You know, you think he do but he don’t.

Stopping Sexual Harm of Women and Children

Oh, at first sign, get some help.

Case Study #14 – Cicely

Cicely parented her children for about six years before they were removed from her home by child protection services based on an allegation that she physically abused her oldest daughter. Seventeen years later she was reunited with her children. She acknowledged that her drug use kept her children from being reunited with her sooner. Cicely’s sister’s husband made sexual advances toward her when she was 18 years old and they became lovers. She was raped and beaten numerous times throughout her adult life.

Remembering Reunion with Children

I have two daughters, one is 20 and one is 25 years old. Oh, yeah, I’m 49. I’m doing great [chuckles] by the grace of God. Right now, at this point, ah, I just recently got in touch with my kids after 17 years. Well, my oldest daughter, she know’d where I was all the while. We were, you know, she knew how to get in touch with me but it was not until 17...well, it’s been like three years ago that I got to see my oldest daughter, I mean, my baby. It had been 17 years. She was took from me at six months by CPS, Child Protection. I was an abusive parent. What happened was my mother had died and she had custody of my oldest daughter. She was there when my mother died and she was like stressed. So she had, you know, black rings under her eyes from not sleeping. They

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thought I had abused her, but later on found out that I hadn't but my addiction, my cocaine addiction kept me from getting them back. Um, I wasn't ready to give up my habit, I guess.

My daughter, my oldest daughter, she claimed, she says that she forgives me and that she loves me, but it's...deep down inside I don't feel like she really understands, you know what I'm saying? Because we have a problem communicating. Now, as for my baby, she's, ah, she's good as gold, and, you know, I would think she would have the most problem with it but she told me that she forgave me a long time ago and now she's pregnant. She's fittin' to have a baby this month. This is my first grandchild. She told me I could be a part of her and her baby's life, so I'm happy with that. You know, I didn't know how the outcome would be once we saw each other after 17 years, but it went pretty well.

How did I reconnect with my youngest daughter? What happened was my oldest daughter she gave me a picture of her and I told them after, you know, 17 years there's nothing CPS could do, that I would find my child. So I guess she said, "Well, my mom ain't that dumb, she can take this picture and do things with it." So, she [oldest daughter] brought her to me that next week. My mother raised my oldest but I had my baby. I thought, you know, although I was an addict, I was a pretty good mother. Well, me and my baby was real close, like I said. We did everything together. She never cried or anything. She never want for anything. Um, when I went to get my oldest daughter, we moved into my mother house. We had everything we needed. It was finely, you know, fine, finely furnished. Um, we had all the necessities that we needed, from washer and

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dryer, and all that. Um, every day she [youngest daughter] went to school. She was a straight “A” student. You know. Um, the last, um, occasion we had was Halloween. She wanted to be a witch and I did, I fixed her up so, she was so wicked. I mean, it was like she was the Wicked Witch of the West and my oldest, when I was putting the nose on the baby, she kept trying to snatch it off, and I took kept telling my daughter she going to get it, she going to get it. They never really wanted for anything. I made sure they had their Christmas trees, and their toys, and stuff. They didn’t want for anything.

It was just that fact that somebody went and complained about my daughter’s eyes and like I said, later on they found out that it was from stress, from her not sleeping, and when the lady came out I got angry at her for even, you know, suggesting that I had did that so I tore up her card and that pissed her off and she went and got the police and they took my children. It was a Black woman social worker come in at that. How can you uproot a child from his parents? I had my baby for six months and my oldest one until she was six years old. I had her hair in dreads and the people, the social workers, they hurt my baby combing her hair out, trying to comb her hair locs out. I told my daughter that when I met her [chuckles] for the first time. I said, “You used to have dreads.” She say, “What [chuckles]?” She had that coarse hair. Her hair was that coarse hair and I couldn’t do nothing with it so I started dreading it and then I said, “I’m happy with nappy, so forget it” but it (sic) lookeded good on her because she had those eyes to change. When she lighten up, they would get darker. When she darker, they’d get light. She had that red hair. It looked dirty, a sandy red. I loved my baby. My baby loved her momma.

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Experiences of Sexual Mistreatment

Oh Lord, I don't know if I want to talk about this. What's after that because I was really abused? I had pistols in my mouth. You know how close it is up against the wall? I had to literally get behind a toilet stool to keep my man from beating me. I have been kicked in my eyes, where now I have glaucoma in my eyes. Oh, I don't know, man. No I wasn't sexual abused as a child, none of that. The first time was with my brother-in-law. My sister's husband, as a matter of fact, my daughter is his daughter. I think I was about 18 years old. My sister was in the penitentiary and I took on the role as the parent in the house and one day we was there by ourself. I never told anybody this but I'm good, it's time. He made sexual advances and we became lovers, you know. I mean, this man worshiped me and I worshiped him as a God. You know, he was my everything and I knew what I was doing was wrong but come to find out later, I wasn't the only sister that had done it to. He has 84 kids and by women he has been with, and his sisters. He was like, something out of the Bible, whereas you go to one sister, you go from the sister to the sister. He had like a concubine and it was not recent 'til recently that one of the lady's sister came forward and told us this, that her son was her man's son, you know, so I said, "Well, look, it's that damn same ole' thing. Shit, let me go and just get my shit out of here," so what I did was I kept telling her, "I've got something to tell you. I've got something to tell you."

I told her and she confronted him, and he beat her. He beat her so bad, the mattresses, she kept the blood-stained mattresses, and I, you know, I didn't even feel nothing about it. It didn't even phase me because we was in the pimpin' and hoein' days.

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You know, that shit happened, and then I was naïve and nothing he could do would you know [knocks on surface] rattle me. He acted like our daughter was no big deal and that kind of messed with me but now I'm all right with it, You know, it happened.

Expectations of Children

I made sure that my daughter went to school, and did her homework, and she played with kids, played like kids supposed to play, in the dirt and stuff. Um, I made sure she was properly dressed, the way I was raised with clean clothes and all of that, like a kid's supposed to be, and not like the way they're raising their kids today. Nobody goes out to play, no one gets any treats unless their homework is done and their room is clean, and they ate healthy food because I cook. I'm a real good cook. [Chuckles]. I don't know where it came from but it just, I guess because my mother was a good cook. I participated in school activities for the short time that I had them. We did everything together, we picked up aluminum cans together [chuckles]. My baby was six months and she knew the difference between aluminum and tin. Yeah, she [mimicking baby] "No. No, this don't go in here." She throwing it out [chuckles].

When I approved of their behavior, they were always rewarded. You know, then they was so small, it wasn't too much that you could do besides buy them candy [chuckles]. It's not like they knew the value of money or things that they were getting. When they did something wrong, oh no. When they did something they knew it because I'm from the old school. My momma whooped me. You know, children don't like that they're whoopin' but I don't know why, once the CPS come in with that act because, uh, the bible tell you you're supposed to discipline your child and that's what's wrong today.

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If they done kept them boards in them schools and let them neighbors whup them kids when they catch them doing something wrong too, like everybody in the neighborhood going to whup you if they found out you did something. Well, I live by the old rule. I ain't going to lie. You did it wrong, you got it wrong. I didn't beat them you know, but they got a spanking. Not the baby though because there ain't nothing she can do wrong. She's too little to know. You tell her that's a bad thing to do, not that she bad. You tell her it's a bad thing to do. You know, because you tell her she bad, she grew up thinking she bad. It's all in the word—the putting into words. You know, once I seen that standing in the corner don't work. That don't work [makes a disapproving sound]. They think you're playing a game but they didn't, you know, my kids, they didn't do nothing to cause no whuppin'. That one time when she [oldest daughter] went to that park, and stayed out, I said, "Don't let daylight catch you, I mean, nighttime catch you" and she knew exactly what I was talking about. Now, she want to come from the park and go across the street to her friend's house and play hide-and-go -seek from her momma, and I even went over there and asked the little Spanish people where she was. They lie and say she wasn't there. Then later on here she come all the way, you know she had to get whooped. She couldn't go outside, and sure couldn't go back to they house.

Sources of Strength

It's God. That's all about God. I just didn't have the knowledge that I have now and I asked him for the wisdom and the knowledge to walk in His way and I knew he had, ah, better plans for me because, one day, uh, I was sitting in the garden and it was cloudy, man, cloudy and I was just weary and I laid back and I said, "Oh, girl, you done

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fallen on a cross” and, ah, I looked up in the sky. Like I said, it was cloudy and I asked God, I said, “If you have a plan for me, please shine brightly on me” and that sun just came straight through the trees. I mean, it was so cloudy, man and it shined, I mean, so brightly on me and I always thought me and God was in cahoots because I’ve had several people to die, and they wanted to see me before they died. Like this last person who died, he wanted his hair to grow back on the top of his head and he sent this man to look for me, and he told me what he wanted. He said, “I want you to grow my hair back.” I don’t know what made me think I could, but I did and he died the next week. This other lady, she laid in my lap, I was braiding her hair and I told her “God, I said it’s okay,” and that night she died. I asked her, did she know I was an angel? and she told me, yeah she knew it all the while, and I don’t know where that shit be coming from. I mean, I’m serious, I don’t know where it be coming from what makes me talk like that? I tell everybody. I be washing cars, it could be raining and it don’t even be raining on the car. That’s why they call me “Water.” Well, some of the reason. People be stopping, saying, “Man this girl washing this car and it’s raining, but it’s not raining on this car. I don’t know, like didn’t you know water don’t wet water? and they just flip out.

What happened was one day we was walking, me and my friend. We was trying to find some dope and it was pouring down, raining. We was walking. We walked a *long* way, and did not get wet. I said, “Dag gonnit, you see that? We’re not getting wet.” He said, “I thought you know. Water don’t wet water” and I say, “That is my name, ain’t it?” I say, “I’ll be damned” and for some reason I just always said me and God was in cahoots. We was partners.

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Participation in Treatment Group

Here at the agency I don't like doing the group because they're not a group because I have suicidal thoughts and they're not equipped to handle my situation because once I leave here I'm in my room by myself, thinking. They don't understand it but I just sit here in the group and don't say anything while they're talking, so that's why I said I'm glad we're in here by ourself (sic). They say the group is mandatory. I told them that although I have been in the streets with prostitution, I feel that I am not able to share, and I'm sorry but I don't think they would be equipped to handle me if I had a breakdown and I told them that maybe one day they touch on something I might want to share but it'd have to be on my call. I know what I can handle and what I can't. This [the interview] is going good for me. I'm glad I'm sharing and its not in a group. I'm going to a psychiatrist trying to uncover the past and I'm breaking down that mentally. I kept all my appointments so I said I did pretty good, me and God. God had my back.

Spirituality and Individual Counseling

You know I went to a spiritual retreat about two weeks ago and I got a chance to see Jesus so that was an experience that I never encountered. He told me everything was going to be okay so I have to go with what God say now, that he has plans for me and I'm ready for it. That's all I can say. I know whatever it is He's got planned for me, He better let it flow out of my mouth because I don't know a bit more what I'm talking about then the man in the moon but I'm going to try. Yeah, I'm ready for it. I tell you one thing, when I asked him to come into my life and take away my defects of character and. my addiction, I prayed. I asked him to free me from all of my addictions, my cravings, and

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everything that went with my addictions, you know, the streets, prostitution, men, drugs, whatever habits I had.

I'm serious. It's like I never picked up drugs. Since I've been talking to these different counselors and stuff on different areas of my past, you know, in these groups, man, if I had a known this a long time ago, ain't no way in the world I would have been an addict. If I had a known that all I had to do was find somebody to listen to me and to let me talk. I wouldn't have never picked up no drugs. I might have drunk [laughs].

Losses

The killing part was my mother died. A week later my sister died, and then a month later they [Child protective services] took my kids. I was devastated. I was just tore up completely. I went from one hospital to the next and I never, you know, got a chance to really mentally, you know, I think it was a shame because I didn't even get a chance to parent my children. I was really mentally stressed out, but I don't have no malice against the people that raised my daughter because they raised her well. She always know that they weren't her parents and she would let them know that. She managed to graduate from high school, this is her second year in college, you know, I'm not upset about it. I'm upset that I wasn't in her life but, you know, I had a disease [drug addiction] and at least they were well, you know, put in good homes. They weren't separated because they don't separate siblings in that state. The judge, she always gave me permission to have my baby, you know but, um, I just couldn't seem to shake my addiction, especially after all those losses, and didn't know how to deal with it. I think that's pretty sad that I chose the drugs over my children.

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My mother had an aneurism. A blood vessel burst in the back of her head. My sister had AIDS. She shared a needle with her brother-in-law. I had two brothers that died and I have one left. One brother died on my 18th birthday. He was 23. He was shot. I just recently, um, had a spiritual awakening, um, by my grandmother. I never did get a chance to grieve for her. I was quickly took by my father, who I really didn't know so I really didn't get a chance to grieve. So I had a lot of regrets and abandonment and, um, trust issues really bad but I'd say Saturday, God gave me, um, the insight and allowed me to grieve in a way that I was smiling as I was going through the house, and remembering everything that was there. And after it was over, then I broke down and told her [grandmother] I was going to be all right this time. She passed away [Crying] In '76. My grandmother raised me. She loved me [cries]. My grandmother was like the center of our family and when she died our family just separated. You know, and it was just like broke up to pieces. As a matter of fact, I haven't been to a family reunion since my grandmother died. I just guess when my grandmother died I just didn't care no more. It was a loss because my mother didn't step in and be my mother at that time. I think that's what really harmed it the most. I begged my mother to give me two weeks of being my mother. I would have never lost...I would have never lost nothing. I even wrote her a letter. She still couldn't do it. I knew she was going to die though. She was so...she was glowing at night. She had on a white teddy. She had just came back from the west coast and east coast and she had her hair like Anita Baker. I can still see her standing at that door and she was glowing. She knew she was getting ready to die. she was standing up looking out the window at six o'clock in the morning, getting ready to get my daughter

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ready for school and she had an aneurism. She had a major stroke. My grandmother had cancer. Every other woman in our family had breast cancer.

My aunt used to tell me that if it fell on me than not to have chemotherapy, to get radiation. She said it may hurt but you'll live longer. Well, all of them lived to be in their 90's except my grandmother. She's the only one that didn't have radiation.

Relationship with Caregivers

No my mother didn't raise me. My mother was abusive. She was an alcoholic. My grandmother took me and my brother when we was babies. She [her mother] was real abusive. In the end she tried, though but I wouldn't let her. It was too late. Well, she didn't try to make a difference with me, she tried to make it different with my baby. My baby couldn't stand her. She [mother] threw her [baby] out the window one time. It was cold too. I told her, "Take my baby in." And she didn't have to let me in. She had my other daughter. I said, "This is your grandbaby too." And I guess he pushed her back out the window. My baby knew that. She wasn't bullshitting like my momma. Babies know good people. That's right. That's right. If my baby would clown and act and start crying, then you've got to get out of my house because you ain't no good because my baby didn't cry.

Me and my grandmother was connected at the hip. My grandmother had soul. She was like Florence on Good Times [T.V. program] as a matter of fact, that's who she look like. Them White folks loved her, man. She worked for them White folks for a long time. Man, that's my friend, my father, just my everything, man, you know? I'm serious. She's

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been through everything with me, my addiction, and still love me, you know what I'm saying? And that's hard to find.

Family Traditions & Childhood

Besides the holidays we traveled a lot. I can tell you the highways. I can still remember going on as a kid. I just have a good memory. I don't know why. We traveled a lot. Cross country, fishing, crabbing, I was a happy child. I had trophies all across my piano from different things. I participated in everything, basketball, table tennis, art, you name it. I learned to play the piano on my typewriter. Yeah. They have the same keys. I even tried to play the clarinet. I was in the band. I was a straight "A" student.

Family Names and Cotton Picking

My great aunt that's still living, she's 105 years old, yeah, she got all of us now. I didn't know they had put her in a nursing home. All of them [aunties] had weird names – Aunt Tutu, Aunt Mut, Aunt Sugarlump [chuckles] and Aunt Planky [chuckles]. I don't have the slightest idea where those names came from but they use to call me Plucky. I don't know where they got all them names. Uncle Buddy, Uncle Doobie. Man those some back in the day names. You better not call no kid today Doobie. Panky. "Come here Planky," "Hey Aunt Panky." [laughs]. "Hey, Sugarlump" [chuckles]. Yeah, when I was growing up my mom had a friend named Panky. Yeah, she was called Panky. Aunt Panky. "Hey, Piggy." Yep, Pick-a-ninny. Yeah that was another name too. Well, she looked like a little fat pig though. So I could see where she got her name [chuckles]. Fat, Opaling. I don't know where them old names came from. Them some *old* names. Yeah them cotton picking names because I picked cotton. I got cheated out my money too. I

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went and told my momma. My momma made him pay me. [Chuckles] My own cousin, ten cents a croaker sack. Yeah, big ole bag of potatoes and you put the cotton in. We call them croaker sacks. [Chuckles] You know I'm country but I'm good.

Family Assistance

When somebody in my family need any kind of assistance they always come get me, for the bad things. When there's dirt they need done. Like my cousin took me up to the east coast because the dog had been in the house for like five days, so you know the house was messed up. They come get me for the dirty jobs. Yeah, um-hum, because they know I'm going to handle it. I got that reputation, I guess because I'm a hustler by heart [laughs]. I'll go into your house and get your dead dog. I don't care, when you could call the Humane Society. They say, "uh-uh I'm calling," they use to call me "Hot Water," not because I stayed in trouble, it's something that goes with the street knowledge, so, I mean before I left my home I was so tired. Man, I was like 24/7, I don't even believe I got a good, eight hours in sixteen days, I'll put it like that. Man, I was a hard worker and they didn't want nobody to do it but me. They ain't letting no dope fiends come in their house. I'm the only one they trusted. I washed cars all the day long, mow yards. I don't care, paint houses, whatever, as long as it was legal I did it. You know you can't glorify drug addictions but they tried to glorify mine and I used to tell them, "Hey, you're talking about that person, you might as well be talking about me." "No, Mrs. [Cicely], I almost forgot you get high. You ain't like that." I'm like, "There's no certain way to get high, man," but they loved me. I just found that out though, since I've been here the last six months. They crying for me to come home. I know I'm missed. I'm like, "you should

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have told me this shit before I left.” I just wanted y’all to know how I’m going to be missed.

Community Respect and Relocation

Yeah. I came here because man, I was tired of them people. Shit. I was tired [chuckles]. I was tired of them man. I don’t know, they got me for the job, they didn’t respect me, you know what I’m saying as a human. I’m not talking about my family. I’m talking about my community; you know what I’m saying? When it’s time for me to lay down I had to pay my way. They’d try take the fan off of me. I got, you know, tried of that crap but now I’ve been getting my money back out of them. Yeah, they been sending me money down here, trying to make me come home but it ain’t going to happen. They don’t know I done moved down here.

Medical and Psychiatric Healthcare Experiences

I picked this state because all them hot flashes [down south]. Hot flashes was tearing my ass up [laughs]. Yeah man, I wanted a cold climate, at least I’m honest [laughs].

Wow, them hot flashes in [down south], man, I was coming out my clothes walking down the street. I didn’t care [chuckles]. They, you know, since I’ve been here I haven’t had none, come to think about it until they gave me that, um, Depo shot at the hospital. It messed me up pretty bad. It made me bleed for like three months. Then they gave me those Provera hormones. God, I was like, “Ooh!” I mean, my bed was just soaked. I mean, you swore to God somebody poured water in it. I said, “Man, I didn’t tell you...” after two days of that, I...man, I throwed that pill bottle away. Um-um. No. Oh,

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man, that was horrible and then I kept bleeding, kept bleeding. I thought I was the lady in the bible and they wanted to give me another shot. I said, "You must be out your mind." I said, "Man, I'm turning this over to God" and I got on my knees and prayed on it, and God took that away, that sickness away from me. I have a low glucose and low iron and they couldn't understand why my glucose and iron stay low and I kept telling them I was born this way. I been having this problem way before I had a cycle and they wanted to stop my cycle, telling me about it, "you're 49. You need to be trying to stop anyway," and I'm like, "you can't play golf with my body," you know what I'm saying? This is a God thang here, you know what I'm saying? [Indignantly].

They get up and say, "Well, we're going to try this shot for three months. If your iron and glucose raise than we'll know this was the problem" and it didn't. It made me worse. I was going to the hospital every other day in the ambulance because my heart was pumping too much and it was dehydrating me and I was getting dizzy. My blood pressure was dropping so low and I was going temporary blind. You know what I'm saying? I told that man, "Look, let me tell you something, I'm going to get on my knees and I'm going to pray to God on this, and let him handle it and I'm going to let this shot wear off and you ain't fittin' to give me nothing else." As a matter of fact, I don't even want to see another gynecologist. I don't care if I do have a problem. Let God have it. Yeah, this just happened.

I done had two colonoscopies in a week. Yeah, it was their [doctors] fault on that. It was. They knew all the medicines I was taking. They knew that iron was going to make my bowel movement dark and they emptied me out and it never would clear up because

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of the iron and then I had to do that again, so I was like really not eating, not eating nothing. Now I can't take my iron, so I'm...my resistance is real low and, um, then I had my teeth took out. Then they opened up my jaw and took my plates out, so I couldn't eat, still couldn't eat and I was all man.

Then I'm going to a psychiatrist trying to uncover the past and I'm breaking down that mentally but I'm all-good though because I kept up all my appointments. I went to all of my meetings so I said I did pretty good, me and God and God had my back. I had went to my primary doctor and I was telling her about some of my problems and then she asked me did I feel safe and I broke down crying. She told me to go across the street [psychiatrist location] and I did. I thought it was the best thing to do. Nah, it ain't working out okay no more. They had me take this test man. They said some things about me that was not true.

I told them, maybe if they had a worded it in my terminology then I probably would have got them all right [laughs]. You know? The shit you're talking about, I haven't heard of that about no shit like that. Break it down and put it in my terminology, I bet you I get them all right [laughs]. So I said, "Your doctor's got to be out of his mind to say I'm all those things. He don't know what the hell he talking about because I was a straight 'A' student."

The shit ya'll got on this paper, even the student today that they're teaching, they ain't going to know what the fuck ya'll...excuse me...what you're talking about [laughter]. Shit.

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Nah. I told that woman there, I told that lady, I said, “What in the hell you mean I must have been in a special ed?” “You got me messed up. I was a straight ‘A’ student.” I told them, “You should tell him that you need to put it in my terminology the way I was taught.” I bet you I’d a got them all right. I bet you they all right, I’m going to put it like that. I bet they’re all right because I answered them to my best of my knowledge and it works for me.

My Man and Racism

Sometimes I be saying, “Damn, is you racist?” because for some reason I’m like this here; I messed with a White man for 29 years. He 83 [years old] and I met him on the ho’ stroll [Laughs], but I can’t stand to see a Black man with a White woman. It’s different because Black men focus on what the White man don’t want and he [Black man] come and flaunt it in front of the sister. When a sister go and get a White man she’s going to get money. She ain’t going to get no White man got less than she got, walk down the street and say, “That’s my man,” so does that make me racist? [Laughs]. It is a difference but it don’t make it right. Yeah, because his [Black man] dick’s going to be this big [gestures with hands] and they going to be holding hands, something that you want your dude to do with you and he [White man] ain’t. He [Black man] flaunting her, “That’s my, this my gal.” You ain’t going to never see a sister walk down the street with no White man that’s got less than she got. No, that ain’t around, not without coming from nowhere. Twenty-nine years and we’re still best friends. Yep, that’s my dog there. He from Iowa, now that’s a racist town. I don’t see how he living there because he sure love Black women. I got somebody to introduce me to him. I said, “Oh, he’s a winner.” Yeah,

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and I treated him real good [emphasis added]. Yeah, he was all right. He took care of my mom, my children. He was a good old fellow. He 83 years old, I don't think he going to ever die, man. He's strong! He sent me some money. A good old fellow, man. I wouldn't trade him for the world and better not be nobody better not mess with him either. They get the shit beat out of them. He would tell me he was sick. I'd have to get on to the house, take care. Yep. Well, he done took care of me all these years. He really have. I mean, all through my addictions and everything. He'll be up here as soon as the weather break, because he has land where he have corn, and potatoes, and soybeans. So, he have to protect his, well, his foreman probably already done planted it. But he'll be down there for probably a whole month. Then he'll start coming every week out of a month. My family? They love him to death. I tell them he's my friend. Yeah, and they know, they ain't stupid! "She ain't with that old ass man for nothing [laughter]," so, let's get real. I keep it real, man, you know. I'm real honest. They say I'm brutally honest, and I'll put it like that, and don't care if you don't like it or not. I ain't sugarcoating nothing. When they came and took my children, he was on the first thing smoking out of Iowa, baby. He went and paid that lawyer upfront to do a job that they didn't do. I told my man, that lawyer didn't show up for court that day. We went back to that office. I told him, I say, "You go on downstairs, they might tow your trust. I got this." I went in there and told him, I said, "Let me tell you something. This man gave you money to represent me, to get *my* children. Don't nobody fuck over this White man, not even me."

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Drug Use and Attraction to the Streets

I started smoking that good weed at around 18 or 19 years old. A long time ago, good weed, it make you eat up stuff and make you laugh but this shit they got now make me, oh man, dizzy, woozy. I don't know what the hell they're smoking. I don't like that. I done picked that habit up but after high school I stopped smoking weed. Yeah, I went to bigger things, cocaine [chuckles]. Yeah, snorting it, smoking it. Free-basin'. My sister shot me with some dope but that wasn't my thing because I looked at her body and I didn't like them marks. She shot all in her arms, all in her veins, and so she was beautiful on the outside, man, but she was just *ugly* on the inside. She was a thief. She couldn't go nowhere twice. She was just ruthless but I loved her. I loved her. I loved her. She talking about, "Don't nobody owe you nothing." She smoked up all my money. I ain't been home, since my brother was looking for me and when all my money gone, she go get her shit, and come back, and sit there and smoke it front of me, don't give me shit, talking about, "I don't owe you nothing. I don't owe you nothing." She was a good teacher, I'll tell you that. She told me she hated me because I was too honest. Yeah. She would say, how you keep from getting high. She ran in there looking to see if her dope was in there. She ran in the house, telling everybody to get out. She was looking everywhere for it. "Where my dope at?" I said, "I don't know, and I ain't look for it," and she was looking all over the planet and I said, "I ain't even looking there." Then she found it. She said, "You know what, man? I hate you." She said, "You wouldn't even lie and say you saw it. I know you wasn't going to take it but damn, bitch, you wouldn't even lie and say you saw it." I say, "But I wasn't even looking for it." Shit. Go prowling through people's

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houses, don't care who it belong to. We smoked together. She was a speed baller. She shoot and smoke at the same time. I used to be scared for her, man. I just met her on the ho stroll. She said, "Oh, I can't tell you nothing. I'm doing the same thing. All I can say is be good at whatever it is you do," and she used to call me a star turnout. She used to try to teach me how to steal. I told her, "I don't want to learn how to do no shit like that." "Well, you're just going flatback all your life, honey." "Whatever."

Yeah, one side of the life was the pretty girls and on the other side was the thieves, was the pill poppers and syrup drinkers, and they be sitting up there, titties be hanging all out, slobbering all out the mouth, sleep and get woke up and then they would be [smacks hands] messed up really bad, but on the other side was the pretty hoes, all other side, pretty hoes. We'd have on our bikini bathing suites and shit. Yeah.

What happened was, one day, I used to ride that No.7, I think it was. No. 7 bus, and it used to take you down St. Martin Drive, and them hoes was so pretty. They were sharp. I think that's what attracted me to the streets, and money. Getting in them cars. I think that's what happened and then I didn't have no family when my grandmother died. I went back to school though, that and Job Corp, then finished.

How to Stop Sexual Harm of Women and Children

What do I think it will take to stop sexually harming women and children? Roots, man. Ain't no more root and ain't nobody setting no roots either. They're just living day-to-day. Ain't no togetherness. The bible say that though. In the end, mothers against daughters, neighbors against neighbors. So it ain't nothing you can do about it, not now.

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Case Study #15 - Maya

Maya, 42-years old, relied heavily on her extended family system in parenting her children through many years of incarceration and drug misuse. While in prison she availed herself of extensive parenting, treatment, and therapy services that she continued upon her release. She has four boys ages 25, 23, 22, and 19. She had one girl who is five years old but gave her to a niece, as an infant, to rear as her own child. The family members of the boyfriends' of Maya's mother sexually molested her and she has vague memories of her father also being one of her abusers. Maya also experienced physical abuse at the hands of her siblings.

Intergenerational Parenting

My relationship with my children, it's getting better. I didn't have one at one point. We're working on building trust with each other. They're working on allowing me to parent them again, due to my drug use, my past drug use, and getting into prostitution, all the stuff I was involved in. So it's gotten a lot better. I'm still learning how to, change the roles, so they can stop being a parent, and now I'm the parent. I think that's the stage that we're in right now, reversing roles [chuckles]. I've been parenting my children the whole entire time. I just haven't been parenting them either, I was parenting them, trying to parent them while I was still in the streets and using drugs, and then I was still parenting them in prison, by means of using parenting classes and I tried to, you know, I tried to do some, um, like they were trying to do some intervention stuff though. So I've always tried to reach out from prison in parenting them, as much as I could over the phone, through letters. I, like I never stopped trying to be a parent and it was hard, so, a

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lot of the kids' trust have now been broken. Yeah, my mom was there for me, a big impact in their life. My family was a big impact on their life. Main—mainly my mom and like their family, like their dad's side, their dad. You know, and so they also pitched in and so everybody kind of helped and volunteers in the street from other programs, did their best to help my children. So I don't know, there were a lot of people that were parenting my children. The children's father pitched in, churches, extended family members. A lot of people helped with parenting my children.

Experiences of Sexual Mistreatment

I was angry most of my adult life. My anger was based on the fact that I was a kid and I was molested as a child. I was abused [physically] by my siblings as a child. On top of that I have been stabbed in the streets. I have been raped. I have been in relationships involving domestic violence situations. I got all types of stab wounds, and just everything. I have been kidnapped and raped several times. I have been beat down. I have been left for dead. I have been robbed, stomped. You know, just, the world, I just, I have been lied to. My own father had did things to me, just things and I hated myself. I hated the world. I hated everything about it and I told Him [God]. I mean, that's what I was angry about it. You know, but I said that, I told Him the truth [chuckles]. I had a repressed memory of the abuse for a lot of years. I didn't remember it but I knew it was something but I couldn't remember it. I heard voices in my head. It took me a lot of years to realize what those voices were. The voices were actually the conversations that were being held. I found out years later from therapy and stuff, that was being held under my subconscious mind when I was being molested, so, what happened is the people who

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babysat me, my mom's, family, my mom's boyfriend's family were the ones who molested me, and then my mom's boyfriend was a drunk. He was really mean, and abusive, and angry, and he was also abusive to my mother. He mistreated us as kids and I always was in fear of him. Even though he didn't whoop me, I was terrified of the man. Then on top of that, my siblings, beat me a lot, mistreated me and that's because I didn't get a whooping, and they did, because I was so tiny. So, I got it from them. So I was getting all the way around.

Disclosure to Children

My sons knew that I was sexually abused and this is how I did it; how I told my sons, I told them a story of a little girl. I told him a story of a little girl. I told them that something happened to this little girl. As a result of this happening to this little girl, the sexual abused, I told him that this is why the little girl was doing what she was doing and, uh...and these are the things, why the little girl was acting the way she was acting. I told this story about this little girl and when I was done they were like, "Mom, that little girl was you." So I did it in that way, and they understood it. So I didn't so personalize it because like it probably would have been too traumatic for them. I was always the mom to be creative with my thinking to help them with things. That was one of my ways of telling them about my sexual abuse, was through the life of a little girl but they guided me and they're like, "Mom, that was you." But they understood it. They were in their early teens when I told them.

Twelve, ele—thirteen, eleven, nine, somewhere up in there but they all got it. They were like, "Mom, that was you." Um, so, they know that like I have no tolerance for

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them like hitting a woman or like I have zero tolerance for any of that and they know why. They definitely know why I have that type of intolerance.

Meaning Made of Sexual Mistreatment Experiences

Oh, I told myself I was unworthy. I was unlovable. I was ugly. I was, one of them was the core beliefs that I have on [chuckles] myself and then I suffered from entitlement though because I believed that everybody owes me and I believe that came from the fact that they were giving me things. So then I, and the people were all giving me some stuff, so I suffered from entitlement as well but even though I suffered from entitlement like I feel like anything that bad that happened to me, like I deserved that, like I deserved that bad thing that was happening and so I just embraced all the stuff that was bad that happened to me because I was bad. I was...I was just a bad kid, I was doing badly. To me, I was the worst person in the world. I didn't like my name. I didn't like nothing about me. I didn't like my name Mary either. That's why my book is called *Out of the Rose of Mary*. Like I hated my name like I hated me and I changed my name several times growing up because I didn't want to be Mary. This is the first time in my life people cannot call me anything but Mary but I remember, you couldn't call me Mary. Like you could not call me that. I would lose my mind, "Do not call me that." Like I would freak out. Like I hated me. What did I want people to call me instead? Well, at one point I was [chuckles] was Minnie Me. Then I was, Candy Cane Cancer. I remember one time being like Sweet Pea. Then I think I remember being, [sighs] Mayvon. I remember being Naomi, and then I ended up just being May-May and she was the worse person I ever created in my life. That person, I think, was dangerous, treacherous, um, violent, angry.

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She was a kitten but would kill the first thing, I was just wow. Uh, that I mean, I'm glad I killed her. She's dead [chuckles].

I just played whatever role, just as long as I just didn't have to be Mary. Then it got to the point to where I ended up being Mary, May-May, and May-Milla. Mary was me. Like some people would be like, "Okay, you're an intellectual person. We need you to..." You know, May-Milla was like the gangster, like real, real mean, and will come in pull out pistols, like I was that violent and May-May was the manipulator, shouting prostitute type of "Ha, ha, ha" type of person and people would identify me. In my drug world, they were asking me, "Like we need May-Milla right here right now." You know and I would just jump into character. Mind you I didn't have any real hints of this. I just, I was in that, I was drug-induced and, I just played these, I just jumped into character because, I didn't want to be who I was, me and whenever somebody got wind of who I really was, I'd just freak out, like, "Back up off me. You're getting too close." Yeah, so.

All of it was useful and helpful. All of it, um, helped pave the way for who I am, my success today and it's going to pave the way for other people to be successful. I tell people, I am no longer a victim. I have been victimized but today, because I'm not taking a victim stance, I'm able to go out and turn around and help other people now because I'm not a victim. Like you ain't going to tell all the bad stuff happened to me, I done waked up a hundred times, kidnapped over probably 50, all that, stabbed, beat, killed, all that. It doesn't matter. None of that's going to hold me down. Now, what I look at it as, it's a blessing I survived it. I just have a real strong desire in me to help the next person up out of there, to let the next person know that you don't have to stay where you are,

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that you can move past where you are, that you don't have to allow that to happen to you no more. Like you don't have to stay with them type of people and choose them type of places to go around. Like I want to be the type of person that carry those type of messages to people, let people know there is definitely a way out of this situation. You know? Like even though that happened to you, that doesn't matter. You can move past it. You can still be successful, productive. You can still heal. You can still, you know what I'm saying, grow. You can still change. You can still thrive. Like I stopped thriving when that happened to me. Right there I died. Instantly I died. I'm thriving again and it took a while, you know.

History of Incarceration & Separation from Children

I did ten years in installments. I started like going to prison when I first had my first kid. It was in 1986. I went to a juvenile prison in Sheridan City, MN. I was 17 and my son was four months when I first went to prison. I went when I was, yeah, 17 years old. Throughout yeah, it's been I think about ten years incarcerated, off and on, from 1986 'til 2007 is my last prison [Chuckles] experience. I felt terrible separated from my kids. I felt like just a lost cause. I felt like I was out of cause. I felt like my world had ended. When I did that first prison bit that was just like the worst feeling to me being separated from my kids like that.

Like I felt their pain for real. Like that was the first time I really, really felt my kids' pain. Like, before, when you're using and, you know, your numb to everything, you're not paying attention, you don't have nothing in you. That was the first time I felt it. That was the first time I did four years. It was supposed to be three and a half but I

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kept getting in trouble so, I'll be here four and a half or five, because I got out and then I came back. So I did about four and a half or five years.

Expectations of Children

What were my expectations that I had of my children? I didn't have any. I didn't have any expectations of my children. They were just there. Like I loved them but I didn't have any expectations for them. I didn't have any goals set for them. I didn't have distant goals and dreams or, um, nothing like that. You know, "You need to be a gang banger. You need to be hustling," and I didn't have any, not any realistic expectations. I mean my kids did whatever I say. "My momma crazy. We're going to do whatever the lady say." Like I was violent with my kids. Like I'll pull a knife on my kids, you know but I felt like that was the way you raise them. You know, you've got boys; you've got to be tough with them, so, you know, you can't let them be punks. "Boy, shut up. You over there crying like a little b-i-t-c-h." Because I was hard on them, I thought, like literally, because I had boys, like I'm not going to let them grow up to be punks. Like I was raising them correctly and I screwed them over. I didn't know and I really, honestly, I didn't care because I was an addict.

Now I'm harder. "You need to get a job. You need to get a job." "Call me when you get work. Boy, what's wrong with you? I'm not going to be taking care of you because I'm your mom. You need to go to Job Core. What's wrong with you?" "I need you to, you know, live life on life's terms, and stop hiding behind like drugs," you know, "You're just going to hang out at that pub?" My son is like, "no mom." I'm like "I can't tell." Because I once said to him, "If you lose that job, I'll..." So, their job...one son, his

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job calls me, like, “Ron didn’t come to work.” I’m like “What [chuckles]?!” So, they know I’m still that mom but they know my expectations of them are to be productive in life and get it together, tighten it up, tighten it up. Yep. Yep, they used to be in the papers, and cycling, and running. They don’t do that anymore. Either one of my sons, even when they got a job and now I’m trying to make them can keep it. It’s like, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, don’t leave. Don’t, don’t quit it.” I used to be terrified because I didn’t know what they were going to be. I didn’t know if they were going to get shot or where they were. Um, they used to go to parties and hang out. Like they don’t do none of that anymore. Um, they just don’t, and, um, I don’t have that fear anymore. So that’s gone. That part of their life is gone. So I know that God’s moving them to a new place, to something else. They know when I don’t approve of something they did because I tell them and when I approve, I tell them too. “I’m so proud of you. Oh, my God.” It’s like I tell them, “I’m really proud of you guys. You guys aren’t gang banging, and this, and that, and the other but you could just be doing better.”

Hopes for Children

I hope that my kids have a personal relationship with Christ Jesus, that they find a way to heal from all the past pains and hurts that I caused them, and that they can move beyond the things that have happened to them in their life, and to know that those things happened to them but that’s not who they are. My kids know these are my wishes for them. Yeah, my kids tell me all the time, “Mama, we know that what you were doing in that life don’t have nothing to do with us” and they know that because I tell them that all

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the time. They was like, “We already know that ain’t got nothing to do with us that’s you’re stuff.” I’m like, “Thank God.”

Parental Strengths and Limitations

My strength? I think my greatest strength as a parent is I already know everything that’s wrong. I already know everything on parenting is wrong. I can take that and can compare to like...I can...I’ve seen the results of it. So I can be like, “Okay, talking to them this way got this result. You don’t want to do that, Maya.” [Chuckles]. Like mostly it was my bad experience and stuff. I’ve learned from all my bad experiences. Like I’ve learned so many lessons. I go back and I think like, “My gosh.” That’s my strength is my past bad experiences. Another one of my strengths is that, um...like I’m the type of sister, it doesn’t matter. I don’t give up. I never give up. Like I just have this thing in me that I’m just not going to give up. So I’m not going to give up. So if I fail, I’m going to go find a better way of doing it. I might call somebody. I might call, I still call my parenting teachers and say, “Hey, this is what’s going on. This is what I need this” and they’ll say, “This is what you do.” Then I go and I do it and I call back, like, “Hey, it worked.” You know, so I never give up. I’m always trying to find a solution. I’m always trying to find a way of something. I’m limited by my past experiences as well because my past experiences are so, um, engrained into them, with the fear and the neglect and the abuse, and all that, that they’re coming but they’re like, you know, “Hey, mom, I’m still a little angry.” So like my past experience is also limiting.

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Influences on Parenting

Yea, being molested as a child influenced how I raised my kids, most definitely. When my kids were little, I didn't let nobody watch them. Didn't care who you were. If you weren't my mom or real close family member, my kids would not be watched. Matter of fact, when I started selling drugs, I was on welfare and my kids had a nanny. I paid a nanny. I was so terrified of something bad happening to them as kids, people molesting them, um, that if you weren't my mom and them, you weren't touching my kids. You weren't watching my kids. A stranger never watched my kids and then I finally hired a nanny. My kids was young and had a nanny for all four of them and she had a really clean house. I would give her food stamps, food, and everything needed to really take care of my sons. So, I just didn't trust people with my kids. Like I didn't care, like to this day I'm like that. Like to this day, like when older women try to come at them, I used to step in, like, "No, you ain't fittin' to be molesting my kid." Like I still had that mentality. Like, "You're not going to molest my son. You're not going to rape him of his childhood. You're not..." I was getting real indignant.

My kids just quit dating altogether. They know the women were a little older than them and they'd be like, "My mamma would lose her mind." I've always been like that, even like Ronnie is sixteen talking about, "Mommy, this woman, she touched us," and, "Where's she at?" And I would check her. "It's just not happening. Still it's my baby. You're not going to rape my kids." They didn't get it and I would say, "That isn't right. She's not going to come and take you though." So, that is one of the things that I didn't

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trust *anybody*. I did not care, anybody. I was real careful and the men that come in the house too that's why my sons ain't never got touched. So, definitely a big influence,

Well, then, the things that also influenced my interacting with my kids was my drug addiction, my lifestyle, my prostitution, and my gang affiliations. So those were the things that influenced it and so I taught my kids, they knew it was okay for mom to be out prostituting, using drugs, as long as I brought money home, and let them all get into gangs and every guy I had, was in a gang. So I let them know that I that was the influence I had on them on their life then.

Three and a half years ago I came and I told them, I was like, "Hey, guess what? Everything I ever told you was a lie," so we based our whole life on that and so that was kind of hard for them to take and so, now my influence is based on living by example, being productive, getting a job. I got off parole. I worked really often, never got in trouble. Like I got my license, got my insurance, paying my own bills, being responsible, you know, having a full-time job, going to college. Like now, those are the influences that I have on them. They don't get in trouble anymore, but they're just kind of like in limbo. They're just, they move from a troubled state to where I'm just here so hopefully they'll transition into being a productive citizen as well. So they're not doing what they used to do, okay? My cousins they, one has been in prison for murder, one for shooting at the police just stuff and like, so they have, yeah, they've been through some stuff because of me.

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Drug Addiction and Prostitution

My father is actually the one who gave me crack cocaine when I was eighteen. My father brought drugs up here from Chicago. We used to smoke just marijuana. My family, my brothers and sisters, you know, that's all we ever did. My dad, he says to me, he says, "Here, try this," and has me try it, and has my boyfriend try it, and has my best friend and her boyfriend try it and so then we get hooked. It was a love affair because it was instant gratification and it took away all of the pain. It took away all of the heartache. It just numbed everything but what it did is it numbed it instantly. So because I've always walked around in pain as soon as it numbed it, like I found that I was like, "Hey, I don't feel the pain no more" and now, not only did it numb the pain, you know, I've always felt powerless. So now it made me feel powerful because now everybody wants these drugs, now everybody wants me because I'm pretty and then I make money and everybody wants to hook up with me because I make all this money and like I'm able to make all this money and all these guys want my money. So then I became like a thousand dollar hooker now. So, I think like, oh, my God, like this is like now I have power but now I'm using the drugs as power to manipulate people, to make myself feel powerful.

Also, I get the opportunity to get back at and pay back some of the men for all the things they've done to me. So now I'm manipulating and I'm using them, and I'm dominating them and I'm making men do what I want them to do and, um, I'm loving it all and I turning tricks with them. Now, I'm really giving them what they want and so I'm just this powerful person. You know, I'm thinking I'm just like Queen Latifa and I'm just running around, doing all this stuff. I mean, I didn't realize it was destroying me at

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the time. But the thing that got me caught up was the numb and the power .that came behind drugs, and the fame. Like I became just famous, like, “That’s May-May,” you know. Like, “Ooh, I’ll walk you. I heard about you and I’m like for real?” People are afraid of me. People were in awe of me and all this stuff came with it, you know but at the same time there was a downside.

The downside was, um, like there was times when I was rendered powerless because a man overpowered me and raped me. There was a time when people used a lot of trickery to get me to do certain things. Um, there was times when the drugs had me so down and I needed to get it, that I was doing less than what my standards were to get it. Um, there was times when the drugs were [chuckles]...I wanted the drugs so bad, like when I ran out, like I’d have a...like if I’m running low I’d have a panic attack, “Oh, my gosh, I’m running low.” Pretty soon, then I’d become desperate. Um, [chuckles] it was just there was times when I’m like, “this drug is not really making me”...like I was thinking that it was making the pain go away, but it was masking it. So whenever I felt the pain I would freak out, like, “Oh, my God, I’m feeling stuff.” So whenever I’d feel stuff I would get ill.

Physically ill, mentally ill like I’m starting to feel and I would lose my mind to go get some drugs. I’d be like, “Look, I’m sick. I need my medicine and I would just freak out everybody. They’ll be like, “Here, girl,” because now I’m starting to feel it. So it tricked me. I’m thinking that it was healing things for me. Not. It was adding more problems. I was having problems, I was having problems, I was having problems. You know [chuckles]?

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Parenting Through Drug Addiction and Incarceration

I had my kids and I was embarrassed. They loved their mom, and were like, “We love you. What’s wrong with you momma?” I always tried to be with them and no matter you want, still try to do this, that, and the other but at the same time, um I’m in and out the drug life. Like either I was in prison or I’m there as their mom, or they moved in with me, or they moved in with my mom, or you know, it was something. It was like I wanted to give my kids what they wanted. They wanted to be with me so bad but, I mean, even using I would say, “Oh, I’m going to get an apartment.” So we’ll have an apartment for a month or two. It wasn’t long. But they wanted to be with me so bad that I mean, it was hard to tell them no. But then my kids wanted to be with me so bad, they started coming to the crack houses looking for me. Come in on the streets, like, “You know, I’m going to hang out with mom.” And it, and it was just, it was bad.

No. I never once have I ever, ever, ever lost custody of my kids. One of my son’s fathers tried to take custody of one of my sons when I was incarcerated. My son was old enough by then. He was like, “I don’t want to go with my dad.” And they’re like...well, you see, they’re like I haven’t done anything wrong because they [kids] had always been with my mother. Um, so I never lost custody of them. I never signed over custody of my kids. Um, never have like had a call from child protection or nothing like that, because, really, my mom just really had them. I told my kids, “Look, I love ya’ll but you need to be here and I love you enough to place you’re here because I loved my kids that much to

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where I left them there but I'd come back and forth, and I'd move in for a little bit, and I was kind of all over.

Parental Rewards and Pride

I think the most rewarding experience I had as a parent was being there to, um, watch my children's personalities develop. That was the most rewarding experience I've had. You know, in between the times when I was sober, I would listen to them, have conversation, and just, you know, tell stories, and ad lib. It was just really cool to watch my kids develop their own personality. I think the only other thing is, I taught my kids that, no matter how they felt, mad, sad, happy, or glad, they can always tell mom how they felt, even about me and they utilize that and I think that, since I instilled that in them, they still do it to this day, what mom, you know. One time one of my son's even told me, he's like, "Mom, you victimized us. Like we're victims." I mean, like they really say how they feel. I think that that helps them get through the pain and stuff so, I through that time, they express themselves, and say everything that I tell them about things [laughs].

Oh, what I'm most proud of as a parent is that my kids are able to see me, at my worst, like always using, like strung out, and to see me, just be totally successful, to like, see me on the other spectrum and not even, they don't even know that I'm not that person anymore. Like I'm so far removed from that person, and to get the respect from them today, like I didn't get that before. They used to give me like the street credit respect, like, "Yeah, my mom's cool," you know but today it's like, you know, they're so proud of me, and it feels good to know they're not ashamed of what I do anymore, they don't

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have to hide it or lie about me anymore. They don't have to be afraid or worried about me anymore, like that. That's it.

A Will to Live

What turned me around is that I ended up going to Columbus, Ohio. I just ran off. Didn't know anybody there and so there's a lot of bad things that happened down there. A lot of people were coming up dead, coming up dead but they were like missing. Like no one could find their bodies. They were doing a lot of killings there. I was caught up in some really bad drug stuff and I was right in the middle of it and I thought, "My goodness, I don't want to die like this," and I just started losing my zeal for the lifestyle. I just, I've always had a will to die. I never had a will to live since I was a little kid. That was the first time in my life I wanted to live, that I can say, "Oh, my gosh, I want to live." I used that one little piece in me, that one little inch of, ounce of will I had, and I just grew on it. I just built on that. Like I don't want to die like this.

Like I don't want my family not to know what ever, what happened to me. I began to make changes and find my way back to this state. I began to do what I need to do to get back here, um, barely made it out alive. Um, when I got back here, they didn't have any food on the bus, I didn't care. I just needed to get back. People were going to kill me because I knew too much. It was a lot and when I got back, I just kept building on it and I said that I want to change and so I knew that I needed to turn myself in [to the police]. So I said, "Go turn yourself in. You need to go back and take care of everything, undo all the damage." So, "You need to start with prison." So I knew I had to go to prison, so I walked in and I turned myself in, and when I walked in, you know, it was

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really ironic. He said, “Now you’ve got to save yourself. I was just about to stick this in here and put a warrant out for your arrest.” I had been gone a year. I turned myself in and when I went there [prison], I didn’t tell nobody that I was going to change. I didn’t say anything. I just did it. I just did it and it was the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life.

I utilized everything that they had, every program, every bible class, every book, everything that I had. I knew I had to relearn and learn new things. Everything that I had knew, I decided that I didn’t want to know it anymore; I want to know something different and so I started reading. I probably read about over 1,000 books, not even articles and things like that. I just read, and read, and read, and prayed, and read, and talked to guards, and people, and like, “Hey, how do you do this?” And I just never stopped. That was more than a blessing. That was grace. Like I turned to God. Like I cried. I just cried out to God and then I just told him what was wrong with me. I was angry and I just told him everything that was in my heart and I just gave him all of my stuff and I didn’t go to God like, “Oh, look at me now.” I came to him as I was. Like, “This is who I am. I know you’ve been calling me for years.” This is what you get and He said, “It’s okay” and he cleaned me up. That was the most amazing experience I’ve had in my life and he gave me favor and everything that I needed, everything that I needed to learn, God provided those books for me, I got a radio and music. Like I didn’t have to go anywhere. God said, “I will bring it to you.” He did that and more, and more [laughs].

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Relationship with Caregivers

When I was growing up, I was always closest to my mother. Always. My father made me feel uncomfortable. I can't remember if my father did things to me when I was a child or not but I always felt uncomfortable around my father. I know he tried to do some things to me when I was older. That I know for a fact. I did not like my father. I just actually some way forgave my father, Thanksgiving, when I went to Chicago. Yep. I totally forgave him and he knew, when I gave him that call before I came, and he began to cry. Like, God said, "Maya, you need to release him." Like I tried to kill my dad on several occasions. I tried to run him over with a car. I fought him. One time I took a Coke bottle and hit him, and busted his whole head open. I blamed my dad for giving me drugs. He tried to rape me. Like, "You was not a dad." Like, "You weren't a pop. You weren't my dad. Are you serious?" Well, now I called him, "Hey, pops, what's up?" You know, he was just like shocked, like. I used to call him, and cuss him out, and talk crazy to him, and couldn't stand him! I mean, my mom was like, "You need to figure that out." I would just dog my dad. I hate him. Not anymore.

When I was a kid, one day my dad came over and bought everybody presents but he didn't buy me one. So my dad told me, as a little girl...I wanted this doll called...I'll never forget, they're called Baby That away and she crawled. My dad never bought me that doll. So, I hated him for that for so many years, too many years ago. I'd say I was about, that probably I was like three or four. So now I'm eighteen and my dad says, "Hey, I'll buy you this...I'll buy you a car because I didn't give you that baby doll back then." I was still holding him on for that baby doll. So he buys this car for me. So he told

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me to come over and get him because he's freaking out, people are trying to kill him. I did not know anything about crack cocaine, never seen it in my life. So I go over there and I'm watching these people, just weird, and standing around, and just acting strange and my dad was paranoid. So I'm like, "Dad, come on, just get the car. I called my mom. Like wow, these people are smoking and stuff," and da, da, da.

When I was a child, my mom was my best friend. I always felt loved by my mother. She's my best friend. I felt love. I felt secure. I always felt secure with my mom. I felt special, very important. My mother, um [chuckles], was my enabler. Like I was her baby. Like when I first started getting high, my mom would do anything, give me all of her money, just stretch herself to the limit, break herself. Like I would steal for my mom. My mom would just... "Oh, my baby," because I was spoiled. Like my mom and my dad like totally spoiled me. Like I was rotten and so, my mom didn't understand it. All she knew is she wanted to help her baby, and she thought that giving it to me would help me. Well, one day my mom said [chuckles], uh, "No, I'm not going to do it anymore. I'm not paying for this stuff." She was just like, "No. That's not what I'm supposed to be doing," and she just gave me over to God and I just kind of, um, would get mad at her. I would get mad at her, and I would do things, and, you know, take stuff out of her house, and rob it, and just whatever, because I'm mad at her because now you're not doing what you're supposed with me.

Childhood

When I was upset as a child I'd hide in the closet in the dark. I would pretend to be somebody else. I'd put like a shirt on my hair and act like I was white. What I think

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was the worst. That I was going to run away. I think the biggest [chuckles] thought I had, that I actually went through with I wanted to be invisible. Two, “When I’m bigger, I’m going to get everybody and I literally took revenge, like on all my brothers and sisters. I had revenge in my heart as a little girl. “When I get bigger, I’m going to kill everybody that ever hurt me” I did. I was just literally was like, “I’m going to kill everybody,” and I really tried to hurt my brothers and sisters because of what they did to me. Then they had me beaten when I went back to Chicago with my mom and my step father, I went to go live in Chicago, I just straight up, “I’m going to kill that bastard.” Just when I got to Chicago, he was already dead. Like you can see, he’s already dead. He was already dead. He was already dead. Yeah, I wanted revenge, be invisible, and just always running away. I just wanted to get away. Like I...that’s how I became a runner. The drugs made me feel invisible. You know, I can straight and kill myself. I can hide within myself. You know, I can be Maya way down deep. Like, “Ain’t nobody going to ever hurt you again.” Like, um, I was telling you, I saw a great therapist. I had gone into Chicago. I got some pictures of myself when I was little. She told me that I had put them out to see. She told me to get all these pictures of me, I’ll show you, out there [points to living room] and I put the little girl behind my adult self and, um, and I protected me. So I don’t have to worry about my little girl. So she told me to put the pictures up like that and after she said put the pictures up so you were protecting them, hovering over. So I had to put them behind. And, um, I wasn’t connected to the pictures at first but I’m starting to get connected to them, because, like she said, expose them, put them out there and I’m starting to see that those pictures of me, that is who I am. She’s helping me integrate

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because I disassociated myself when I was being molested. That was a part of me creating those other selves, um, by disassociation.

Losses

So, um, I go to prison this last time and I'm...like my mom had a diabetic coma, and somehow she had a stroke and so when I went to prison this time I said, "You know, God, um, I just need one thing. I just need my momma to see me in recovery" and, um, my mom is like, "I am so glad, just so grateful." She was like, "Like I couldn't do nothing else but give you to God. I'm the best child she's ever had now. I love my mom. She had a stroke. She lives with my little sister. Like they don't pay her. They give her money but they don't have any insurance for her. She's getting older. She's 66. So, I'm going to pay for her insurance for her, um...like my mom likes where she at, so I don't try to move her. Plus I do whatever I want and do whatever, whatever. But my mom likes it because my...her grand—my nieces and stuff are there. So I don't get into it. She's happy where she's at. I just make sure that whatever she needs, I'll give it to her.

It [mom's stroke] was before I was in prison and that's when ran in and out, but my mom had a stroke and I remember calling my mom one day and she was crying. I remember, I was being high and I just knew something was wrong. I dropped my drugs and this other girl was with me. I'll never forget this and I love her to this day and we ran about a mile and a half to my mom and I kept trying to tell my sister that something's wrong, take her to the hospital, nobody really would, whatever. Finally found out my mom had a stroke and she couldn't say my name. She couldn't remember me and it took me...and I ran from...it took me like three months to even go see her because she couldn't

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talk and she couldn't say my name and I couldn't see my mom. When I finally did go see her, um, all my mom said was, "What took you so long to come see me?" She always fixes my clothes because I'm like the neatest dresser, I was the fanciest dresser ever and she started fixing my clothes like she always does and I just started crying [Crying while talking about the experience]. Um, then when she asked me do I still love Queenie [mom's nickname] I thought "my mom's back," and it was really, really hard and I couldn't deal with it and I ran off. I went Indianapolis because I just couldn't take it no more. My son was facing a second-degree murder. My other son had shot in a crowd and shot someone. My mom had a stroke; my dad had a lung collapse. I had just had a baby in prison, and I just gave her up, my only daughter. My sister got an aneurism and I just ran. I couldn't take it. I just ran. It came so sudden.

Daughter Born in Prison

I had a daughter in prison. Um, I didn't know I was pregnant. I had, um, been raped a few times before. Um, I know I had to turn myself in, so people in the neighborhood knew. There were these men who were drug dealers and slash gang bangers, um, who, um, had a habit of kidnapping me. That was their way of loving me. Like I was their woman, their piece, or whatever. And I was the type of woman that I would spend lots of money on drugs. I spent a hundred, two hundred, three, four hundred dollars on drugs at all times. So, they know I'm coming to prison. They told these men were, they were raping me. They were raping me. They were taking sex of me. and so a guy ended up being stabbed and just running back, trying to rape me and then they were just like having sex with me, they're having their way with me. So they knew I was going

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to go to prison. I get there and I'm just sick, throwing up and then this, and the lady's like, "You're pregnant. "Pregnant?" "Stop playing." She gives me the heartbeat and, um, my niece had had a baby, and she never did drugs, smoked cigarettes, drink, nothing and like her baby died in ten days. I thought, why God? And here I am, out there...the worst of the worst and I've got a baby in me. So, um, I prayed about it, went to the chaplain, looked in a bible, did what I needed to do, like, "God, what do I do?" So I gave her to my niece. My niece suddenly...at first I told her, "Now that I'm pregnant..." they was like, "Mm, we don't believe you." I said, "Okay." So I was like six months, I took a picture. They was like, "Whoa, you're pregnant." So, I...my niece, I be kind of like, um, so that was when her baby had died and they were grieving and all that and my doctor didn't agree and he thought like, "Okay, Maya, you're high. You're tripping."

When I took the picture, I called home one day, and they said, um, "What do you mean you're pregnant?" I was in the process of, um, trying to find an adoption agency to use for her. Two days after she was born, they had to come get her, so they came and picked her up from the hospital. She [niece] had her and I had a lot of guilt. I didn't want the baby. Uh, hate...um, then again, I wanted her, because a lot of people said, "Yes, you should get your baby," and I would take her back and then I would give her back and I just kept taking her back, and kept taking her back. I searched my soul, really searched myself and I said, um, "I understand. Um, I don't want to be a parent. I don't want to learn to be a parent and, um, and I don't want to have that responsibility." I had to get honest with myself. I'm brutally honest. It wasn't easy but it was the truth and so I decided to let her stay [with her niece] and I don't get involved. I just stay out of their

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lives and how she raises her and it's okay. I'm trying to give her complete adoption, let her adopt now but

it was a tough road for me to decide to be honest with myself and listen to everybody but I stopped listening to people and I start listening to me. She's five now. Um-hum. Yep. So I parent, you know, from a distance a little bit. You know, I don't really do a whole bunch. But, um...I just don't get in their business.

Living in Recovery

It works better to just live my private life here and just let everybody else do their thing because I have a different lifestyle. Like I'm a born again Christian, I'm sanctified. I don't smoke anymore, cigarettes. I don't drink. I don't go out. So I have to protect my recovery. I have to protect my gifts that God has given out to me, protect everything that I have at all cost and sometimes my family is the ones who will destroy it. So I separate myself from them, but at the same time I'm connected to them but they know my lifestyle. Like no one hardly ever comes over. Like I don't get visitors because I don't need it. I'm checking pockets when you come in, everything. "What you got, don't need to tell me? What you got in your pockets? Take it out. Throw it away. I'm calling the police, because I don't want to deal with it." I don't even play. I don't even...I don't play. All across the board, calling 9-1-1. I don't play no more, I'm calling the police [laughs]. I don't even play with people today. So most of the time I'm by myself. I'm okay with that [chuckles].

I go to AA meetings. I go to NA meetings. Um, I have a sponsor. I work the 12 Steps Program. Then I have three sponsees that I sponsor. Um, I am involved in [an

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agency helping women escape prostitution]. I just couldn't graduate for a couple years with my job, and flow and all that was in the way but I think I'm going to graduate this time. I spoke at their graduation last time. Um, so I'm involved with them. I go to the Law School's re-entry clinic for women just coming out of prison and I still go to that. I'm in their newsletter. I still have to take the Parenting program. I do speaking for them, whatever they need me to do I just, volunteer and do it. Yeah, so I did all that. I've been in books, and magazines, and been on the news. I have been an author and stuff. I do articles everything that I do, so it feels great. You've got to be careful. Other people could try to come and molest us. I always protect myself, but one thing I like about me is I'm very honest. Lot of guys could try to come at me and I could just totally be honest, like, you know, "I'm just going to be honest with you. This is, um not happening. Basically I have a spiritual love affair with my God and with myself.

I've been working with several therapists over a course of, I'd say since 2007. Like I just immediately got into talking to a therapist, counselors you know. I have a social worker I talk to still, and this therapist. I just continue to stay with my support group. I mean, I'm probably...one who's been there...like, "You've been in this support group for like two years," um, as far as like this one group and it's like you know, it just works for me. You know, it just helps me. Um, I went to go see my parole agent one day. He's like, "Wow." and I'm like, "I'm still doing everything right." He's like, "I am so proud of you!" It's like, "I'm still doing everything I was doing. I mean, why not?, you know." I don't think...I personally think yet at it's time. I thought it was but God says, "Not yet. Um, not yet, Maya." So, when it's time for me to, um, move from being the

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student to the teacher, he'll let me. It's all I had at one point. Like God stripped me of everything.

Relationship with Boyfriend

My boyfriend left me. When he left me a couple weeks ago, he didn't even tell me he was going out. He just was kind of figured out a way to, just kind of leave and right now, like anything that man needs like I would give it to him. Like I would help him. Like I will take him back. Like I have forgiveness for that man. Like immediately like I understand. Like God has given me a deeper understanding of this man. Like I understand why he left. Like God gave it to me and then my God also said, "Maya, he's going to come back." He's got some issues from his past and he's afraid of commitment, he don't really want to know it. God is telling me and so is pastors and all those people, "Like that's your husband." Um, I just have to just be still and stand. So, when God decide that he wants to bring him back to me, that's God's choice. I was like, "Okay, God, it's your will but right now I'm not trying to see it" Like tell me right now, like oh, I'm liking this because he kind of siphoned my spirit when he begins to, he likes to regress. Like we'll be going on the same track and everything is good. It's like, well, and then he'll just regress and he keeps doing that. So, I can't do nothing with him. I'm really glad that he is where he's at but then God can work on him, do what he needs to do and if God decides to bring him back, then he'll come back and he'll be ready to take his place in this relationship. I'm not confused about the fact that there's him, there's me, then there's us. See, and then when us broke up it didn't matter; I still had me. So you know, there's still Maya. So, I mean, I just keep the feeling. Every time he sees me, he's like,

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“Girl, you just get better and better.” Like I was affected. I don’t want nothing but the feeling. Yeah, it’s like what do I do? Like I’m in an interdependent relationship. There was him, there was me, and there was us. He did him and when he did him it broke up us but I still will do for me.

Relationship with Ex-Husbands

Like right now that’s my ex-husband, my first husband. He was just on the phone. Like he wants me so he can come back but maybe one of the things is that I have to make amends with some of the things that I did in my past but there’s too much pain there. There’s too much, I mean, there’s nothing we can do with that. I mean, he wants me, so. He’s the father of my kids and he saved me. We married in 1994. He just found me and saw what I’m doing and now he wants to see me. I don’t know, I just tell people the truth. Like it’s not going to happen, so.

Somewhere between 2003 and 2006 I was married to Kenzie and he was like the worst. He actually ended up stabbing me in my back and, um, the blade broke off in my back and it went like a little bit around in my, um, stomach and, the knife was actually broke off. He tried to kill me and he went to jail for robbery, in and out the story, running from him, and then getting back with him, whatever. I think one of the most fearful things about me getting out of prison is like I don’t want to go back to Saul City because I thought he was going to kill me. I just try to keep tabs on him and I would do it through his cousin’s girlfriend. I was really always scared all the time. I was going to go underground and change my name, I was so scared I remember at one point. So then I finally, called her and said, “Hey...,” you know, because she gave me tabs on him. “I’m

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really doing well,” this, that, and the other, “Where is he?” She said, “Maya, um, you don’t ever have to worry about him coming at you again because he’s bed ridden or something because he drunk too much and he can’t come after you.” I laid all that fear down, like I was okay. Then I felt relief because he can’t come after me anymore. He’s in Belamy Heights and he’s like bed-ridden and he’s just like bad. I mean even though he’s bad he still continues drinking and using drugs. It gave me consolation to know that I was free.

Yeah. He was very I’m talking like very abusive, like stabbing, like kidnapping me, raping me, like stalking me, like, um, beating me, yeah, like he didn’t care if the police are there or not. Like he’ll kick the door in and kill me. Like he’s like the one that’ll just like come and stab you, like doesn’t care if police are around. Like he was one of them. Yeah. That’s survival. I think the reason why I’ve survived is because honestly, I think the reason why I’ve survived is because I didn’t want to survive. I wanted to die. My God had mercy on me and he had grace and he protected me from death, and told death be still because he had a purpose for me. God didn’t want me to die. You know, I think he had a purpose for me. [Crying]. He wanted me to know that Maya has a purpose for you, that there is a reason to be alive. I didn’t know that and I believe that God saved me because he didn’t want me to die not knowing that he had something in store for me, and that I was loveable, even though I’ve done all these things. So he spared me. He told death to be still because I have a purpose and I didn’t want to just die, I wanted to be invisible. That’s all I ever wanted to do. When I was a kid I just wanted to be invisible. I just always wanted to die like that, and never, ever. I never wanted to be alive. I can’t

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remember. I can't breathe. [Takes a few deep breaths] I never wanted to live! [Crying] It felt like I had to live in that place, and that was the first time I ever wanted to live. I was probably like 38 years old. So [sighs, breathes out] Yeah. [Short pause] I'm okay. God spared me. Then not only did He spare me, um, He preserved me. Like my brain, like He's probably thinking like I'm a...I'm a genius. Um, I'm not a loser. He spared me physically. He just preserved me. So, um, yeah, I live for him for those reasons.

Spiritual Life Journey

He's [God] the only one that let me know, and that was the first time, I ever felt love, like real love, like attainable love. Through all the pain, through all the hurt, through all the madness, like God's the only one who pierced through that to let me know that He loves me, and that I was loveable. He showed me love. I fell in love with Him and then when I fell in love with Him, he said, "Now I'm going to tell you who you are" and so then He got me to fall in love with myself and then, when I did that, he said, "Now, I need you to love others." So that's how it worked, with God. So I have a really, *really* super close relationship with God, like a very close... [Breathing out slowly with deliberation]. When God changed me as a person, I thought, how do I explain to people? I said, "Well, just, um, let me just be an example," and so I just, I share it by being an example. I carry the message by living it. I think the most important thing is that the word of God abides in me, like grows in me and I abide in it. Like the word of God, and God himself, has taken up residence in my heart and in my life and so he just radiates through me. I live, I think I breathe, the word is alive and it brought me to life.

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The word of God was imparted into me and brought life into my bones, into my mind, my members and because that light is in me now, there's no longer death and so, when I speak to people like I'm always encouraging, and loving. When I see people and tell people about my past, they don't like see it. "Like I don't even see you being like that," but then, people who know me, they're like, "What the heck happened to you?" So, I carry the message through my lifestyle. It's a lifestyle. The Narcotics Anonymous, the spiritual principles, I practice them in all aspects of my life, just like the biblical principles. I practice these. Now, I'm not perfect. Honest to God, I'm a work in progress but for the most part like I practice patience. I practice tolerance. I practice love, you know, forgiveness. Um, like when my guy left me, immediately I went to God and I said, "You know, I didn't have total forgiveness for him, for this," and I wanted to still seek revenge and God said, "Maya, if you have total forgiveness, you wouldn't be seeking revenge. You'd walk in forgiveness." So I'm like, "Oh, gosh, now I've got to walk in forgiveness." So he told me, I have to walk and live the very things of the word of God or the very things that are in it, spiritual principles that are in Narcotics Anonymous. For example, my goals like I set goals, I set for like two, three years ago. Like I reached those goals, you know. Um, my weight loss goals, like I already lost 40 pounds in a year. Then my main goal was to get toned. Another goal of mine was to save \$10,000. Like that was our [boyfriend] goal, but if still, if he didn't want to do it, I still do it and right now, he walked away. What did God do? I had five and a half of that saved in a week after the brother left. I worked at it. I do a lot of fasting. I lose a lot of weight by fasting. Then I do a lot of fasting. I lose my own by fasting, not going to work as hard. I fast and so now

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I've changed so much about me, but I needed to also apply it the physical and the spiritual principles of narcotics anonymous and to apply it to all areas of your life. Well, I was lacking in two areas. I was lacking it in my financial department and I was lacking it in my eating and my weight and so God said I have freedom in all that. I have victory over all this. So why am I not leading a victory? How come I'm not staying triumphant in these areas?

So what I did while I was in prison, I researched *everything*. *Everything* for like a year and a half and so I have the knowledge. God said, "You have it. You just need to push it into practice," and so I did. So when he left, what I did is I just cut out the cable, cut out some things, went to Orlando, I had \$250, which is fine. Then I went to my job and said I needed some extra hours. They said, "Hey, come in every other Sunday." Um, just cut down on some things, went to some food shows, got some things, and was like, "Maya, just live off what you have," went and got some free hygiene products, things like that, brought it in my home. Um, "You don't need to go buy nothing. You have everything you need." So any money like come in, I pay my bills. When I'm done paying my bills, anything that's left over that I don't need, I don't just buy unnecessary stuff. I take it and I stick it in the, um...in my bank account. So I have three bank accounts. I have one where my deposits come in. I have one where I have a Money Market account. That's my savings that I never, ever touch and then I have one that's a checking, I call it my "flex check." That's where I'm moving stuff around. Like if I want to get some extra gas or something, I've got a couple hundred dollars in there that I can take. I never didn't have that when he [boyfriend] was here and I tried to get there but immediately after he

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left, and God was just like, “Here.” So, I started practicing that in my life and immediately, I found some freedom. So now I’m starting a 90-day toning program. Like I want to get toned. I want to get fit. I want to do that. I said I wanted to practice, um, better eating habits. I’ve gotten it all down except for two things, candy and fried chicken. I’m telling myself, “God, you know what I can’t keep making excuses for that.” So I got candy and I ate some chicken wing there, and I said, “You know what God? Like this ends today; like this is it. Like I’m not going to do it anymore. Like I need to find some freedom from that because I don’t feel in bondage to every time I see fried chicken, I think I’ve got to eat it or candy.” So anytime I feel like I’m in bondage or something, like I know I can break it because if I can break a drug addiction, and a sex addiction and all that, and I can change my life, I can definitely stop eating candy and chicken. So, I mean, I just look for freedom. You know, why, I just feel like even in our [boyfriend] relationship, like there was no freedom in that. God takes anything that’s not like of Him. He was not like that and maybe one day he will return. I don’t know when he will return. In the meantime, I’m still going to keep the feeling. I’m still going to move forward.

I’m still don’t live outside of my means. I do what I need to do because I developed a program, um, called, um, Alter Restoration and I did *everything*. I have to just show it to you, and people where like...“Wait a minute, you did that.” Like I did everything. Like every piece of paper needed to be filled out, like the application, everything for the county program for people coming out of prison. It took me two years to develop that program. God gave me the vision and I did exactly what God did. I’m talking about every piece of paper that you need, have, the schedule, the homework

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assignments. Um, I developed like 70 something groups, um, financial empowerment groups, life skills groups, um, things, just all types of stuff I developed and they're all based on the word of God. That program is just there 'til God tell me otherwise. So it's just in there.

I did it, I typed it up. God said, "This is what I want you to do." I did it and I did what he wanted me to do, and I just left it there now, 'til he's ready. So, a lot of the times I just do have to do what he say, and I don't understand why I'm doing it. The same thing with my finances. like I was reading. I felt like I was being moved, like to read. I was like, "Why am I reading this? This is so tedious. I'm tired of reading, but I just mostly, I just kept my spirit was hungry for it and I read everything I could.

I've never been healthier. I'm as healthy as I've ever been. Like anything natural, natural products, you know, to clean my skin, bathing, um, cleansing programs, all that stuff, um, I just learned how everything, I don't know, and it just works. My weight goal is successful. People at my job are like, "You're just getting better and better." They laughed at first, "Ha, ha," you know, and now they're looking at me like, "I can't believe that girl lost 40 pounds. She's all looking good." I'm still dealing with the money thing. Like I bring my food. So, like I don't care if I have to bring a can of corn; I'm not going to keep buying food and wasting my money. Bring a can of green beans. I don't care. Bring some pieces of bread and some Miracle Whip. I'm not going to keep spending my money, buying food outside or eat out all the time. I bring my big old thin bag, and like, "Ha, you got your big" and they laughed at me and laughed at me but, hey, I got some freedom. So, it's okay. I might not do things the way people think it should be done but

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I'm not supposed to either because if I did everything the way everybody else did it, I'd still be in the same situation I was in before. So I'm okay with that.

Family Traditions and Values

Well, no there aren't any kinds of family traditions my family celebrated. I remember just thinking on my family as drinking, partying that type of thing. I do Kwanza. Like that's my own stuff though. Like I do that, like nobody else in my family does. Like I celebrate Kwanza.

Um, I try to get involved in like black history month or, um, Martin Luther King, Jr. Like I want to go hear somebody speak or like [sighs] my family just kind of hangs out with each other and goes to pubs and, smokes marijuana, plays dominoes, um like I don't do that stuff with them. Yeah, they probably just hanging out, doing whatever.

My family consists of me and I mean, they [family of origin] value like the lifestyle and the drugs. Their belief is, you know, you get some money, you're going out there and you hustle, you do what you need to do. My values and beliefs are in just living a honest life, um, living a productive life, living a peaceful life. I value change, like always evolving and changing. I'm just fine, just always discovering, you know, and rediscovering myself. I'm into that. So, like I have a different value system than they do now and I value the word of God. I value my relationship with God and my faith. I value those spiritual principles of narcotics anonymous. Um, those people are more my family and my church family, and my Narcotics Anonymous members are more of my family. They're my closer family. They know more about me intimately than my [birth] family, like I'll call them before I call anybody. I'll call somebody from church or somebody

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from my support network or something before I call anybody in my family because my family doesn't understand my process. It's not like they don't care but they don't understand it.

My family, like they call me for help. I talk to them all the time. It's just I don't hang out with them. Uh, like I go see them. You know, like "Hey, how y'all doing? I've always been a outcast all my life. Always and they always picked on me. I've always been an outcast, so being this way doesn't bother me. Like my kids are so used to me not being around all the time, that people can live right down the street and they won't come see me and then, I'm always busy and they know that you just can't pop up at my house and just think, come hang out and lay up. So they already know I've got some real good boundaries going on. I'm like if people come over to my house it makes me nervous. They're kind of like okay. It makes me nervous.

Supportive Kin

I think I'm closest to my little sister and my mommy. I know that I can go to any of them. Like if I'm going through something, because I've changed so much, I can just count on them, like they're there. My little sister, like people will like freak out, like "What's wrong with her?," you know. They want me just to stay the same as I was. My little sister will say, "I don't know what you're doing and how you got there, just whatever you're doing, keep doing it." I have a lot of family in Chicago. I'm just now starting to reach out to them. Like the people in Chicago knew I existed [chuckles] but nobody ever seen me. Like they knew I was going to prison. "She ran out of state, but she unstable." I never went to family reunions. I was just over there for the first time in July

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and they actually asked me to pray and speak over the whole family. I could not believe I was so broke by that. Like I was never around. So people now they call me for advice. Um, they look up to me, my family. Um, they have respect for me now. My extended family, is now, I'm getting closer to them whereas like I would hide from everybody because I didn't want anybody to know what was going on but at the same time, having that relationship back then makes it easier for me to live the way I live today.

Nieces and Nephews

I'm the best auntie in the whole entire world. Like I can have on a \$500 outfit and I will like get on my knees and play with my nieces and nephews. I respect little people relationships. When you're twelve and under you are part of my little people crew. They just love auntie. When they see me they just, "Auntie! Auntie!," and freak out. I bring sugar and [chuckles] let them do whatever they want. I just play with them. I have a whole bunch of nieces and nephews.

Socioeconomic Climate During Childhood

I grew up back early '70's [chuckles], um, Chicago. Seen a lot of violence. So, I mean, I was already predisposed to the lifestyle, just growing up in Chicago. You know, um, it was just a matter of time and not only was I predisposed because of my environment, I was a product of my environment. I mean, it was normal in my environment, in my community to drink, to be drunk, falling down. It was normal to see Aunt Anita get smacked, you know, for her to smack you back, all the times she done cut Uncle Travis, and he's drunk again. You know, that was normal.

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Like I didn't know nothing, like I didn't even know that, it took one of my first cellmates in prison said, "Do you know that men...all men don't hate women?" I said, "Nuh-uh." Like it was normal for women to be out prostituting like I seen it all the time, like people hustling. Like that was the norm for me. So, for me, to do what I did, I'm not even surprised anymore, now that I'm out of it. I'm like, I don't feel that bad because, I mean, a lot of that had to do with my environment. I'm a product of my environment. We were talking about that in counseling now [chuckles].

Education of Community About Sexual Mistreatment

I think the best way to educate people about sexual mistreatment is to find the people who have actually been sexually mistreated, to educate them, um, not to get statistics or whatever, I think get somebody who actually survived it, who lived it, and to go out and to speak, to go into the highways and the byways, and then the crevices where people are actually getting molested at, or sexually mistreated, not to be going to some seminar where everybody rich is sitting there and they want to donate some money. That doesn't help. You need to get out there and get dirty and you need to hit the streets. You need to hit them where they go to shelters at, where are they going to get free food at or, you know, places where they frequent, not to put yourself in danger but to get out there and you need to get in there. I believe that is what God is doing for me. Like God is like why do I just keep getting put in these situations where everybody is messed up. Like God is like where the drugs are. It's like, "I need you to get in there." You know, because who's getting the message from way over there? So have the folks who have walked those experience and handled it get in there. Don't wait for them to come to you because

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they might not never get there. You've got to get down in there, and you've got to get your hands dirty, and get those tennis shoes muddy. You might have to get a little gear in on them or whatever but you've got to get up in there. You've got to go out there in the streets where the people are. You have to because some of them can't get to you, to where the service is so you've got to go where they are.

Stop Sexual Mistreatment of Women and Children

I think the best way to encourage people to stop harming women and children sexually is, um, through love. I think the world is just one big sore just waiting to be healed. Right? And I think that if people who hurt who are hurting people have been hurt themselves. So them people have to be loved now. I mean, these people are part of their environment and it just keeps going on, and on, and on. Instead of always pointing the finger and making them feel like they're the scum of the earth, or whatever, because of what they did, I mean, you have to love all the people who were victimized but you've got to also love all people who are perpetrators instead of making them seem like they're the root of all the problems. No, these people are hurt as well. They did wrong even the people who molested me like they did me wrong. They should not have done what they have done, but, still, somebody had to do something to them. Somebody got to 'em like that. So I think that for me, that's just for me, I think that people need to be not only loved but they need to be educated. You know, and education, giving people information, letting them know that there's other alternatives out there. People need to have that. They need to know some people don't even know that there's an out, there's a way out. They think this it now. I thought that this was it, this is what I'm going to do forever.

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What Community Should Know about Parenting

If I could communicate anything to my community about my experiences as a parent I would want to talk to the teens and the children whose parents aren't parenting them correctly, to let them know that there's other people out there who are willing to help you, that you can still come out of this, and survive, and be okay, and still be successful in spite of what your parents are doing or not doing. I would want to be able to go in and have, um, stuff in the schools in these at-risk schools, alternative schools, and have groups where these kids can come and talk about the things that's going on with their parents, or lack of because they may be selling dope, or out there strung out, or whatever. These kids need to know, it don't matter what your parents are doing; you still can make it. Like Jesus still wear his cross for you, for your momma that sold all the food stamps. This is where you can go, get you some food to feed your little brothers.

Things like that, I think. That's the message that I want to get across because that's the generation that needs to be saved right now because for me looking, that's the generation that rules it. For African American people, we're losing them. They're younger and younger, going into the prison system. They're younger and younger, getting pregnant, and just out there. So somebody needs to give them this message, like "You can't change what's going on with your parents but you can definitely change what's going on with you but you are not rendered powerless because of what your parents are doing." You can tell them, separate yourself from what your parents is doing. I don't care if your momma is a dope fiend, she a dope fiend. That ain't got nothing to do with you.

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Case Study #16 – Octavia

Octavia is a 50-year old grandmother of four grandchildren. She has two boys and two girls who were raised by her mother, sisters, and brothers until they were teenagers when they were returned to Octavia. Her uncle molested her as a child.

My oldest son is 30-years old, my oldest girl is 28-years old, and the next girl is 26-years old and my baby boy is 22-years old.

Experience of Sexual Mistreatment – Childhood

My childhood was kind of dark because every summer we used to go to my, um, auntie's house, my dad's sister house. I be staying with her. Her daughter was a year older than me and baby sister was about five and I was older. I was about seven, or eight, or stuff like that. My uncle (auntie's husband) started coming around and started touching on us, put his big mouth over mine, ugh, ugh, just, so I used to take my baby sister all the time. I used to hold her when we go to sleep, you know, so, the boogeyman wouldn't get her and stuff. Then I'd take that home with us, and still hold her, and go to sleep with her, so the boogeyman won't get her. Every year we've got to go up there, and then I'll start going up stuff. I start telling him that I'll take it to protect her and it was like that 'til I got about, ah, whoa, 13 probably. I think 14, that's probably when I started drinking, probably and this going on every year, coming up there. I say to them two years ago my auntie died. No, she died last year, in, ah, April or May. I went up there and I seened (sic) him at the funeral and he had enough nerves, after the funeral, to come around by my house. I was outside and I was I was drunk and he tried to get me to come over his house. I just had bad memories, flashes and stuff. I went and I bought me some drugs. I was

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drinking more. I got behind the wheel. I must have ran into the building that was right there. They had a speed bump, and I don't know, I just ran into it and everything's went downhill from there, I couldn't see nothing. I ended up here. Yeah. Yep, it was like, it had to be May, about this time too. Yep. I think seeing him triggered some feelings that's what happened, because I stopped through Michigan, stayed with my daughter a couple weeks, and then got into it with her, accused her of being with my man. I mean, I was drunk. I was just out of my head. I know she ain't going to forgive me for that but she have forgiven me but, yeah. I was out of my head. She wouldn't ever. You know, it was me and from there, that's when I came to [this state], because I would just have to get away from everything, to not lose myself.

Then my baby sister, she started sucking her finger. You know, and she don't remember that today. She don't even remember it. I was glad she didn't remember that because I had brought it up to her. I didn't say anything to nobody because I was so shame, and quiet, shy, and everything. I really was so shy that I...you know, how you look at people, you be thinking people know you done done something? I was really quiet. I used to hide [chuckles] sometimes. I went to school. I was shy. I didn't want nobody looking at me or nothing. I was just always hiding, when I get a chance. Would be a lot of people and stuff. Everybody would go to a party with the family and stuff. My dad and them would go. I don't see nobody around but and we had music. I remember this one time we went to this place with my daddy and them, his sister and them had got together, his brothers, sisters, and stuff and they had rented this hall out and we came in. The kids came in and the music was playing. This is what I remember. It was bars back

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there but you couldn't see it. We came in. The music, we start dancing. The minute I heard or seen my father, and sisters, brother, cousins, and them over there, I froze. I don't think I danced again. My teen years I didn't dance. My 20 years I think I got 30-something, I started trying to move. I had my kids like, "Oh, mom, you can't dance, oh you can't sing." Huh, they just didn't know.

Effects of Sexual Mistreatment

It seemed like if I wasn't drinking or drugging I would have been really overprotective of my kids but I did talk to my daughters and them and told them to let me know. You know, this is when they was little and stuff. They was very outspoken, you know. And they used to tell me. But when they got older I found out they was lying to me about having sex—my oldest one, not having sex, because he had an infection in the tubes and was lying. They became liars and stuff. So, if anything happened to them, you know, in their teens, they weren't going to tell me because they was ignorant. I think they was like, "She'll believe whatever I say. She ain't going to notice. No, it'll be better like that."

When I got to having kids and stuff, you know, I just got loose like it was okay. It was okay then. You know, to have sex. Yeah, but it took me a long time. I was like...I [chuckles]...I don't know, really. I had...I had three kids, and I really didn't enjoy it. I didn't, 'til I was 26 years old. That was the first time I enjoyed it. [sex] I remember. And, um...

Um...but I, sometimes...if I'm sober and having sex, I'm very uncomfortable. I was very uncomfortable. It was like nothing there, no...nothing. I think that come from

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being...just being closed up in a...in a place. And it stuck with me when I got grown, when I'm sober. So when I'm drunk, it wasn't no problem. I can take anything then. I can get...get...get it over with and be acting like I'm having fun. You know, it didn't bother me. But yep, not having it or whatever, when I was sober some days, I was shamed. I was like, wow. Then I didn't never talk to anybody about those experiences. I have a psychiatrist now. I talk to him. I've been talking to him [Short pause] for about three months now. Other than him, no, I don't talk about it to nobody else. We be having groups and meetings. I still won't come out and I just went through my life with my eyes closed. Staying. You know, I had a friend, a good friend and we was together for a couple years but, you know and he could support my habit. I used to get drunk. First, I had me a baggy some, and I smoked that, and I would...you know, most of the times I went behind his back to these different mens, um, getting money to get that [drugs], while he didn't know [chuckles].

Intergenerational Sexual Mistreatment

My niece, she's 13 years old and she came out about, ah, my younger brother messing with her and he paying for it now. He paying for it because the system won't leave him alone. He is a sex offender, a registered as a sex offender. She was like 3, 4 and she was trying to tell me and my sister but my sister, she had a attitude. She kept tell my niece, she say, "Bitch go to bed! you still up!?! Bitch go to bed!" I'm telling you, one time I really heard her say it. She was really trying to tell us and she didn't want to go to bed. She just crying, went like this and stuff. We used to go all the time and leave her, leave her, her sister and brother. My kids wasn't there because my momma had my kids. This

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my sister on my dad's side and they was staying with me and we'd go and leave. She was telling us.

When she (niece) was 13 years old, she went to a different school in Lansing. Her mom moved on the north side with me. Some speakers came to the auditorium at her school and all the people there was asking them about if they a family member, or a friend, a neighbor, or somebody touched them in the wrong place they're supposed to tell, it's not they fault, and all this, you know, was telling them kids that and I guess she was crying and she went to a teacher and she told a teacher. The police came, they got my brother and he couldn't deny it. My sisters from my momma's side said she was lying and then they couldn't stand my sister. She was scratched off the list forever and my father, he didn't like that either. He wasn't on my niece's side either. Her mom was on her side and I was and her grandmother on the other side and the aunties and uncles on the other side, not from our side was on her side but me I knew and I felt so bad.

That's how much we was partying. But, you know my sister just wanted a babysitter because she couldn't get nobody else to keep her kids because even then my sisters and them was acting funny and them towards her because my dad done had kids on the outside. You know, so they didn't really claim them and so I guess she wasn't that bad, you know. My brother, he was a drinker and he was freaky. He used to, I don't know, he used to be trying to talk to my sister. Tried to get her in bed but I guess it went out one ear and the other one. She started leaving the kids there and they all got older too and, uh, we moved in another place together and she [niece] was about six or seven then, if not older. We come home, and he's in the room with them [nieces and nephews]

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asleep, with the door closed. We go to the table and sit at the table. We got some more drinks, and we're playing cards and stuff. Not one time but it crossed my mind. I'm looking, "What is he doing? Why is you in there with them?", I was telling him. He said, "Lamar kept playing. He won't go to sleep." It's another bedroom in there but we didn't think about it and nothing happened. And the poor girl...you know, it was just happening to her. Now she got four kids. She got a good job. She got a house, her and her boy—her kids' daddy. They live in Tacoma. She got another sister by her dad that she met that live in California, and they getting together and she is doing so good. And she's 28, same age as my daughter.

Relationship with Children

When they was little kids, um, they was like spread around. It was good for me. I was good with them but they was spread around because my sisters didn't have any kids and they wanted this one, one wanted that one and then my mom wanted my oldest. You know, my oldest was sick. He was born sick and she [mom] was like, "Let me keep him for a month." Then a month turned into a week. The week turned into a year, then years. I moved around the corner her, had got married. Then I had a girl and my sisters, they had her most of the time then my third child, um, my mom had and then my last child, I did, 'til he got to the age of 11. He, um, stayed with his grandmother on his father's side 'til he was grown. I got three sisters and three brothers by my mom. They stayed with everybody else until they got in their teens and then everybody wanted to give them back to me. I didn't know what to do with them because I was drinking and I really wasn't being a parent. I was wanting to be drunk, or I be trying to put them on punishments or

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trying to tell them what to do. It was too late. My girl, my oldest one, when she got 18, she left; really when she was 16. She came back at 18 and then she left again and then my younger one, she was just I think some part of a gang or something. Then my oldest son, he was with my mom and his other grandmother, back and forth. He's my youngest one. When he was 11 he went to Gary, Indiana.

I was in jail for truancy at that time for my 27 year old and my 22 year old, they was 11 and 14 at the time. They was going to school but they wasn't. They put me in jail for not sending my kids to school. This was Lansing, Michigan. I was two years on probation. At the time I was doing homecare for the elderly two hours at a time and sometime I come home, be asleep, you know and my kids, they get the mail, because the mail come about four o'clock. I still be having a client at four and then at six and then I come back home and sometimes I get the mail but they would send letters and I didn't see the letters. So, they, um, put me in jail [chuckles]. They'll leave out like they're going to school, come back like they done been to school. I didn't, you know, know they were skipping and then I didn't get the mail saying that they wasn't going to school and then I had to go to court. They had subpoenaed me to court or whatever and then I ended up going to jail, for four months.

Now my daughter was just out there. I didn't know where she was. She was like 14, 15 and I was saying, "now, who going to take care of them?" and they was fittin' put my youngest son, they put him in foster care for a month or two months. Yeah, about three months and the fourth month, they said he was going get lost in the system or something. His father had came to see me and then he was like, "My mom will get him."

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So, um, the social worker came up here and I signed the papers, so he could go with his father's mom, but they couldn't find my daughter. So, she came to see me one time. She was saying she was staying with a friend but she wouldn't go with my mom. My mom had moved to Gary by then and then she [daughter] would go by my sister's house every now and then. My sister wasn't treating her good and so, they got anger at each other, and like I didn't want them [kids]. You know, I was, you know, like I threw them off to everybody.

I call myself being proud of my children back then when I was drinking and drugging. I had my kids in everything. They go to the center and they get in the programs. They was in Drill Team. They was in a parade in Lansing, in a big old shrimp parade in Gary, and they jumped rope. They was in the paper. My sons was at the center, playing basketball. They played pretty good. It's just that I wasn't there. They was doing all this and I wasn't there to take pictures or say, "It's a good job. You're doing a good job now."

But, um, now that I got grandkids I can say that. "Good job." And I'll keep them, and my kids let me, you know and, um, I tell my kids now, um, I was asleep for 50 years, my whole life.

That's what I said. For 50 years. And one day, I woke up, and I [sighs] I just felt good. I breathed. The air smelled so good and I see it, the world differently. I see it's other things, good things out there, um, that's more important than what I was doing, because I wasn't doing anything and I wasted half my life because I'm half of 100 [chuckles]. I was drinking when I was 14. Twenty-six I was drugging and ever since then,

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every day, and it was around my kids. Now, I didn't smoke in front of them but all of them, they know what I was doing.

My kids now, I get along with them. All of them call me, and can't wait to see me. One lives in Lansing, one in Gary, and one in Texas, and one in Austin, Texas and they are happy for me, that I'm clean and moving along. They want to see me, you know, but they want me to take my time [chuckles].

Oh, I think people would say that I was a okay mother back then and now, ah, 'cause I gave them [kids] material things. But I didn't given them love. You know. They ate out all the time. Then, when they got older, I'd want to cook something, they don't like it. They want money so they can go, and that's what they do today and wish I could take it back. My oldest one's doing her daughter like that. The daughter don't like... "Oh, don't like this," when she cook. She want McDonald's and she know exactly what she want from McDonald's, or Wendy's, or Kentucky, or [chuckles]...or when they go the, um, Chucky Cheese. No regular food. I'm trying to tell her. Yeah, but now she trying to whoop her daughter because I never whooped her and her daughter is snapping at her right now. She's six years old and she get what she want. If she don't get it, she'll have a fit in the store. I didn't give my kids a chance to have a fit. I just gave it to them. She [daughter] trying to get in the whooping because she can't punish her [grandchild] because they do so much, she be off her punishment. She [grandchild] don't care. She got TV in her room, a screen TV, she got everything she...I told her, "Oh, no. You're going to have to keep that up even when she grown."

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They did. They had everything. They kept up with the style. And I was getting it because I had a sugar daddy. I had a boyfriend but he wasn't working. But I was working and plus, aid was helping me and, um, that's what they got. But my love, I didn't have time for them and when we be talking I tell them, "I remember when you were so and so." And they trying to remember [chuckles] because it was just a couple times of things that I did with them but they like to hear it though.

Influences on Parenting

I was completely different in raising my kids from how my mother was with us because my mother, she raised us strictly. My mother was kind of real strict. I mean before the streetlights was on, we was in that house. We done did our chores We done took our baths. I mean, I don't know, maybe I felt free, let my kids be free, you know.

Expectations of Children

I'm looking at them [children] like they're doing the right things but they wasn't. They wasn't going to school regularly and they was sneaking behind my back. Like they'll tell me they wasn't having sex, but the grades was good when they did go to school. Yeah, two of them was on the honor roll a couple times. I mean, I was raising them pretty good when I had them. They had to be really bad for me to whoop them. I only whooped my middle child and my baby boy. My baby girl, she said something very disrespectful to a friend and she meant it and she talked back to me. I was really upset and I spanked her. My youngest one, I spanked him. I was mad at him because he didn't come home. He was mad at me because of that stuff [drinking and drugging] and he didn't come home. We couldn't find him for a day. A neighbor found him on the other

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side of town playing. I brought him home and I whooped him but other than that I didn't whoop my kids and didn't let nobody else whoop them.

I didn't do nothing when they did something wrong. I was always protecting my son. He was bad, my baby but I say, "He didn't do it." When he was 19 he almost spent the rest of his life in jail. He, um, shot back at the police. He had two of guns. Well, that's what they saying. They had a video camera in the, what you call that, low housing. They had cameras all around them. We could see him. He was running and they're ducking and the police, they shot him in the face and in the butt. Yeah. He had turned around, you see police ducking but it looked like a shadow. That's what the public defender was trying to tell us, it could have been a tree, the shadow off a tree. So they couldn't tell if it was the gun or whatever but they was going to, um, try him for two counts of attempted murder of a police officer and they was going to sentence him to 90 years for one and the other one 60 years. Um...um, I had got a settlement. I was down to \$7,000 that's when he got in trouble. I got a lawyer for him and the lawyer got him off with 11 months and a year probation. He didn't even have to go to court. I said, "That money must have did that." Then my oldest one got in trouble selling heroin to an undercover three years ago. He out. For some reason God was on his side. Lord, Jesus, I'm telling you. My oldest used to be a user.

Yeah. Yeah, he was bad. He was doing crack and heroin. My, um, oldest nephew started him and my other nephew on that, because my son and my younger sister's son, they used to sell it. They used to get robbed all the time but I believe it was my oldest nephew who was robbing them in black and stuff. Then he started hanging around with

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my oldest nephew and they were selling, then he got him caught up with drugs. They was about twenty-s—24 and they're 30 now. My oldest son is struggling now. He had two probation officers, a fed and state. He's struggling and he talk about that a lot. I think he needs some help with that, with his problems, because he's saying now didn't nobody want him when he was a kid, and now he can't, he don't got no job. He distressed. And I can't do nothing for [choked up] him. I want to. So I talked to my mom about that. She was like, she said, um, he just need to go to a program and stay. He don't need to be a outpatient. He told her he want to be a outpatient. She told him that he she don't think he should be in a outpatient. He need to get his self together because he's not struggling enough yet and he listen to her.

Separation from Children and Grandchildren

I'm really feeling the separation between me and my kids because, you know, it's not only in space but, you know, we're not together (emotionally). I want to pull us back together and I want to start all over. I asked my youngest daughter and my oldest daughter just yesterday. And they want that so bad and they said it's okay for me to start all over. I thought maybe my youngest would say, "Oh, no, it's too late for that. You wasn't worried about that when you was raising us. It's too late." But she was the main one, talking about she is so proud of me too that she want that and she want to be with me. She can't wait to see me, all that and that make me feel good because them two would have been the hardest. They the hardest. My sons, they love me no matter what. But them two, it really did something for me and that makes me even willing to study to look for more things to, you know, get into it. I applied for disability but I still want to

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work on the side. But I don't know how to do that yet. I still want to do what I used to do, because I love it. I love being around older and disabled people because they lonely and they need us.

My oldest daughter took her child away from me. I'm a...oh, my God, I had that baby since my daughter had had her in her stomach because six years ago she was really trying not to have that baby and I convinced her, "Don't do nothing to yourself. I'll be there." I was there when the baby came. My daughter went back to work as soon as she could and I had the baby. The baby started growing up and for four years I had that baby. She took her away from me because I just wasn't acting right. I was still doing the same old thing (drinking and drugging). You could hear me miles away and stuff. It ain't like I was expecting, just because I had a daughter, knowing that I wanted her daughter, that she's supposed to give me money but the money was for something else, you know and she got tired of that. "Oh, no. You can go." I went back to Lansing, but I came back before I came up here. I was in the state and then that's when she want me to get the baby back. "Mom", when she was up here, "I'm just going to ring her neck. I'm going to hurt that little girl. You better come and get her. I wish you had your own place. I would bring her to you for the summer, like that," and that'd just make me feel so good. She wanted to give her back to me. My grandbaby is six now. She was amazing when she was little. She just knew so much and she'll listen. Me and my friend that I've got now, we go back and forth to Milwaukee, to Lansing and we have her. She said we be arguing and hollering and stuff. She hit the seatbelt so she could scoot up to the thing and she said, "Mom, could you cut that down?" talking about the music. She was, uh, four then. I'm

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looking at her like “what she say” and she said, “cut the radio down.” She said, “I can’t hear!” She said, “Cut it down. Cut it down. Momma, you and Joe, ya’ll need to stop arguing because you know ya’ll that’ll make Joe not pay attention to the road and stuff and police going to pull you over and then he going to go to jail, just like my dad in jail, and stuff and then you’ll be...” What’d she say, “...Boo-hooing.” And, um...She was just four. Then she would just talk to us like that and we was like...and we was laughing. The hollering was just crazy. It was crazy. It was crazy! I said... “This is somebody. Somebody got reincarnated.” My sister died in 2003 and my grandbaby was born in 2007. She’s a mess and then I’m standing outside on the balcony. He (boyfriend) went to drop this girl off at work and I went out on the balcony and stuff, and I was just out there smoking my cigarette because I can’t smoke in my daughter’s house and she comes outside and she’s just looking at a car going past and it lookeded like ours but it wasn’t. Then she said, “Joe taking too long, ain’t he, momma? Um, it don’t take him that long to drop that girl off at work.” I’m like she was like reading my mind. I’m looking at her and stuff. I was like [Laughs] and she kept talking. She just kept talking. He should have been here by now. What’re you going say when he come back?” I’m like [laughs] girl, I’m like, man. I’m just like, and then sometimes she just want to know why I be laughing when she talking. I’m like, “You somebody else. ”

Hopes for Children

If I had three wishes for my kids future, I would want them to success and happiness...um, and wealth on they own, you know. I think they would wish for a mother, father, and togetherness, you know because their father did the same thing. He

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live in North Dakota. He married to another woman but we call him. We talk to each other. We text each other back and forth. He wasn't there for them because every year, I mean, every year if he do four years (in jail) and he get out, that same year he going back. He never stayed out a whole year. He was stealing for his habit and you couldn't even tell he got high. He wasn't a drinker and he was so neat and so polite. He'll charm the pants off a woman. I'm telling you it was just like that and he is still like that.

History of Alcohol and Drug Use

I was drinking at fourteen. That's when she [mom] was still kind of strict. I was sneaking but she was still strict. I started when I was fourteen but I was sneaking, sneaking around her. I stayed on punishments and stuff like that but as I got older I start drinking in front of her you know and even when you're grown she'll say, "Don't bring that stuff in my house," or stuff like that. "You're not drinking..." But she didn't say that, and then things just went out. Um, when I start drinking in front of her I was like 21, 22...23. I was drinking when I was 14 and by 26 I was drugging.

I think that's when she just disappeared, you know. I don't know what started me to drinking. I think my mom went out of town and, ah, my sisters...my older sister was watching us and I was over a friend house and they was drinking and it made me feel good, me and my best friend [chuckles]. Then, I start sneaking from there and drinking with my my oldest brother, he always...he was a big old person with a big old guy with a lot of hair, and every day he have a liter of [alcoholic beverage]. My mother used to tell him, "Don't bring that in my house," but he would say, "Oh, woman," and, you know, da-da-da, and, you know, then, you know, she tough but [chuckles] but we seen all that,

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you know. We was like, “Man.” But he acted like my father who wasn’t there, he say “give me some more ice water. Fetch me something to eat. Wash my clothes. Do this,” you know, like in my mom house but yeah, she was letting him, you know. But we couldn’t get away with nothing [chuckles]. We couldn’t go, “Mom, he trying to...” No, it didn’t work.

I only stopped drinking and drugging in November of 2010. I stopped because I just got tired. I just, it was boring now, you know and then my health. When I stopped, I started getting sick, started going to the doctor, find out I got lupus. I’ve got Hep C and, um, I’ve got, I’m a diabetic. Yeah it was a big shock. What they was trying to, when I go to the emergency room, you know sometimes I go to the doctor, you know, I be drunk and high and stuff and they be telling me, “Well, you need to take care of this because you...” I just be wanting some medicine so I could get out of there. I don’t know how long they were saying, telling me. So, my diabetes, I knew about it for 10 years. They give me some pills and when I’d think about it, I’d take it. You know, I wasn’t taking care of myself at all. They said I was kind of lucky because I was, I was drinking alcohol, but that’s not good but the alcohol, it was keeping my sugar down. Now that I stopped it’s up sky high, three and four hundreds. Now it’s got to get everything right. Then they’re worried about my pancreas now.

Family Traditions and Celebrations

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Christmas. We celebrated Christmas a lot. Mother's Day we used to go to my grandmother's house in Milwaukee. My distant cousins, or aunties, or stuff like that would go. Like the people in our family? I'm the only outsider. You know, me and my baby brother is the outsider. And my sisters my brother that's up there. The family, they get along with their cousins, aunties. They're real good and me and my brother don't because, um, we was kind of loud and I don't know why I had anger in me but I did. I just get mad when I drink and, um, they don't like that. When we have family functions, 4th of July picnics, barbeques [chuckles], and stuff, they hate to see us coming because we're always arguing with somebody. So, when we got older they didn't tell us. But then the kids got older and, you know, grown and stuff and they start telling kids. Kids start telling us and we just, we'll be there. We pop up [chuckles]. Then I started staying my distance. I just left, just, trying to move on. I'm not close to my family anymore.

My grandmother used to take us to church when we'd go to Lansing. My mother used to send us on a bus to a church and it was a mixed [ethnically] church, you know, because we grew up with mixed people, you know, but yep, but then, as we got older we still was going but older and stuff, what...yeah and I was like 17 and 18 I stopped. I didn't take my kids to church when they were little. I just didn't think about it and I was drinking. I was probably sleeping all day, Sunday or gone.

Family Socioeconomic and Emotional Support

If somebody needs some food or money in my family they would help each other. Yes, they're good with that. Yeah, they'll help each other out. My mom do most of the helping and everybody would look to her because my mom, what she got, she's satisfied

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with. She ain't trying to, I won't say to get nothing new. She'll keep the old. You know, sacrifice what she got to give to everybody else and that's who everybody go to, my mom. If my mom couldn't help nobody else would be expected to help, [Chuckles] ah, no. If it not money-wise but for being there for a person, like my sister husband died Tuesday. So they're there. My other sister's there now, neither one of my sisters called me and let me know. My kids told me. I was wishing they could, at least one of them could have told me because I communicate with one of them. She text me, we text back and forth. I thought maybe she'll text me and tell but they up there for her, my sister. You know they'll go up there, come back.

Neighborhood Environment

Everybody considers my mom's house home in Lansing. It was a good neighborhood where I grew up and raised my kids. It just started getting bad when my kids got older. When my oldest got about 14 and 15. The population got bigger and people from out of town was moving in, families and stuff. They was always, um, fighting. Now it was a lot of fighting going on and arguing, and stealing, and stuff from people. It was really bad when my kids got in they teens.

Violent Relationships with Partners

I don't know what I would consider to be my strengths as parent because back then I was mostly getting beat by my baby's father. He kept me with black eyes. He cracked my ribs. He done beat me unconscious, put a tumor in the lining in my brain. I kept black eyes. And I got so used to it that I can go to the store, go to work like that and don't think nothing of it. My jaw got broke. It was just, I don't know, I was confused

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with love. I was still growing up myself though, and I had four kids. Then they was seeing all this. How did that end? Um, one day I moved. I moved. He came in drunk and me and my daughters was fighting him back and then we called the police, then put him in jail, and put him out, um, for good. He um, he came back for like a half a month and he met this girl. I would just go over her house but I had a boyfriend by then and so, he, um he wasn't supposed to be over there. I'd threaten him all the time and then I moved and he didn't know where I was at, we just moved on the other side of town. That's all. Yep, and he didn't know where we was at for a long time. It was so many people came up there now because, usually, you can walk down the street and ask, "Do you know where so and so live?" And they could live on the other side of town and they'd tell you but the population got big. It was bigger so he couldn't find us and I was with somebody else. My relationship with him started when I was 26. He got me started on drugs and that's when the beatings started. I was with him until about 37 [years old]. Then I got in another relationship after him and that was a abusive one. I was with him about four or five years. That was like 2010, I think it was, something like that and then I started just getting in relationships and I start throwing the first punch. I don't know why that was. Then I'd get beat up and then [chuckles], I don't know, that's probably what became of what I thought love was, probably. Just today I was thinking I was, because my daughter going through something with her husband. I was going to tell her, it's in the bible, about love. I said, "Love is not abusive." I was going to tell both of them, "Look in the bible under this passage." You know, I've got to look back at this. It right today, and show

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them what love is. I was going to tell them. I didn't know what love was 'til I read it out the bible.

Relationship with Caregivers

My dad, I just didn't want to be around him. I was, at this time I was, I was shy and he hollered a lot and that put a fear in me and I just hate the day I had to go over his house. Or he'd come over ours. That bothered me too. He'd have us come over there and cook, and wash and fold his clothes, and clean up his house and he'll fuss about that and I always tried to stay out his way then and then he'd get mad. Where is you at? Why you always..." and I just didn't ever want to be around him. Even when I got older and stuff, I was like, ugh but my mother, she was strict on me as I was growing up, 'til I got a little bolder and stuff. I was like 16, 17, whatever, and stuff and I was just drinking and stuff but she was a Christian woman. If I had five words to describe my relationship with my mom, what I'm going to put it like this first. Um, my mom, she kind of knew me when I was small. Then she knew me when I was small but as I was in my teens and 20's, she got confused about me. In my 30's and 40's, um, it got kind of distance, and wild, and I really was getting a little too disrespectful but she still was there for me because she's still there for me right today. It's a good relationship. It's my sisters and them that don't want me around her.

If I had five words to describe my father, I would use selfish, mean. I don't know. He's selfish and mean. I mean, sometimes he can be fun when he drink he be fun. When he drink but and strict and, um, what you call the mens that just love womens? He jump from woman to woman and he went down and married a 28 year old, same age as me and

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my sister was. It didn't last a month. I thought he was crazy. Then the same month he was going with, liking two sisters. Then like the next month or two he married one of the sisters. I thought he was just, he was just crazy [chuckles]. At this hotel when we were on our way down South, he stop in his hotel. He had his camcorder. He was taping the woman that cleaned up the room. What you call her? The housekeeper, the maid, he flirting with her. He had my daughter going to the mall with him and stuff, picking out womens and that was my youngest daughter. She was about 13. [Chuckles] He went to his grave just like his dad. His dad was in the backseat. They had my dad and them, or somebody drive him to his mistress's house. And his skin hanging and stuff. He dying and they said he just lift his head up and had to get one more look. He was just like his dad. That's why my brothers are like that.

I feel the closest to my mom. Being kind, it's just in her. She's just so sweet. You can't help it, she draw so many kids that ain't hers. When I was upset as a child, I cry and my mom would be like, "it's going to be okay," and my dad will holler and make it worse, or telling me, what I'm crying for? Ain't no reason to cry. Do I want a reason to cry? He don't make it no better.

Relationship with siblings

All three of my brothers just like my dad. I got one up here and when I came up here we got into it. He still want to be my daddy. He said, "Well, you can leave, you know." and then he'll call me, "You will come back," and, "I wasn't playing games." I'm not and then these women, his girlfriends, no he don't want nobody, he is just partying. He like womens around him, doing everything to him. He just love them when he is

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partying, and when he ain't partying he don't want no noise. He just want to read his book, nothing can move. He be like, "Who did that?! Who dropped that?" Uh! Are you, why you talking so loud?!" I said, "Oh, you're miserable [chuckles]." He just my dad. That's my dad and love them womens and stuff, but their time is their time.

Losses

I had a best friend um, but me and her not talking to—as we're grown and everything. Something happened between us, it was a misunderstanding and it stayed like that. She used to just sleep around. She got pregnant when she was 13. I didn't even know she was sleeping with nobody and then she got raped and I was there. She didn't say nothing, I was in the other room. She wasn't saying nothing and then she come back, she all scarred up and we was 14. We was about 14, 15, or something like that. It was around in that age.

I was like 30-something, the end of 30, beginning of 40's and stuff, I had this friend. I met this friend. She was real nice. We got along real good. She had a boyfriend. And, ah, she just dranked and when she drank she liked to clean, and cook, and have everything all neat and stuff. Her boyfriend, he used to smoke and, um, we used to play cards and he used to call her all the time. I don't know what he was calling her for but I thought maybe he was trying to get money and then turn her on and then on, I told him, "If you ever do that it'll be all over for you. She ain't going to want you no more," and that what happened. I seen her one day and she came over to my house. She wanted some stuff [drugs] and I was like, "Oh, my God!" I looked at him. I was so mad at him. Then after I start seeing her and stuff, you know, just down the hill by this liquor store, with

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old mens and stuff, and different people, in and out they trucks and stuff and she started coming by and stuff, and we started getting close then. One day, I woke up and, ah, somebody was telling me they found her dead on Lake street, by these bushes and I knew who did it. He did it. He came over to my house and I looked dead at him. I told him, he was in there with a friend that I had. I told him, "You did it. I know you did it." I said, "You can't even look at me. I told you when you got her started, before you got it started." I was just fussing with him and stuff. He was just looking at me. Then somebody was telling me, "Don't do that because he'll do the same thing to you." I said, I told him, "You try it. I'll be waiting on you." I just talking to him and that bothered me a lot, just not seeing her no more. Like I dranked and then forgot about it and then sometimes, when I wake up in the morning, I remember and then I have to start smoking and drinking more to forget things. I didn't even go to her funeral because her kids and her mother had her body taken, she wasn't from there. So they didn't have it there, so.

My sister passed away in 2003. It was heart, I don't know, from smoking, did it bust, or she had a heart attack but I know she got real big though. Every year she was just getting bigger and bigger. She wasn't the little slim girl that used to do them, flips with the shorts on and stuff. She just got bigger and bigger because she loved to eat. She liked to drink. She liked to smoke, all that and she passed. I was upset. I was just wasn't done arguing with her. If I was there, I would have had her at the hospital. But, yeah. Then it bothered me. I didn't even grieve for her like three, four years. And one day it just hit me one day. I thought about it, it just started...oh, my God and these was the times that I was bad on this stuff (drugs).

CAN I GET A WITNESS? **Lessons From Childhood**

I would say, if I could do it all over again, what I know now, you know, I wish, um, I just was more into me. You know, stayed in school. I mean, stayed under my mother. It would have been a good thing but I just wanted out. I left school in eleventh grade, but I was really in the seventh because my ex-husband, I was following right behind him. I wasn't going to school when I was in the seventh grade, I was skipping school and they was passing me with "D's" and "F's". In the 11th I just stopped going. That's one thing, um, I was smart in math; I loved math and science but I just was hanging out with my husband. Then he would go to jail and when he was 16, I was going with him. I had two kids under him; my oldest and my youngest. That was my man at 14. Yeah, the two girls is his.

What Community Should Know about Parenting

Um, spending time more time with their kids, even if their kids don't want it, find a way to make them excited, more excited to want to do different things, and want to do this because some kids will sit up there, and they be like, mother be like, "Come on, let's...we're going to do so and so" and they be like, "Oh, I don't want to be doing that." And they be thinking, that's just a waste of time. But if you just go on and make them do it, you know, the first couple of times, they'll see a difference. Oh, and they'll love it too.

What will Help People Believe Children?

You've got to listen to them and talk to them. You brush it off, you could brush it off because there've been a lot of incidents. Some mothers just don't want to believe it, and then they hoping, "ah them kids just heard somebody else say that, or they're trying to get my attention or something like that because my friend, she died two years ago. She

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was from Michigan. I found out when I went to Lansing that she died, went to her funeral. Her brother, we grew up with them. Her brother hung with my brother. He kissed me when I was a little girl. I remember slob, big old lip slob all around my mouth and then he pretend like I was falling and he was pulling me up when my sister was coming down the stairs. I felt it was my fault because we was getting ready to leave my sister house. We was getting ready to go home and I ran downstairs, trying to beat everybody and stuff and he was right behind me and he had a chance. I was around six or seven and then it was already from my uncle. Then, um, he was molesting my friend's, um, daughter. She had, ah, Down Syndrome and, um, he was messing with her. He's in prison right now for that up here, somewhere, um, for years he was messing with her. I don't know how it came out.

I think there have to be more programs about sexual mistreatment for kids and adults too because I would have never told and I'm 50 years old. I would have never said nothing because I didn't want that shame and stuff and most of it is still buried but its still there and every now and then one of the ghosts will come out and you remember, you know? It was a relief when I told my psychiatrist and he understood. He was like, "It's okay. It's not your fault," and stuff like that.

Case Study # 17 – Michelle

Her stepbrothers sexually abused Michelle, a 56-year-old mother of five children, during her childhood. She was raped at 17-years of age by her boyfriend, and prostituted for many years. During her involvement in prostitution, Michelle relied on her extended

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family and her children's fathers to help her in caring for her children. She is currently an advocate and independent consultant working with youth in prison.

Experiences of Sexual Mistreatment

I mean, I got raped by the stepbrothers, I remember from six until I was out of there, until I was eleven. My sister Jeannine hates me to this day because she became the victim when I left. I said, "I was a kid. What was I going to do? I couldn't stop nothing." Mama said love them because they're your brothers. I mean, who're you going to trust? I mean, everybody but Jesus [chuckles] done stuck me in my back some kind of way. Every day I try my best and I ask God even, "Will I ever trust anyone before I leave this earth?" because I don't know how because every time I try it's gotten wrong some kind of way. At first, we were told to go wash the blood from your panty before your mother comes home. I just cried out to God, and asked him to punish them, and kill them, let them be punished, let them have the same thing happen to them that they were doing to me. After a while you start thinking what they're doing is okay because it's better than hearing your mother screaming out in agony and fleeing her abusers. I mean, you think that's okay to touch your own brother that way, when he's hurting, to help him feel better.

My mother died and then my real father came and got me and my brother and took me to live with him and my stepmother in Chicago, but as soon as I turned 18, I was out of that house with my stepmother. I got raped at seventeen, had my first child, and ended up marrying the father of my first child, the one who had raped me. He had been my boyfriend for four years, three, yeah, almost four years. I know I said no but I should

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have never kissed him anyway. I faulted myself for that. Sometimes boys, men call that misleading. They think if you kiss them it means sex, and I'm not into that. I mean, I had kissed him before. He'd kissed me before. I said no every time. That day I really said no but there was no turning back for him. We had been together four years before he did that. It was at his sister's baby shower and him and his brother fought like mad people because his brother tried to stop it but it was too late; he had already ejaculated but I was a stupid baby. I didn't know one time like that you were going to get pregnant. I thought sex is lovemaking, you know, not being raped or misused. I went home that night to my stepmother's house and my pants were torn, my zipper was busted and she asked me what happened. I said, "My zipper busted." You know, I never said nothing, never went in the bathroom to clean myself up. I just went to bed and that was not a good thing but I had no sense. I hadn't been taught about sex, and what happens, and none of that stuff, how to clean yourself, or they didn't have no "day after pills" at that time that I know of. They've got everything nowadays [Chuckles].

Coping with Sexual Mistreatment and Domestic Violence

One of the most difficult things was keeping it [sexual abuse] from my mom and not talking to her about it because I didn't want her to hate me, and say it was my fault. I called my stepbrother like six years ago and told him that I forgive him for what he did to me when I was a little girl and he said...ah, first thing he said, "I thought you wanted it." I said, "I was six when you were 20 but I didn't call you for that." I said, "I called you to really tell you, in my heart I forgive you. I love you," so I can have my power back and go on with my life and then the next thing out of his mouth was, "Your momma did it to

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me” and I said, “If she did, you were grown and she was grown” because his dad was older than her. I said, “I didn’t call you for that even and I’m sorry if that happened but I can’t receive that. I don’t know that to be a true statement and I’m not there to judge you or judge her. I just leave it to God but I love you. You’re my brother and that’s what I called to say.” I really have forgiven him. I let it go. It’s free for me because for so long I hated and wanted him dead. I believed and I found out through him, that’s not what I wanted. I wanted justice.

I used to think that if it wasn’t for us being born, that momma wouldn’t be getting beat up or they wouldn’t fight. You know because sometimes we blamed ourselves for being there because then maybe he wouldn’t have hit her if it was just her and him. That’s really sad but that’s how we felt as a kid. You’d be thinking that, hey, maybe you’re the reason they’re in there duking it out or something. Something you said, something you did t’d them off, you know, and so yeah, that’s we always thought that we caused her to get hurt. I told myself that I was being hurt by my stepbrothers because I was fast and because I was tiny and I had a nice body and I used to think that I was so cute. That’s how come people want to mess with you.

Relationship with Children

I have four sons and one daughter. My daughter is 39-years old, my eldest son is 35, the son next to him is 32, and the son next to him is 28 and the son next to him is 25. I believe that were so close coming up, even though I was away from home working sometimes two weeks at time I’ll be out of town but the kids always believed we were close and I always believed we were so close that we sat down and ate together. I studied

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with them and gave each one of them an hour of study, so that no one will feel left out or shunted but as I am older now, I see that, uh, my kids still try to have that connection where we're together. I feel it's not as connected as we once were but maybe that's what happens when kids get grown for any of us here. They don't call on you 24 hours a day but I want to hear from them 24 hours a day because I worry that they're okay. So, they are not contacting me every [chuckles] day. You know, Reggie, the 28 year old does, oh, yeah, he calls me almost every day. Reggie's the one that's in Oklahoma right now but he has just bought his first home in Indianapolis.

Parenting Influences

Everything [chuckles] influences how I relate to my children, I think, because of the way I was raised. I didn't have, um, a lot of close parenting. I kind of raised my sisters and brothers and I was the mom. My mom went off to pick cotton and hoe cotton in the fields while I was left to fend for myself, kind of, with those half brothers. Yeah, so that was one of the factors that influenced the way I decided to raise my own children because that household became unsafe and when you become unsafe, it changes your whole style of living, your whole mindset. Yeah, that changed for me. I have to know the parents of the friends they picked when they were coming up. I wanted to know something about those parents, you know. "You're not just going over nobody's house and spend nights," because certain things happen in the dark and in the night that I couldn't control. So, I normally kept them real close because what I couldn't control, their safety, I didn't want them to be there. I had two babysitters throughout their whole life and one was their great-grandmother and another was her housekeeper, whom I had befriended. So, I didn't trust nobody.

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Rewards and Pride in Parenting

Wow, the most rewarding experience I've had as a parent is being a mom. Yeah, just being a mom, just loving your kids and unconditionally, and without conditions. They're not there for me to tell what to do. I ask, we share, we talk. I don't force them to even have my own religion. I know I want Jesus in their life but I don't force Jesus because my brother tried to force him on me but you can't force Jesus on anybody. It's a choice. And so I tell my son, the one that's 28, he always says, "Mom, I'm going to find you a house." He was a football player at one time. I said, "No, I ain't worried about a house. You just make it. You do good for you. It ain't about me baby. I lived my life and don't cry when I'm gone because you know your mom's headed somewhere new now then where she was going."

I am most proud of as a parent of the fact that my children all had five toes, and five fingers, you know, four fingers and a thumb [chuckles] on each hand, and you having four toes and having a big toe [chuckles] on their feet. Really, I would start crying every time I heard I had another boy in the incubator and the doctor would say, "What you're crying for? They've got toes and fingers, and they're healthy looking." I said, "Okay, I'm good with that." So, yeah. Oh, I wanted another girl so I could dress her up like a doll because I recall, that was the happy time in my life was playing dolls and cutting them out of newspaper, because we didn't have money for real paper dolls, or [laughs] you know, it worked.

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Parental Challenges

The most challenging experiences I've had as a parent is not knowing what to do when they got sick because those are things I didn't know how to guess at. I know the things I call the doctor for. I'll even call 9-1-1 if I felt it was necessary because when a baby gets sick you can't help them because they can't always tell me what's hurting or what's wrong and I wanted to know what's hurting you, and how can I fix the pain because pain is not good. Yeah. I have a different mindset about pain. Yeah, it's a challenge [Chuckles]. Yeah, because, um, the hurting kind of pain, I can stand the pain of a cut or something like physical but that mental hurt that pain I don't like my kids to have to go through that because you can't nurture that kind of hurt. Only He [God] can. Yeah, only God can. Yeah, I say that God because he's the only one that, you know, he loves you when nobody else loves you. He holds you when nobody else can hold you that safe. You know, so that's why I want them to have God, because I know what he can do.

Expectations of Children

I expected my children to be honest and to do good in school, and to always tell the truth, because a lie, you've got to keep figuring out which one you told the last time, but the truth stays the same and that way it doesn't grow into this big cancer that consumes their spirit. We talked about everything. I mean, there's nothing my kids can't talk to me about. I don't play birds and bees. We talk sex and trees, okay? So it's real and the more they knew, I believe the more they could protect themselves, and good touch and bad touch. You know, "there's a good touch and there's a bad touch and this is your body and you don't have to allow anyone to misuse it." It's a choice. I let my children

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know when I didn't approve of their behaviors by hollering. Um-hum, sometimes scream, and say, "This is not going to happen." I wasn't a hitter. You know, I tried to spank Reggie a couple of times but Reggie seemed to like spanking, so [laughter] I wasn't going to start that. I got to liking them spankings because, evidently, I did not like them because I wouldn't shut my trap when my stepmother was talking crazy. So, he seemed to like those little love taps. Uh-uh, no, that does not work with him. "Do not trying to hit me because I will tell you, 'Give me some more [chuckling].'" No, because then you'd be crying. No, and, you know, I'm the one that would cry if I had to spank my kids. No spanking is not it because we always think hitting's going to do something but it makes us meaner and I knew through experience, if you hit me I'm just going to talk or not, and then I'm going to hit somebody else. I may not I hit the one that's perpetrating me, but I'm going to go hit somebody. Um-hum, I'm going to get satisfied. So I don't like that. I think a lot of us, if we would find out that we make little monsters out of kids by making them angry and once they're angry, anger had got to do something. You know, it manifests itself. It grows. So I don't want that. I think mother at church told me, she said, "You've got some of the most respectful and loving kids I've ever seen and I wish I had that with my kids." But, you know, we all do what we can and I said I'm not going to do this because I went through that. I think I smacked Shelly one day. Ah, she was like 14 or 15, and she slipped in the front yard of the baby sitter and I yeah, I lost my temper. I let my children know when I approve of their behaviors because I always tell them.

You tell them because how will they know? I tell Reggie and them all the time, I love them, I'm proud of them and he'll say certain things like, "Mom, why? What? I'm

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just doing what I know how to do, being a dad. You was a mom to me. You're the best mom I ever knew, in my life." I say, "No, if I was the best mom I wouldn't have made some of my choices, okay, as I did." "But I'm the best mom you have known." Yeah. Reggie has not had it so easy. He's

had it rough because he didn't meet his father until he was 11. Tony, my son that's 32, would taunt him, and tease him, and call him a bastard kid. He dealt with all that and the doctor told me I had to remove Tony from the home. It got that bad to them to be like that and I knew it was different with Tony too because, see, when Tony first met his stepfather, Tony was only like three. I was dancing and working in the world and I didn't want my kids around it and so I shared custody with my ex-husband. Yeah, I got full physical and full legal custody of all my kids when I divorced him but two years later, down the road, he still wasn't paying child support, so I had to figure out how I'm going to feed my children, besides welfare. Welfare's an option but I didn't want welfare for my kids. Uh, if we need it, it's there but it's not something I wanted to lean on. Um-um.

Hopes for Children

If I had three wishes for my children twenty years from now, I would wish them a future without racism, one where they're judged by the content of their character, who they are. I want them to be living well, having their own homes, and happy, and being who they choose to be, because I don't want to define who they need to be, ever. What I hope my children learned from being parented by me is that anything's possible, that they

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can do whatever they desire to be or whoever they desire to be, and that they are loved; and they are to love their children the same, and nurture them until they feel whole and complete.

I think sometimes that no matter how much we know we wish we knew more and sometimes I get scared too. Scared that I won't be able to give them [kids] the right answers, scared that I won't be able to solve a problem that's so big that only God can change. You know, you get scared. Just because you're a parent doesn't mean we don't get afraid that we can't keep our children safe. I'm afraid of what the world's going to be like for them in ten years, let alone twenty years. When I'm gone, what will the world be like for my kids? You know, I think about those things. I think about my years are shorter now than they once were. I think about aging. You know, I don't want to leave them behind but I know one day I will. So that's where I'm at.

Changes in Parenting

You parent you know, well, when I stopped having to iron their clothes every morning [chuckles], that changed my way of parenting because, you know, you don't do it, and you need to ask them more, if what do they want you to do for them because they are getting older and I think I treated them like babies, and still baby them and they still act like babies sometimes. My husband says, "I've never seen a family where each kid believes they're your only child." Mm, and I said, "They were parented that way." You know, they were parented in a way that they all became special. They knew that and to me, if you don't show it, I don't know it. You know, I like showing it. Love to me is action but that other stuff, lip service...the real service that you want to show me is going

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until we come into play. So I'm not a lip person. I follow through at what I hope to tell you I will do, anyone that is. My word is my bond and I believe that thing in itself saved my life because honesty and freedom of self became so important for my life and my kids' life because they know, if you tell a lie, I don't feed into it and you could tell when you're lying because we look at each other's eyes. I'm an eye person [chuckles], because it's windows to the soul. Yeah, and so I'm like that with the kids. I know when you're telling me a story. I know when Edwin's drinking and when he's not. He would be around me. You know, he's not; he's hiding out. He's ashamed and I wish he wouldn't be that ashamed that he would come out.

Parental Strengths and Challenges

What gives me strength as a parent and as a survivor is Jesus. There is nothing as great as that because I know without him I'm nothing and with him I can do anything. There's nothing people can say to me to degrade me, because I've degraded myself more than they ever could. There's no harm that they can do that I can't withstand and get through. I know that. I am more complete and more whole than I've ever been in my life. I know what I would never do again. If I had to rewrite it again, I would never let anyone touch my body inappropriately and I would still continue to hold my head high, whether I was broke or poor. I'm rich in spirit. I have a richness about life that nobody can shatter, I don't think and I feel good about where I am in this space. I'm just another vessel doing my best each time.

I can't give my kids what they ask for sometimes. You know, sometimes kids ask for things like money, you know, and before I could. Today it's limited [chuckles].

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Okay? So, they are spoiled and I would love to continue spoiling them. I want to leave a legacy behind, something that can help enrich their life as they go into the future, so there's no struggle. We've struggled. You know, and you don't want your children to struggle as you're struggling.

Family Traditions Celebrated

We celebrated every Christmas and Thanksgiving. I try my best to always have them [kids] come by, or we go together and eat. Even when I was out of town, or whatever, I'd always want to try to bring them home for Thanksgiving or Christmas and then when I married my White husband, I remember, that was a problem for me. I think that may have been the onset of the panic attacks because I didn't know where my kids you know, if they were eating like I would be during my Christmas, if they were happy, like I would have them happy because we'd go to Indiana, me and my child, Greg [son with White husband]. Yeah, we'd go there and one day I told his [White husband] mother, because he was hiding the fact that I had other kids. She said, "Why are you always so sad when you're here and everybody's so happy, and all the presents?" "Presents, what presents?"

"I'm going to put that aside. That don't mean nothing, baby, to me. My kids are everything and I'm here. Your son doesn't even want you to know I have other kids. I have other kids." I had three other kids who were back in this state with their dad and step-mom.

I felt like I was too big of a sinner to be in church. We'd go on Easter. Everybody has to go to church on Easter Sunday and put on your little Easter dress. I go to church,

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once for us, church and Easter. Yeah [chuckling]. Then everybody go to church, go Easter and go, and all that stuff. But no, other than that um-um [laughter]. I was a little devil. I wasn't going to church and the mothers know me. She'd say, "Honey, when are you coming to church?" I'd say, "Mother, I'm not coming to church like this," you think? "When I am ready I'm coming." I don't play with God, mother. I got that much insight. I may get dressed up Easter, but I am not a hoochie fool. I don't play with God.

So I told her and that was a lot of years that mother would see me at the park across the street with my little mini dresses, all made up and all messed up. I thought I was so cool and so whole and she'd invite me to a church and I'd say, "No, I'm not coming." What I didn't tell her though, baby, is that I felt like garbage and trash and garbage don't go to church because when you come out you're still that garbage because you had to go back to play [prostituting]. I don't play. So, once I got in church, I've been in church. I ain't never came out and I don't do what I once did.

Supportive Kin

I define family as blood but, uh, I know about the generic families in community and I have a lot of that but nothing's like a real mom. The church mothers are mother for me because they became like mothers, you know what I'm saying? They can never be my mom but they are mothers for me and they have nurtured me that way and they have given me a foundation that, in God, that nothing will shatter. I don't care what church I go to, whose tutelage I'm under, I have a foundation that's there and I don't go past that.

I'm close to my brother Matthew. We're 11 eleven months apart. To me we're like twins at least that's how I feel. You might ask him, he might tell you something

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different [laughter] but always, in my spirit, in my life, that is, ah, must and we're close, thicker than thieves, I'd say like that. We don't steal. That's the word we use. I always had to take care of him and he's always been there and we still talk. If I need something, he would do what he could to get it to me. If he needs something, I'm going to do what I can to get it to him. If something were to happen to him, I'm there like yesterday. He's in Oklahoma. We'll both be 57 at the same time.

Relationship with Family and Losses

I don't know. I didn't even get to know my real brothers and sister—well, their half brothers. Matthew and I are the only one that has the same mother and father. My other sisters and brothers that I used to take care of passed away. They murdered one of my half-brothers when he was 23. Somebody shot him in back of the head. I didn't get to know him really at all. My mother died, then my real father came and got me and my brother, Matthew and I didn't get to connect with them anytime.

Even though momma died, she abandoned me, and left me to the wolves. Yeah. I was in the jungle all alone, you know because she died but as a child, I didn't see death as a necessary because I believed there was always a choice because my stepfather would beat her bloody and in the morning everything was okay. It wasn't okay. It wasn't okay in my head. It wasn't okay in my heart. It wasn't the right thing for her to do. He was beating her all the time. During the time she got there to that hell. As long as she married him she was in hell. She taught me how to cook when I was four, standing in a chair. You know what? I believe I went there at four because she taught me how to cook, standing in

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the chair, when I was four, for them [stepfamily]. I remember that. The whole community told her not to marry him because he was no good but she married him anyway.

I never liked him either. My real father because any time he came near, my mother got beat up. So I didn't like him. Yeah, he gave my mother money and then my stepfather would beat her up. So I didn't like him. I told him I didn't like him. Finally, after I went through LEC training, I needed to be free of the anger and the resentment and just say, "You really didn't abandon me when I was that little girl but I felt abandoned once I started being raped, and that you [real father] really moved to Chicago. You didn't leave me. You never said you didn't want me because you came and got me." But to me, just because you're a sperm donor doesn't make you my father. You know what I'm saying? And that's what we've got a lot of sperm donors but it doesn't make him my father. He doesn't know how to be my father. I try talking to him. I don't feel a father connection. I try to say, "Oh, daddy. Daddy, it's not the same." I asked him for...ah, I said I needed a little money just a couple of months ago and he said, "I don't have no money." I asked him for \$25 like forty years ago [chuckles] and he said he didn't have no money, and he had a whole drawer full of money. You know, and we all knew that. It's like, "Oh, I'll *never* ask you again." My mother from church told me, "Ask him." I asked him and then he said no again and I said, "That's not good for me." I cried because I will never ask him for a dime because I asked him for a dollar and I'd have to explain twenty hours why I wanted a dollar and Samantha could run in there and... "Oh, daddy, daddy, give me, can I have a twenty, Give me another twenty, can I have a twenty?" and he hands it right over, like it ain't nothing! Don't that affect us? I mean we're your kids. You know, I

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mean, you came and got us and we didn't ask to come here and to me, you treat us the same. You know, but it's never been...Samantha has always been his favorite kid, even with Stacy and Kim, who is his kids.

Stacy just turned 50. We started trying to connect and be closer. But her sister, do you know what she said? Ah, she robbed us of our inheritance from her mother. She spent it, gambling and my brother and I was going to get angry, and I said, "Honey, God didn't have us have that money to began with. I'm not worried about it." "I know momma loved us. Now, I know." Because five years before my stepmother died, she said, "Not only do I like you, I love you. Not only do I love you, I like you." Um-hum. I was 43. She had hid like 10 or 20,000 just before she passed, on her ticket or something, and so, um-um, she wouldn't have did it. She had cancer of the uterus, chronic bronchitis, and congestive heart failure, all three. I think they said she was only like 63, 62, 62 or 3 years old but I had talked to her about domestic violence and about God and she knew how I felt and what he did for my life. She said that, um, for the first time she knows what domestic violence is, and she thanks me for that and she wish she'd a known sooner what I had taught her, because she didn't know my dad was an abuser and she would have left. Um-hum. I knew she left us something and my dad wouldn't believe me when I told him, "I know momma left something." Then after she died, and he found the paperwork, he said, "Oh, you were right. Your sister took ya'll's money from your mother," and this was a sister that was his daughter.

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Socioeconomic Support

Well, most times, when people need something, I have to initiate it. I'll say, you know, the kids want this or, you know, Sherry wants this, or Tony want this, or Greg want this but most times I hide it. I won't tell him [husband]. I just give little Greg money if he needs it, if I have it. Or I'll give Sherry something if she needs it and I have it. I don't tell my husband hardly. I don't always talk to him about it because he gets really angry and hateful and he doesn't want you to do anything for anybody it seems like. I don't normally, um, go to many people to ask too much help. I have to take care of me because, you know what, really, though? I think that's my fault too because I haven't learn to trust very many people and it's hard for me to ask for help because I'm the survivor, I call it but I say be your own survival mode because I know how to take care of myself. When you don't know how to take care of yourself, you don't know what to do. You give up most times. When you get low, you've got gifts. I make blankets. I make jewelry. I can survive. You know, and like I tell my husband, don't think that I'm going to be harmed over and over again by you, because I can't because I know what it is to esteem yourself now. So, but it would be nice sometimes to believe that you had somebody you could call on when you had needs but I don't really ask that much and I don't really get that close to people. For some reason I put closeness as then they die. Sometimes when I put getting close to people, then one day they're going to die too. I don't get close. I don't have to deal with the dying.

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Experiences as “A Workingwoman”

I became “a workingwoman” after my divorce from my ex-husband and my three kids because he wouldn’t pay support and welfare, when I checked into it, they want to know how much your TV, how much your car, how much your rent, how much your everything, when you’re going to pee, who comes in your house, who don’t come in the house. I said, “I’m not going for that. I’ll work three jobs.” Then I did start out thinking [laughs] you could work quite a few jobs and get enough money to take care of kids but it was a senseless journey. You know, I did Industrial Plastics. I worked for the Northwestern Life Insurance Company. At the same time I think I was doing those two jobs. And then, you know, you’d get all the little bittie jobs and the Community Electronics, I worked with them too, you know, so...Honeywell, Control Data. I type 90 words a minute, you know, and worked from a Dictaphone. So, I was good at that. It just wasn’t enough money to do everything that a mother wants to do when you’ve never had nothing yourself. It would get us by but we’d struggle trying to eat, and trying to keep the rent paid, and clothes on all their backs, and you know, the insurance paid for the doctor bills, you know, because it was good insurance. But no, there is things I wanted my kids to have but those hours don’t give us.

As “a workingwoman” girls teach you everything, don’t you know that? Yeah, everything. I started out dancing behind the glass, over in St. Louis. It was called Rhonda’s Place [chuckles], I’ll never forget and I was so ashamed and after a while you just swallow that shame and you just go on with life and you don’t look at people acting stupid in the audience. You look in the air and keep your eyes focused on a dot in the

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wall or something. Um-hum and it became okay. I wasn't going turn any tricks or do any of that. I was a straight dancer. Women started wanting to be with me and I said, "No, I'm not there," and so then, ah, it just progressed. I met a couple of girls, saying, "Oh, you work out of town so hard," you know, "So messed up." You know. I danced probably about three years and then I ran into pimps and and wimps and learned some sense [laughter]. That somebody's child got to put a diaper on [laughs]. Give me a break, baby. One thing I said in my life was I don't raise boys. I don't talk to boys. I talk to men, okay? I'm not raising nobody's babies and putting on no diapers because I done did all that. Yeah. I wasn't running no other women because I wasn't going to jail for all that. I'm not into that. You know, if I was foolish enough to be ran, then I was foolish enough to try to figure a way out of that mess and believe me, pimps and wimps come into play really quick in my head because I know those who want to be something that they ain't even got sense enough to try and name or spell.

How long was I involved in that life? I have no idea, honey. I just blocked all that ugliness out but I know it had to be some time after I was about, ah, twenty-five, until I was about probably thirty-five, forty, somewhere in there because I had to tell my son, at twenty-two. My children didn't know my life, that their mom was a workingwoman. Those were the words I used. Those were the words I always used. I couldn't say any other thing. He said, "Mom, what kid looks like me? Went to prom in a limousine." He said, "That's why you're crying two weeks about/around him. Get over it. I love you; you're my mother. You have always taken care of us." I got on my knees before my God, naked and I said, "If you will help me, I promise you I will not do that kind of work

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anymore,” and he ain’t had me hungry. It ain’t been easy. I’ve had bills over my head that I didn’t know I’d ever pay, worked my way in credit by getting a Capital One Visa, that you put your own money on, and worked my credit to A-1 credit. So, you just can do anything that you put your mind to do, and God will be there for us. He never left me. I left him. I really thought deep inside that if they were viewing my body in my casket what would they have to say about me as a mother? I don’t want to hear my mother was a workingwoman or, you know, whatever else you want to name us. Had it not been for what my child said to me, and where I was at that moment in my life, I couldn’t have got any lower. You know? And that brought me up.

What Helping Professionals Should Know

Don’t go on with your preconceived ideas as who you’re going to cure. We don’t have that power and we just have to touch that mustard seed, that faith. Once it’s in operation you don’t have to do and struggle in yourself to figure out a solution. It comes by itself. I truly believe in faith. I believe we’re equipped with everything we have to survive our journey, if we learn to let go of this way we believe we can cure everybody on our own, and let curing just take place. Telling takes form in the journey and if you’re allowed to share your journey you can come out with some answers that you wouldn’t have had before.

What Community Should Know About Parenting

There’s nothing greater than being a parent, and to having children, grown children to leave behind, that’s going to replicate some of the things that you taught them, and pass those things on to their own children but if we’re acting a fool and we’re out

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there in the world just living, what will we leave them because we really wouldn't have time to give them anything. So, for me, family is community and if community could embrace one another and share lessons learned in knowledge, our children would be much healthier. We as a people would prosper and flourish. [Short pause] And ask questions. What do people need? How can you best serve them? Don't just assume because there is no cookie-cutter approach to healing.

How to Educate Community About Sexual Mistreatment of Children

You have to teach them, what does violence look like, you know, what is it, really. What is violence for you? Is it control? Is it intimidation? Is it isolation, humiliation? There are many forms of abuse and so many times we thought we knew it all; we didn't know nothing.

How to Stop Harming Women and Children Sexually?

[Chuckles] let them listen to some of the stories of the mothers and children who have been harmed. Let them listen to their own heart, if they're the ones who have harmed. They know the face of it and they know what its like and you can deny so long, but eventually the real you come to surface too.

Case Study # 18 Toni

Toni, a 20-year old mother of a 2-year old daughter vaguely remembers being molested when she was seven or eight years old by the son of the man that raised her. At age 13 she distinctly remembers her paternal uncle fondling her during a car trip.

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Intergenerational Sexual Mistreatment and Disclosure Process

Well, I guess you would say early on in my childhood he [man who raised her] did take care of my older sister too but with the thing with his son, because she was molested by his son, so my grandma took her. So I guess you could say he did take care of her because I think she was like at least ten before she left to go stay with my grandma. Let me see, because I'm two years younger than her, I guess you can say I was like at least seven or eight when it was happening because I knew about it but I didn't know about it because I kind of remember things but then I'm not sure of it and I can't ask him (man who raised her) of course, because he passed away. I remember things, like us in a room or something. But then it's like, who can I ask about that? I remember being in a room with his sons and one of his brothers for sure. I don't even recall myself even saying no. All I remember is that basically I was laying on the bed and they would just come in there. But then, you know, my sister's story, it's like totally different. So I'm like, well, if they did that particular thing to her and I just remember laying down and them coming in there, but that's just also something I never brought up until like last year, or this year actually. Well, no, no, in October when we went to Alabama to visit.

Well, basically, me and my sister got into an argument because I was telling her like, um, she basically didn't have to go through nothing else. My grandma, uh, worked so it wasn't like she (sister) struggled after that. So, um, she was trying to say she had went through things and she brought it (molestation) up and then I was like, "Well, I have too." Then it got into a heated argument, but then we started talking about it. You know, and it became emotional for both of us.

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When I was about 12 or 13, basically, um, I was sitting on the lap of my younger God sister in the car with my Godparents going to River county. We were going to visit my older sister at that time and basically my God mom's brother caught a ride with us. He got in the backseat and like, you know, I had on, I'm pretty sure I had on shorts but I'm not sure if it was a skirt with a skirt and the shorts but I do remember that it wasn't a dress. So the next thing I know I'm just feeling his hand and, you know, first I'm like trying to move over but then I was thinking like, should I say something? Because my God-sister had told me like, "Well, you know, we went through it. But I told my mom about it and she didn't do nothing. They didn't involve the police." And I was just like, "Well, if I'm saying it they've got to believe me. Even though we're in a backseat, like who can see besides me, or who can feel it?" So, basically that's what happened with him. Basically, um, my God parents were driving. It was already like packed in the car, so I had to sit on my younger sister's lap. I knew that wasn't nothing going to happen if I said something because my God sister had said something to my God mom and they didn't do anything about it.

I had met my God mom, like when I was like seven or eight but I didn't move with them until I was 13. Well, I was about to be 13 because it was the summertime. I moved with them because, um, well, my mom was on drugs and she's in prison right now too. My mom's fiancée was asking me if I wanted to smoke with him. And I don't know which particular thing that she was doing at that time. So I went and I talked to my God mom about it and what she did was let me stay with them on the weekend, so I went and stayed with them on the weekends and then I'd come back. I would go stay with the man

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that helped raise me on the weekdays and then when school was out, through the summer, I would stay with them, and weekdays, I'd come back. Then, also, they ended up transferring schools with me. So I would stay with them at nighttime and then, of course, they'd take us back, which it wasn't but a ten-minute drive to the school and then, you know, we'll go back at night but that was like in the wintertime before I stopped staying with them fully. And, you know, the incident with her fiancée, you could say, I have never told her (mom). I had told my God mom and that was it. I don't recall telling anybody else about that because, you know, I was thinking, like in school that's what we were learning, say no to drugs and I was like, well, what if he just keeps asking and I can't say no?

Relationship with Caregivers

I don't know, basically, him (man who raised her) and my mom had domestic violence a lot in my childhood. And, um, but for some reason like I can still like well, I loved him because, you know, when my mom turned to the drugs, then he took care of me and my younger sister and that's her dad. Um, he took care of me as if I was his. So, you know, he didn't like misjudge me or anything. I guess you could say, um, I just lost respect for my mom. Yep, I've just basically lost respect for her. And then with the man that raised me, like even though he like beat her, and I had witnessed it, I felt like, I don't know, I didn't have anything against him, I guess because even though I could see it, I was young and then, when we got older, when I needed him the most, he was there. And then, you know, I'm just like, if he wouldn't have passed away we wouldn't be here (Midwest) now and like this. Yep, they were married and, you know, she ended up filing

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for divorce with him. We had never got whoopings or anything from him but, I would guess you can have to say it was often that he beat my mom. I do recall some, um, well, at least one, um, incident because where we lived, it wasn't a farm but it was like a barn and stuff and we didn't have animals or horses, just had cats and dogs.

And basically he just drug my mom through the field by her head, through the cornfield, back to the car because she had took out running and then other times, I guess it was, um, I guess you can say that it was to the extent where she did run. There was a couple of times she had took me and my sister with her. But that time when she just opened the car door and she just took off running and that was the time she left us.

Another time or two I remember that she was leaving us, and that she had left but she would always come back to him and I guess that's another reason why I just lost respect for her, because, you know, she was letting it happen in front of her kids. And now that I have my daughter, I can't even see myself getting hit on or anything while at least she's there. Then the fact that I've been through it before, I wouldn't even allow it to happen. Oh, I called him daddy because, um, that's who I thought was my daddy 'til like, I guess you can say I was old enough to know that that wasn't once I heard my mom had, I guess you could say they got married when I was two because they were married for two years before she, um, got pregnant with my sister because I was already two. Two of my sisters was four years younger than me. So, you know, um, I was just like that. Now I just say the man that raised me.

My mom has been clean for five years but she's smoking weed and she left in September to a rehab for that, so she's clean from that too. My relationship with my mom

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has changed around my daughter. She helps out a lot with my daughter, a lot. I called to ask her if I can have \$8 for my credit report and she gave me \$10, so I was happy about that. But I think, mainly, if it wasn't for my daughter, I wouldn't still be here. I wouldn't go back to Alabama though but, you know, I probably wouldn't be here but I wouldn't have the contact that I have with mom now because I would have felt like I didn't have to have a contact.

Childhood Experiences of Economic Hardship

Describe my childhood? [Sighs] Um, it was, um, I went to school, it was, um, hard. You know, although I love school, you know, I never failed to go to school, but I went to school to leave the life that I had at home, to leave the problems. Um, I guess you can just say that it was, I don't want to say it's pretty bad because I heard stories that are like, that are similar to mind, but they're even worsen. So, I guess you can say it was kind of hard for me. I like, grew up early. Um, basically, in the morning time I would wake up. I had a alarm clock. I would wake up and go to school. When I came home I would just go in my room and close the door. Sometimes I was even scared to go to the bathroom. And we had a whole bunch of dirty clothes and I like, I would just leave my room to use the bathroom or bathe but I was scared to leave out of my room at times. I think that's when I started pulling my hair because I started looking for split ends because I didn't have the proper care. It was when we didn't have deodorant or pads or anything. So when, um I started looking for split ends and then I felt that sensation, that's, um, the feeling that it came from and then I guess you could say that's what I went to like that spot, just numb, then I'd just go to somewhere else (mentally). So then I guess you can

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say that's when I was doing it in the room and then it came to when I would just sit there and pull my hair, um, at other people's houses. Like I wouldn't even think about it, just do this. So, um, that was, um...that part, when I just stayed in my room and, um, what was the question again? How was it like? And then basically, since I didn't have the necessities, it became hard for me to stay in school, stay concentrated because I was picked on about the stuff. And, um but I tried to run track a couple of times and I was even embarrassed then because you know, and I had my womanly come on monthly and kind of embarrassed to do that. So, you know, I had to substitute for tissue and I asked my God parents, and like, they said, "Oh, we don't have anything." So, you know, it's like what else was I supposed to do?

I was scared to leave my room because I was scared of the question "Would you like to hit this?" that was from my mom's fiancée asking me if I want drugs. It was a two-bedroom. So, you know, I was just like, um, that was before I had told my God mom. And then basically, you know, I just started, um, going over there, sometimes like, I would just stay with my God sister sometimes. She had problems, too, with them, so we will just stand outside and it could be snowing or anything and we'll just stand outside. So then they started seeing me coming over a lot, lot more. And then that's when it was like, that's when she was like, "Well, Toni, what's going on?" And I told her. So that's when I started going between her and the man that raised me. So then it was like, um, he didn't have hot water and stuff. So it was like, for deodorant I would have to use his deodorant. And it was, I recall one Christmas, I thought that, you know, I had, um, got a new outfit and everything. I thought that maybe since it was cold, I put my clothes on a

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kerosene heater and it got that smell on it and when I went to school it was like the worst day ever because everybody could smell it and that's when I just did not want to stay at his house anymore, because of that. So then I just basically stayed with my God mom. I'm okay because I done talked about this a couple of times. So, you know, and then it's like, then the lady (shelter staff), well, she said that it's okay for me to talk about it. So, then like maybe I should get counseling because, since I put it in the back of my head, when it all comes out, then that'll help but then I just prefer just to put it back there and just leave it alone.

When I was upset as a child I pulled my hair. I wasn't much of a fighter. Um, I did have a diary but my mom always will have a way of getting a hold of it and reading it. And like then she would punish me for the things that I wrote down you know, and anything, from what's going on at their house to what's going on at school so, you know, it's just like when I did get angry and she did that, I didn't write it down. I would just sit there, and pull my hair, and just go blank. So I guess it's a kind of way how I start putting stuff in the back of my head, like, "Oh, well." I don't know why she wanted to read my diary. She is like that all the time. She gets the password to my sister's face book page she'll go on it. I don't know why she does it, if she feels like we should talk to her or something but like at that time like how could we talk to her? Then, also, around the time they had six month custody with my younger sister. So the man that raised me took my sister and yeah. So I think I can honestly say that my sister didn't go through much of anything like my older sister did because he kept her when I was gone and stuff. I feel like she and my older sister was protected, I don't know. I'm just upset that I had to go

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through it. I don't know, I guess, like I said, I grew up a lot faster. So, it's like, well, my sister did come to my mom's house. Then, you know, if there was like a bologna sandwich then I wouldn't eat. That's how it came down to me to just staying in the room. I didn't have a reason to come out and go to the refrigerator because there wasn't little to nothing in there. So it was like, um, I'd just basically just stay in my room. And then when she came, of course, you know, I would tell her, "Let's go to your friend's house or something." Um, he has brothers and sisters, um, the man that raised me. He has family members, but it was like the way that they like treated me, I wouldn't even want to go over and ask for anything. So it was like I would tell her to go. [Crying] I just, I say it's hurtful to let me go through that because nobody should have to go through it. My sisters didn't go through it. I hate my mom. Yeah, and I, like it's even hate my grandma, she knew what was going on. And she would still say to me, "I tried to give your mom money for you to eat," what does that do? Why would you give it to her? [Crying] So, I got into it with her (grandmother) too because, you know, like she kept us away from them, like kept me away from her and my sister. So it was like, well, when we did go visit I would always cry to her to let me stay with her [Crying] and she wouldn't take me. [Crying] Um, to be honest, I really don't know why and I have never asked, so I wouldn't know, because she knew what was going on but she took my sister because of what happened to her but I was like, "Why not look into what is going on with me?"

I never asked her why but I done got over it. I don't too much care anymore because I'm not going through it anymore now. Then my mom had us move up here with my aunties who we didn't even know, because she kept us, well, I kept isolated. I knew

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she had sisters. But it's like why would I want to go to them? You know, I didn't know them like that and we came up here, 13 hours away, with these people we don't even know. So now we came here. Well, um, I just started doing things because I knew that my sister was used to a life of not having to go without food at nighttime. So I started doing things that I'm very ashamed of [Crying] to get food for her. And then...but I think I wasn't bad here because there's so many opportunities for you to like get a degree and learn. Where we lived in Alabama was so small that we didn't have, um, two stoplights. There was only one main highway, to reach another highway. It was such a small town but, you know, that's all I knew of and then we came up here, and I seen all the lights and the city busses and I was like, I don't have to walk, but I don't have to walk, but I don't have to walk all the time. So, I'm so happy that this is where we came to, and that I conceived my daughter because I know that life is not the country, you know, life is not that anymore. There's more stores than Walmart or Piggly Wiggly. So, yeah, I'm happy we came up here, I just want to get over this.

Economic Resources in the Midwest

I think when we first got here we stayed with my aunt and then we was like with her for like a good two weeks, not even, no, no, actually, we were here for just a couple of days and we got in at St. Mary's shelter but my mom didn't use the resources like she could have and so we ended up moving with my aunt out of St. Mary's shelter. When we were in St. Mary's shelter for, um, it was summer time when we got here, so, August, September, October, for about six months. And, um, then I guess that was like the limit that's there, because they told us we had to leave. So then we went to stay with my aunt.

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And then my mom had found an apartment. And, um, they were willing to work with her but she was still struggling because she was only getting \$437 and then of course the food stamps from here but then the rent, I think it was like, uh, \$720-something because she had caught a sale or a discount. So she was still like depressed about it.

I stayed in this state because I was like, if I didn't have her (daughter) I hope I would have went to school somewhere but I can't go nowhere with her because I don't have that type of money or the family or anything, you know, that somewhere else, so we could have start over at. So,

[Sighs] basically, um, I guess, well, this is my third time being in the shelter and my first time was in '09. Um, I guess you can say I had got a place in, um...last year, in March on March 3rd I moved in and August came and I lost my job. They was just, um, just going out of business. It was like a food service place at the mall but they went out of business. So, and then my aid, they said I made too much from July so they couldn't help me. Well, no, I made too much [money] in August, so they couldn't help me in October. So I had used that MFIP to cover September's rent and then it was like, um so October came and I just gave up. "Like I'm tired of trying. I'm going to go to Alabama." And I was down there for two and a half months, me and my daughter and I had got a job like my first week there because my sister, she like put in a good word for me, so...And then it came down, so it was like, why am I here? There's nothing but alcoholics and drug users in the country and my grandmamma there. So, you know and my sister too. So, we came back. My, uh, sister's grandma, her dad sounds like, "We have some family." She cussed at Kim in her development, I'm going to call it that because Kim have these tantrums that

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she's throwing. I didn't know that that was a tantrum but these people here (shelter) are saying that that's something we should look into. She didn't want us to stay with her anymore, so I went to stay with my best friend. She ended up just like letting her apartment go, so I went to stay at mom's; she like totally couldn't stay here either. So, basically I'm here [shelter] because I gave up my apartment.

Daughter's Father

I guess you could say I'm the one that's, um, trying to keep her around her father. Um, actually, tomorrow I agreed to take my daughter to go see him although he's no help with her. My daughter tomorrow will be 32 months and she probably has seen him, or the fact that he asked for her a good five times, and the fact that I took her over there just so I can track him down so he can see her, I'm going to say a good ten times, even though I know it's way lesser than that because he's been in jail a majority of the time, and when he's out he's just ripping and running. So, I guess you could say...and I'm pushing the relationship for my daughter to like get to know him. But it seems like...you know, of course, when there outta jail they won't visit. So, it seems like when he's in there, in jail, the most, that's when he wants to see her. So yeah, and I feel like, really, I feel like I shouldn't be doing this but, you know, it's like, well, what else am I going to do? You know, at least I can tell her like, "Well, I tried." I can tell Kim that, you know, "I tried when you were younger," so.

Right, but even now I question, am I doing the right thing too. Who should I allow around my daughter? Even though their dad doesn't care, why am I doing this? Is it because I'm weak or what is going on? Why am I doing this? So, and I feel like I'm just

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setting myself up for failure when I know that when he gets out again he's not going to do anything. He's not going to do anything different. He's not. I was like, when we go see him tomorrow, I'm going to try to do everything to make sure she's on her best behavior so he can see what he's missing out on and then, you know, after then, I don't have a problem. There's no way he can call me and I'm not going to write him because I don't have time. I told him that. We get that the first time. Now it's like, "Why am I doing it? But I will bring her to see you." So, of course I'm still talk to his mom. We talk on Facebook all the time. So it's like that's the way that he can know about Kim, if he asks and then she makes up excuses for him. It's just so pitiful and I look at her like, "Why are you still holding on?" But I guess that's a mother's love. It makes me look at her like, ugh. I can't respect no one who doesn't take care of their child or at least you don't even have to provide for her because that's what I'm doing. But, you know, and of course he's in jail and I don't have a phone, but, you know, still, you [daughter's father] were out for like a good 10 months before you went back [Sighs] but yeah, but then that's her, if Kim would have like robbed a bank I would still love her because that's my child, so I guess that's why she's doing that but because the excuses, you know, that's just unnecessary because she was a single parent, that's why.

Relationship with and Hopes for Daughter

Now I'm thinking about my child and her development, and I feel like "are we done?" She's like, "Actually, you should read to her more." And I'm like, "I know that but if I wouldn't...didn't have my ways, I would read to my daughter. There's times I don't even want to look at her. You know, like, of course I had her today but yesterday I

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was just like, “Kim, will you please just go over there.” You know, and then instead of me saying, “Come on, let’s read.” You know, when I got discouraged she got discouraged and then so it’s like now, when she wants to pick up a book, I have to will myself to just look at it, at least hold it for her. So, I feel like, “Oh, well. I can’t deal with them now. That problem.”

I’m sorry. For some reason I don’t feel like I met that reward in part, as in when I can say that she’s happy because I’m still questioning is she happy because there are times when she doesn’t even want to come to me. You know, and she call other people mommy, which is part of my mom’s fault. I blame it all on her too and, um, you know, I don’t feel like it’s the reward part yet but I feel like when she smiles, that it helps. I’m happy that she’s laughing about something that I did to make her happy. Is there anything that I feel proud of as a parent? No, not right now. You know, of course, you know, um, the fact that I kept at it. But let anybody else say that there’s more to come, so, yeah. Actually, right now I’m not happy with what’s going on so far, since she’s been born.

I use to let her know when I approve of her behavior doing high fives. Um, pow, pow, pow is something I made up, with three high fives. She won’t even do it anymore, just because it’s been so long. And, um, you know, like, “Yay, Kim.” But now it’s like that doesn’t even like phase her now. Probably because I haven’t did it in so long. I know it’s, um, been since we moved in October since I did the “pow, pow, pow,” because at that point I was just like there’s nothing, you know, that’s when her tantrums started getting worser. Um, so, yeah, I think that’s it. And then also, you know, well, I give her fruit snacks and stuff like that whenever she wants it, but there are times when, you

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know, she's doing good, so I give her a sucker and that's something that I rarely give her because it's so messy. So, yeah, or get her doll or something like, "Hey, you want to go get your doll and bring it downstairs?"

When I disapprove of something she does, I yell. (Confessional tone) I do. I'll probably be um, like when she was in there crying, I got frustrated, because I'm like, "Kim, why do you keep doing this?" And I was just like, okay, well, I have something that might smooth her down, because it is time to eat but, you know, so it's like I have this, which I brought down here because I didn't know that they were going to allow her to go in there. So, you know, it was like, I probably do things that is not good for her behavior too. Um, well I did read to her a lot but then I started working, and so that changed it and my mom started caring for her, So when Kim started calling her mom, I felt like my responsibilities, even though I didn't drop her off, so I said, "I don't do that." Because my mom's history...well, mine is I don't trust her to do that. But it's like I felt like, you know what? How about you just go. So I guess you can say yeah, I have changed a lot. You know, the babying up stuff and [sighs] but now it's like I don't do that anymore. Yeah, well, I try to hold her at night but of course she just goes like, you know, lay on her other side. I don't take nothing into that, because she's probably just a wild sleeper like me. But, you know, I still give her hugs and kisses. So I do baby her up, the way she throws her tantrums, because I didn't know what it was, so...and it...uh, I guess it's like...I thought that was like got worser, because she expected me to do something for her, so she just was like if she keeps doing more and more, that's what I thought, but they're like, well, it's because she can't calm herself. So I feel like, yes, maybe some

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things have changed. I was assuming that when she was having the tantrums, it's because she wanted you to pick her up, and hold her because this is my first experience with a toddler, ever. Like I probably like hold a baby or something but that's it. And, you know, it's like that's what they were saying, that's why they throw tantrums, because they're so used to getting stuff. And then, when they end up getting into stuff, there's no...but then, you know, like before we came here people brought it to my attention. Well, you know, I was like, "Whoa, hey, like no child is the same. You know, maybe your child goes through this but mines going through it, so I've got to deal with it. But it's like, now, since, it's more and more people saying it, I want to just get her checked out, because I'm going to do it, just to be on the safe side. I feel like I should have did it months ago but [sighs] um, also the speech part, which I'm blame myself because I didn't talk to her like I should have.

[Sighs], I wouldn't even know how I would describe my relationship with her now. I feel like before I felt like I wasn't a parent. I'm just, I felt like I'm not her parent because I can't console her. There's nothing I can do to like please her. And when we stay with my mom she made me feel like everything I did was wrong. Everything. And it's like that's another thing we have a problem with because she's like it's grandmother's love and I'm like, "You shouldn't say you're momma because it's hurting me," and I just stopped crying about this when we got here, because she would call other people in here mommy and they were like, "Well, don't take offense to it." You know, and I told them my mom is the one who said mommy as in her. So maybe she feel like everybody's mommy, except for me. I feel like everything I was doing was wrong. And it's like, I

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moved two hours away on a bus from my mom when we moved to St. Croix because I was like, "I don't want you to have nothing to do with my daughter. You're not doing nothing but putting me down when it comes to her." So, you know, it's like with my relationship with Kim, I just feel like I'm learning. It's not a new beginning because I have kept her all her life. She probably went a full, her whole life away, about 20 days you know, separated, a day here or a day there. So, you know, I feel like that, yeah, I'm pretty sure that, if she went somewhere I was going with her. [Sighs] Yeah. I'm hopeful about what I'm learning about my daughter. We have like these meetings. I'm usually on track with the meetings for her but then I forgot about it today, because I didn't call her [the worker] yesterday but she said she was going to come anyway. So, yeah, I am, you know, on it because it's like it keeps me from thinking about my own personal problems. So I'm surprised I'm not crying because this is always a touchy, uh, subject for me, her. But yeah, it's like I am hopeful that I can like develop a relationship with her before she gets older.

If I had three wishes for Kim, I guess you could say to be, um, stable, you know, so that she can have everything that she needs, you know, and if she might want something, I can be able to provide that for her. Another one would be, um, well, I guess me and, um, you know, her family, the people that, you know, that encourage her are, uh, mentally stable because I feel like sometimes I take my anger out on her and I just force her to just stop being a child. I force her to sit down while I'm going through my angerment and, um, I don't know, just hope that she's happy. You know, because if she's happy she can make a future for herself. The family that care about her are of course me,

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um, my mom., and, you know, if she chooses to be a part of her dad's life, I'm hoping that he can be stable because he, um, has a disorder and, um, you know, I hope that, .maybe that's why he does what he does. I don't know, I don't make up no excuses, either you're there or you're not. So, you know, I'm just hoping like when she does make the decision it's not because of his mind frame at that moment, it's because she knows how he is or, you know? Well, his mom says he has bipolar. It was discovered years ago but while he's in jail he's got to go through a whole 'nother step as far as going to get some help for it. So, yeah, and their family, on that side runs this so. His older sister, she schizophrenic, uh, um, and then she has six kids altogether. I know two of them that has ADHD now and a majority of them are grown. They're all grown. He's 19 today. I had met him, her dad's name is Matthew. I met Matthew when I had first moved up here when we found that apartment. I had met him but this is when I guess you could say it was a one-night stand because I didn't think nothing of it and neither did he but my daughter was conceived, so.

I think she would wish me to be happy and of course she don't know what we're going through now and I don't even know if I'm going to tell her, like, "You know, well I was in the shelter three times before you were three." You know, I'll probably tell her I was in the shelter but not that many times because I'm very ashamed about that.

Sex Offender and Daughter's Safety

We went to go see her when we was down there one time. And when I found out that her other son had molested a little boy a fact I didn't know and I had my daughter over there, I was just like, "Oh, I can't come back over here." You know, and I didn't

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even that he was kind of, you know, going the other way but I didn't know it was with a child. You know, then, when I was like, "Oh, I want to talk to you, Ms. Ruby. Grandma and Linda came through." And they were like, um, "Really?" I was like, "Yeah" then they told me, looking up on the Internet, and there he was. I was just like, "Why didn't anyone tell me, or let alone tell my sister because that's her brother?" You know, she didn't know. It's like, so, that was the last time. I didn't even go back to say goodbye to her. I had like an hour to spare. She's like a couple of blocks away from where I was staying at. You know, and I didn't even go back to say goodbye to her. He had to file for offender, a sex offender. Yes, ma'am. He has to do that. But, um, he's still working. Like the job that he has is, he's like a manager, I'm pretty sure, at Taco Bell, or it's Burger King. It's one of those places there, that he's still working at. But I don't know what was the situation, why he's not in jail for it or if he did his time, because we was gone for five years and I haven't heard anything about him before we went there. You know, it's like he's just there. Um, like, um, boy, it's always been known that he like wore lipstick and stuff, that way. You know, we all knew that. We heard stories about him in college and stuff. And it was like, but I didn't know that he would do that to a child though. Like that actually, that it done happened twice. I don't know, but somebody said, well, they never went through with it all, so, but, you know, I know both times they were boys and, you know, it's just that when I heard the first one I was like, "Oh, my goodness," and I had my daughter in timeout in the hallway so that I can talk to my grandma and like the fact that I had done that, it made me feel like what type of parent would do that? But I didn't

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know. If I would have known, I wouldn't even like went in the house, just called and said, "I love you guys."

Parental Strengths and Challenges

I think my childhood helps keep me going and trying because, um, instead of giving up like my mom did, that's um, when she throws these tantrums that they're saying that we need to look into it, it makes me just block it out. I can ignore it because I've been blocking out things so long which, you know, that's um, besides just blocking it out, because I'm not going to just, if I pay attention to it I'm going to get frustrated myself and want to leave. There's many times I thought about adoption, but that's because how my mom made me feel. Ugh. But she, um, you know, I would just like for her not to go through as many things that I did. Like the stuff that I can provide to her, that's something I don't even want no one to go through that because that's embarrassing and it makes your self-esteem very low. So, yeah that was just my childhood pushed me. I stay like a block away from the Dollar Tree. So I can take \$5 and go get five body washes. I would just stock up on stuff. And, you know, I was just like, I'm so happy because that's something I couldn't do. I'm still happy about that, that I chose, like if I had \$5 or \$6 to spare, a majority of that \$5 is going to the body wash, other stuff, you know, deodorant because it's \$1 and that helps. So, you know Buy two of the majority of the things and buy...if you get one bar of soap, get two of them, so that when you do need it you can have it. I believe that my childhood keeps me going, keeps me living, and trying. My childhood I guess. That's all I can think about as something that pushes me to like do for my daughter. Otherwise, I would have gave up years ago, instead of trying to

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push or, you know, um, if, I don't know, I always think like, what if I didn't have a child, where would I be? And I feel guilty about that because I would rather, I want to know what that other life would have been. I wasn't a party girl and I always had my hand in books going to school and I'm just like would I have like almost have a degree by now? You know, like what would have happened? Will I be like forgetful of all this stuff, like it doesn't matter, because I would have had a better life for myself? You know, but now that I have a daughter it's like I have to make a life for her, so she won't go through what I went through. So, it just, it brings up all the memories. It's like I know that's where my reward will come from, if, you know, she is able you know, I don't think about if she had a child or anything but if, you know, she's able to be satisfied with her childhood, I feel like my reward will come from that.

Personal Struggles

The most challenging thing for me as a parent is um, my problems. My own problems, um, when I don't even know why but there is, like this happened. There's a girl, a lady there [at the shelter]. She gave me \$40, you know, of course well, I didn't even know it, but she took me and my daughter to the store. So, you know, of course I gave her daughter some snacks but she didn't know that I did it. When we got here, I had said, "Here, this is for you." And she was just and she brought that up, like, um, "You gave my daughter some fruit snacks." And I'm just like, "That's because Kim couldn't eat all them." They were still upstairs and I had, um, gave her two, because it was five for ten and I gave her two and I was like, I just did it because, that's the type of person I am and it was like I went like a good week without talking to her for no reason at all. We just

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start back talking the day before yesterday because, um, the lady, um, to Alicia was like, “You know, she’s a good person. Ya’ll have this bond.” I couldn’t even tell her like...well, for some reason, I don’t even talk to her anymore and then she didn’t do anything. She kept like, “How did your day go today?” You know, and it’s like why, I don’t even know, because I got, to myself and it’s happened plenty of times. I can remember back. The thing is, when I get over that point it might last for a couple of days. I don’t know in my head I always ask, what am I supposed to do to get this back like it was and that’s why I pushed it for more days because I didn’t know what to say to her because, you know, she was probably like, “Well, this girl’s crazy. I don’t want to have nothing to do with her.” And, you know, basically I was like, “Well, you know what? We’re all going through things in here, but this is something that happens to me a lot.” She was like, “It’s okay.” So ever since then, it’s just been picking back up and nothing happened, nothing at all. She didn’t say nothing out of the way or anything. I just came out like, “Kim, let’s go upstairs,” and I took my daughter upstairs and after then I’ve just been not wanting to deal with her. I don’t know why but, well, I don’t talk to the other ladies but we have our discussions but, you know, it’s not like I’m about to sit there and say, “How’re you doing today?” Well, I would say that, but like, um, you know, not get deep into conversation with them but with her I would, and I don’t even know her and then she gave me \$40 out the blue and I was just like, “Why did you do this?,” you know. I don’t like taking stuff because I think it’s a charity they’re trying to feel sorry for me. She’s just like, “This is for you.” It’s like, “What is this for?” you know, right? Because we moved in that day, we had got to know each other. So and this right here, this issue

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has happened last week and it just stopped Sunday because I remember, she was going to church and I was like, “You know what? Before you leave, can I talk to you?” So, and then I was just like, “Why are you doing this?” Yeah, I did feel offended by it. Yeah, I did. She was like, “We’re all having problems in here.” Then she brought up the fact because she didn’t get food stamps at that time. It’s like but that has nothing to do with \$40. I’ll spend like \$10 at the most and that was food stamps, this is cash and that’s why I’m looking like, “Why are you doing that?” But then I told her no, she’ll end up sliding it under my door anyway and the fact that she kept trying to give it to me, it just showed me like she’s not asking for anything. She just wants me to have it. When yeah, when I want to just distance myself. I don’t even want to do it. It just happens! (frustrated) but the problem is, I don’t know how to, uh, make it back like it was. So, yeah (sighs). I don’t know, I feel like it might be like it’s not a wall, like something clear, like a mask or something and then when I finally like can get to myself, I’m like, “How do I play this out?” You know, and I don’t know, it happens plenty of times. I done went through many friends and, you know, some of them have actually stuck it out. Other ones, you know, they’re like, “Hi, how’re you doing?” And, you know, that’s the thing, you know, I can’t tell them what I’ve been through because it’s like how are they going to react to this stuff?

Relationship with Friends

I have one friend, she just thinks like all of her problems are the worst and I can’t even tell her what I’m going through because of what I’ve been through. I really care for her because this is my daughter’s God mom. I’ve been knowing her since, longer than her

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dad. When I had got up here, the first day of when we were at the first shelter I met her. It was like, she keeps telling me all about her problems and I'm just like, "You know what? Yesterday I wanted to kill myself." I feel like this all the time I'm just like, "But you're not understanding. It's not how I'm feeling but it's not something that just occurred. It's always happening." You know, and I can't even tell her stuff like that because she's like, "Oh, my God! Well, you know, this day..." You know, I just want to talk to her, so she can know that she's not the only one. But I think she's looking like I'm making up an excuse for what she's going through. But I'm not. But I care for her. I want us to have this talk here. Well, you know, of course I want her to share her story because it's not just about me our friendship. But, you know, it's like when I want to tell her, I'd rather just hear somebody else's story than tell her. Because it's like somebody's done have it worse than me. So, you know, I'd just prefer just to throw it to the back of my head and go, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, you know, that stuff," but just hearing other people's story. Actually, the lady that was in here before me, like me and her were the main ones that were talking about it because, like the girl who gave me the \$40, she ain't been through nothing. She had everything handed to her, she's like, "Oh, I'm blessed to be living today." I told her like, "I feel like my welfare is too much, its like too much because why am I breathing when I don't have anything to breathe for?" [Crying] And she was just like, "Well, you should be thankful because you're living." I'm like, "I'd rather not be living than go through this," like, yeah, so, you know, it's like I feel like I should just hear other people's stories, so I can help them if I can. So, yeah.

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Coping with Emotions and Disappointments

I just feel like...because some of these things, that's why I don't mention them, because I can throw it back, so be like okay. But when I talk to other families or other mom's been through, or men too, they been through something similar then it brings back memories and even though they keep flashing, I'm just like, "Well, you know, it's their time to tell their story." You know, I don't even want to even tell them stuff. Oh, God, all so emotional. Yeah, because I don't even want to have these feelings. I'd just rather not even cry, like, "Oh, well, it didn't happen." That's how I feel. I just want to [voice cracks] get over it, like just toughen up. Like, why? Who's gonna cry about something that happened five years ago? [Crying]. That didn't even happen recently. Who am I to cry about that? when other people out there, it's happening to them right now. I just don't like to cry at all. Shoot, I don't even remember crying when I was little like the same when kids were picking on me at school I would just toughen it out, "Oh, well," You know, I might have come home and cried, and my mom said, "Shut it up." You know, she'll be like, "Oh, get over it," and I couldn't even tell her like why I was crying. Then I don't even remember her asking me like, "What are you...what is wrong with you?" Yeah, it's probably during that stage when I just stopped crying because as far I can remember, we didn't have a relationship because of the drugs and stuff but let her tell you, she was on them drugs for two years. I remembered years and years. She said there was a point where I wouldn't even touch her and I remember, I remember her and my sister all playing and stuff and I would just be like, "No. I don't want you to touch me. I don't want you to touch you," when they were playing and I was just like "no". I

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remember that and she was like, “Well, that happened for years.” I was just like, “It did?”

Because I just...that’s the only thing I can think about, was like, “Don’t touch me. I’m going in my room.” Then, since I went from aunt to my God mom at 13, it has to be I’d say at least, because I know they divorced, um, in ’96. I was six then. They divorced but he was still coming over and beating on her when she moved out. So, since, I’d say I was ten, as far as I can remember me just not wanting to deal with her anymore because I had stayed with other people, um, before I had got to know my God parents, my God mom because they’re not there anymore, so my God mom. I had stayed with other people.

No I don’t think I ever had any times when I felt like it is all right for me to cry, or feel because I was too busy. I was content with my life. I didn’t have time to think about what I went through. You know, it’s like I was trying to work. I was looking for jobs and then it’s like when I get discouraged, which, um...the ladies here at the shelter, I tell them I’d rather feel, um say honestly I’ll be like, “Well, you know what? I’m not going to get the job anyway.” I say that before I say, “I hope I get the job,” because if I don’t get it, I’m not going to be upset about it. They say that I think, um, negative, and I’m discouraging when I should be, um, like I should think positive to get positive results and I’m like, “Well, why?” Yesterday I came in here and I tried to get my credit report but I put the wrong zip code in and I need that for housing, or I can get a housing thing [voucher], because I got picked and it’s like I didn’t get it. They told me I was locked out and the lady saw how I was so upset that she’s like, “Oh, don’t get upset. We can mail it in. It takes 15 days.” I did not want to wait for 15 days! I need this now or they’re going to give my spot up. Then I just got discouraged. I told her, “You know what? Thank you

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but I'm not going to try it anymore. So then the other lady, she was like, "Will you come on? Let's try it again," and it didn't work. So then I just left there I was like, "God this so," I just doubt myself because I got my hopes up, that I could come in here and do this because I did it before and then when it happened I was just like, "You know what? That's why I don't get my hopes up, because I'm going to get put down." So I just prefer to just say, "Oh, well" to things, to prevent me getting hurt. Well, sometimes it's like I can't deal with it but right now I'm feeling like it's well, I guess you could say I've been doing this for like a year. But now I'm feeling like if I say it's not going to happen then that's when it's like everything, if it don't happen it's okay and I feel like I'm protected that way, I don't have to get my hopes up. Yeah, well, it's um, I don't mind sharing my story. You know, I just feel like when others need to talk then, you know, of course, I'm just going to listen to them talk. It's, uh, like the housing thing, It's like, um, things that I want or that we need, you know, I can't get my hopes up with that.

Family Traditions and Celebrations

No, there was no traditions that we celebrated when I was a child. Oh, well, the man that raised me, and then my God parents, they always had like cookings and stuff on Sundays when I'd stay with them too. So I guess you would say yeah, we had them. But I'm probably pretty sure she [mother] did when I was younger but I don't remember having a cake for my birthday. And I had...I bought my daughter her, uh...because she was born two weeks before my 18th birthday. And I bought her a cake. And I was like, "Can you put my name on there too?" Because I was just thinking like, "Mom, have you ever bought me a birthday cake?" No, then I remember when I was younger when I

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wanted her to get me a birthday cake. So, probably yeah, when my God family and the man that raised me, he used to cook too. I was in church too but that was just another way to get food besides school because we were guaranteed two meals a day and, you know, church, they have meals, the majority of the time they will cook too and then they have snacks and stuff after church anyway. So, and I feel like, but I did go to church. You know, I did read the bible at times. But, yeah, I did it as a way to escape my life instead of going to, you know, praise God or, you know, learn. But of course that's what I did when I was scared though but it was like, when I leave church Sunday night it all start again. Actually—I haven't been to church in so long; well, I went one time last year and then they looked like they were having a fashion show. But before that, I had took my daughter to church, she was like a week and a half old, almost two weeks. It was a Sunday, because she was born on a Tuesday and, um, I took her to church. Before that I didn't go to church before I got pregnant because I feel like, I don't know, I want to believe in Him but it's like how can I? You know, I do say thank you God because, you know, like she said, I should be thankful I'm breathing but, you know, I'm like with all the bad stuff that's done happen, of course, I don't blame Him but it's like, "Well, where were you?" You know, but of course He was there. Yeah, so I don't know. I don't really do the church thing.

Supportive Kin

The adults in my life that I felt close to growing up were um, well, um, the man that raised me, his mom. You know, um, his sister, and brothers, you know, and his ex-wife, they all treated my sister as if, they all treated me as if I didn't exist. Well, they

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knew we were going hungry too. You know, and we stayed in some rundown apartments but they had, it was like these was the rundown apartments right here, and there was a fence. And like less it was one house and this two...that second house. And this is his, um, older brother stayed, no, he's the oldest; his second, the brother under him stayed right there. And they had they all had money. So, you know, it's like he's right here, less than, and I'm the first apartment building, so it's like less than what a [sighs], a thirty second walk to where we were at, so he can just send food, you know, or send anything, or just stop by. It was like, that's, um, my daughter' the man that raised me's, younger brother. So it was like, you're right there. And that house was passed down from generations, uh, well, just...well, like because the man that raised me, his mom, Ms. Ruby, she stayed there. Then she gave it to him because the man that raised me got his own place. You know, that was the fence from...you know, they had a fence, um, around the apartment buildings we stayed in that was basically like the fence there, so...Oh, and then there was some other people. I never met them. Yeah, they were strangers but and then it was Daemon.

Well, um, actually, um, my cousins, we basically went through the same thing, except their mom died because I forgot what she was taken but I stayed with them. I was very young but I was going to school. I remember the magic school bus when they used to come on regular times. That's when I stayed with them. I just don't know what year it was. But then they moved with Ms. Ruby, and that's how I became to know Ms. Rebecca because I had stayed with them. But it was like, sometimes she was like, she was like, "Toni, you can't stay tonight but you can come back tomorrow night, you know, and

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stay.” So, I became close with her because it was like she [crying] was helping me. She used to let me stay with her. When I did feel better she would and she always had some stuff from the Avon catalog, always had deodorant stacked up in this thing in her bathroom, bunches of deodorant and then the girls, they had underwear, they had clothes, they had everything, and it was like I guess they forgot where they came from, so, you know, when I asked them they were like, “Oh, don’t you have that already?” So, you know, I didn’t even feel like asking them. So then, you know, I go ask her, like, “Well, can I have this?” And she was like, “Go ask the girls. You know I don’t have that in here.” But I still was close to her because she did let me stay with her a bunch of times, when I wasn’t at my God mom’s or his (the man that raised her) house but she didn’t have a kerosene heater. She had everything there, food and she had a car. We didn’t have to walk nowhere. She had a lot of stuff there and the fact that she showed me like somebody who done something with her life, this is it. So I feel like I’m very close with her. She’s still alive, just really sick. Actually, I haven’t talked to her in months, since I left. And, you know, it’s kind of sad because when we left I was like, well, I kind of like forgot about them but I didn’t. yeah, so, I feel like I should talk to her but if its now, what am I going to say? “Okay, well, I’ll call you tomorrow,” and then I don’t call her, and she’ll be disappointed. Or she’s waiting a week without speaking to me. You know, I pretty sure it gets her like I feel like it would but I feel like, unless I’ve got something to offer, I shouldn’t call her. [Sighs]. I don’t know, um, what I would offer her because you know, of course she’s retired now and, um, her husband, he’s retired now too. I don’t know, I guess just, um, someone to talk to because like after five or ten minutes I’m just

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like, “Okay, well, I love you and I’ll call you tomorrow.” You know, I guess if she has something she wants to talk about, which, when I do call her she’s like, “Oh, I’m fine baby. I went to the doctor.” I’m like, “Oh, are you okay?,” and I ask her questions. But then it’s like when I tell her about Kim and everything well, I don’t tell her everything that’s going on. But when I tell her about Kim, like she’s fine, then that’s it. I’ll be like, “Okay, well, I’ll call you tomorrow,” and I don’t even think about it anymore, when it’s just a simple phone call.

What Professionals Should Know about Helping Parents

Well, of course, we all have different situations with our kids. No child is the same, as they say but I can’t even say because well, I guess that they already know that, of course, that, um, no child is the same. So, each experience, treat it differently. You know but, you know, keep the same concept of you’re here to help. Oh, yeah, these people here, even though they’re human, you know, they get frustrated and I feel like that’s not their job. You know, you knew what you were getting into. That is the first time I have ever seen that, when my daughter throw her tantrums. And that, oh, no, she’s not an intern; she works here. And I had to tell her about that, later on, because I was so heated, that I like that she’s older and I’m not disrespectful and I felt like I had disrespected her. I went upstairs, and I was just like, “Toni, why did you do that?” But I couldn’t bring myself down to apologize to her because of the way that she said it. Like this is your job. Where do you...what are you talking about, you wouldn’t say that to somebody. And when every time, like if I feel like even with them, if they can’t relate to me or what, you ain’t never went hungry one night or two. Then I don’t feel like I should

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talk to you because it's like what could you say, "Oh, okay." You know, I feel like that's why I don't talk to some of the workers that are there because of that. And with their children, you know, and when you tell me you don't have any kids, it was like, okay, I didn't want my daughter to be down there because you don't have any kids. I don't, you know, It's not nothing against you, I just, it be like if Oh, I was just like, okay, I'm going to see, like and this, um, entertain her but yeah and that's like with anything, if you haven't been through it, I don't want to talk to you. But then when you tell me that you went through things in your childhood, it was like that reassured me. Like I don't mind talking to you at all because it's not like you're going to go back later and be like, "Well, you know, I can't believe she went through that." Because, you know, it's something that you went through, so it's not going to affect you. It's going to affect you rather than me telling you. And it's like, oh. You know. Yeah, that'll be something too that. If you can't relate to it, well, I don't think they should lie, because that's not good either but in my situation I wouldn't want anyone to lie about it. But, you know, just, um, accept it. You know, if you ask questions I would know, you know, just, I really do not know because I want to help people. I want to be a social worker. But, you know, it's like, because I can't relate to, you know, a family that's, uh, rich, you know, they're just having marriage problems. I can't relate to that because I'm not married. So, you know, it's like, yeah. So, you know, if you don't have experience in that area, you can go to it, but like get to know them instead of just heading on in and trying to ask the personal questions. Because when they do that, and ask questions about Kim and I'm like, "You don't have any kids. You haven't even tried to, um, assist me in any way by telling me it's okay. Why are you

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coming and trying to ask me, um, like, ‘Well, how’s she doing today?’” Because I’m looking as you’re trying to be nosy. It’s sad because I’m pretty sure they don’t know the half of it, but it’s like, why should I even try to talk to you? You know, so that would be an advice. You know, if you take it slowly in there and don’t say things like, “I have never seen that before,” and, “What is wrong with her?” Like the lady, she’s going to tell me, “You know, if you want, I can refer you to some agencies and, you know, we can figure out what’s wrong with Kim.” And I’m like, “What are you talking about? There’s nothing wrong with her.” It’s just she’s a toddler. And that’s what I kept telling myself, but [sighs] if there’s nothing wrong with her I shouldn’t have nothing to worry about. So I’m going to get it all together. Checked out. Yeah, I do. Uh, I have fears that maybe, um, something that passed on from one of us. I know because I was born with this attitude, or this personality, of course. But, you know but it’s even hard growing up to get something that my anger that I feel coming on, for her to close up like that. That is one of my fears. If she did, I wouldn’t know what to do because I’m doing it.

Because like my mom it’s like, in that house my sister gets upset with me. And then I get upset with my mom. And my mom gets upset with my sister. So it’s like a triangle of us all just closing up. So, yeah, that’s the one thing I fear, is my personality and even her dad, the fact that he’s not there, that’s rubbing off on her. And No, thank you. I’ve lived it. I’m not passing the pattern.

What Community Should Know Experiences as a Parent

Uh, well, that’d be easy because here [shelter], uh, Kim has the, um the loudest voice. My voice isn’t as low as I would like it. She’s got that. I can see that. When she

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yells, um, many of them [other residents] are like they don't have attitudes but they do.

You know, because they have kids but obviously none of them kids have been what she's doing, um, you know, what she's doing. So it's like offer a hand and, I don't like that they take breaks, so I don't even like to give her to anybody, but just be like, "Are you okay? Would you like for me to do this today?" Thank you. Thank you. You know, so it's like if, you know, they see it's happening [daughter having a tantrum] then don't um, be like, "Oh, my gosh." They say that now. We come into a room, "Oh, lord," and that touches me and it's like, "Yesterday you was trying to ask me how was I doing. Why are you saying this?" And it just, that's why I'd rather just stay by myself, because this thing that I'm going through with my daughter, people are just taking advantage of, "God, she's too old to be doing this." And, you know, I'm like, "What are you talking about, like she's supposed to know." [Voice cracking] So it's like they don't know that we're getting help. All of them know I have meetings at least three times in a week that we're trying to get help for her. You know, it's like they all know that I'm working on it but they're still like, "Oh, lord." That happened yesterday, and I just felt like hitting them and that's why I keep my daughter in the room [Crying] and even the staff do it. [Crying] I'll put her in the room but they just be like I've abandoned my child because of what people are saying. And they're like, "Well, Toni, you can take that to your room." I'm like, "I'm trying to fix her plate here. We will go in our room." We haven't ate dinner down here in at least a good week and a half. (Crying). I fixed the plate, well, besides the weeks, the few days she was sick, I would fix the plate and walk her to the room. I'll put enough on there so that we're both, you know, we got enough for dinner before I come back down,

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just to throw it away, and go back upstairs. You know, I would like to just give her a chance to play with the kids but I'm just like I just don't want to deal with it. Then parents are like...one night she screamed they'll be like, "Oh, lord, you come outta here, so you won't do that." [Talking to their children]. You know, it's like [sighs] they. [Crying] They don't want their kids to play with my baby. [Crying] Yeah, just I want to hurt them. I really do, because my child didn't do anything wrong. She doesn't know she's doing something wrong and they see her by herself. "She's like got a bug or something. Don't play with her. Come on, let's go this way." [Crying] Because it's like when I was, um, in school, no one wanted to talk to me because of the way I smelled. This is basically what they're doing to her. Then, uh, like, um, they're trying, I know that they talk about us behind our backs. I know they do because people have come and told me. But it's like, you know, if I didn't go through it, I blocked it out. People can't, not everybody can do that and then that girl who gave me a forty, she, lets her daughter come around my daughter all the time. She has no problem, like, "Um, can Kim come downstairs? I'm going to keep her if you want to go take a shower." She doesn't do any of that but these other women, [Crying] and they have more than one baby and they're still like, "Oh, lord." But, yeah it still hurts. I don't want her [daughter] to go through none of that. [Crying] Yeah. But I'm just like, at least every day I know if I know somebody that's going through this, you know, I can say, honestly, I have been there. I have. And it would be over. But it's like I don't have no more to say.

My daughter's dad went through something with his mom but she didn't keep him. His grandma kept him. So it's like, "Well, can I call you up and ask you, what did

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you do?" I don't know her like that. We have never met her but, you know, it's like when I do get somewhere, I can tell them like, "You know, yes, I done been to a shelter three times. Yes, I have been homeless. I have a daughter who did this, and this, and this when she was younger and I did it by myself." I can tell them that, so that's why I feel like if, you know, if I go into this business, I will be satisfied and it's not the first time I wanted to do this either. You know, I wanted to help people from my childhood. You know, because somebody out there is not getting something that they need.

Education about Sexual Abuse Prevention

I feel like, um, mainly talking you know, um, with mothers and fathers is a way to educate people about it. Don't put fear in your child, and don't be their best friend, but when something comes up that they need to talk to you about, don't be all, um, like scary. You know, be there when they need to talk to you. That's also something I'm hoping that I can do when my daughter gets older because I can say that now but it's like, am I going to remember to think before just saying, oh, no, you don't do this," you know be there. Um, so I guess you have to educate the parents. You know, um, maybe, because I was telling like, um, what my mom kept me inside so I snuck out the window. You know, I can sit up here and say no, and it's like, well, if, you know, they...don't be the best friend but they set boundaries and give a little rope, you know, maybe they can help, you know, prevent that. You know, and they can also help prevent the kids, um, growing too fast because, you know, the ["come here" talking to daughter who was in the room]. You know, because the parents aren't growing, you know, they're letting them grow at their age. So, you know. So, yeah, I guess, you know, that's the best that I can tell the parent

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itself, to be there to talk because, you know, they say half of rape victims don't report it but I don't know the statistic but it's a lot and, you know, it's like if you know the parents are able to talk to their kids, you know, ask them, then it can help prevent it. Yeah.

Case Study #19 - Diane

Diane is a 44-year old mother of three sons, ages 25, 23, and 21 and a 20-year old daughter. Her father started sexually molesting Diane when she was six-years old and the son of her mother's best friend when she was nine years old. Diane is not sure whether she was raped by her male cousin or if they had consensual sex when she was 14 or 15 years old. Diane shared that their father also sexually molested her oldest sister although her sister denied it up to the day she died. However, Diane reported that her mother remembered what he did to her older sister as well as some of Diane's cousins and friends when they were children. Her mother, sister, and the child protection system reared Diane's children intermittently during the time Diane was using drugs, incarcerated and/or involved in prostitution.

Childhood

You know, I really don't know what I did when I was upset because I didn't really get upset as a child. I was a happy kid. You know, I got along with mostly everybody. I always wanted to help people out, want to be the life of the party. If I had something I would give it and my mom hated that about me too. She used to whoop me because I would give away stuff. "You are you always giving away your things?" "Because they wanted it." "Stop giving away all your stuff!" You know, but usually I would just cry when I got real upset. If I got really, really upset about something I'd cry.

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Yep. Those are few and far between. Even throughout everything my dad was doing, I still, basically, remained a happy person. You know, life was cool. Life was cool with me, you know. I grew up by myself and when we was in Washington I used to go to the beach by myself and just sit there, play in the sand by myself, watch the sunset, whatever, you know, go to the park by myself. You know, in the park in Washington they've got a little animal park. You know, I'd go feed the animals and they were baby animals and, yeah. I'd explore. I'd get on the streetcar, and ride, and go see stuff. I don't know. I like trees, climb a lot of trees. I love climbing trees, as a matter of fact [chuckling]. If I didn't weigh as much as I do now I'd climb the trees. I would climb trees, you know, just to get a bit of peace. You know something about being that close to God, you know, with the birds and yeah, the squirrels didn't like it very much that I was in their trees. I had to argue with a few squirrels about being up in the tree, now. They was like, "Tst, tst. Tst, tst." I'm like, "Look, I'm just going to sit here for a minute." And they'd be not knowing what to do but I guess their nest was there or something, and they were rather upset that I was in the tree. You know, it happened to me a few times. And I was like, "Look, I just want to sit here. I'm not going to hurt you," you know. Like, "Little critter, I am not after you." "Tst, tst, tst, tst, tst, tst, tst, tst." And I'm like, "Whatever dude, I'm just going to be here for a minute [laughs]." They'd be looking at me like, "Okay, she's a strange people." You know, and I would just sit there and I'd talk to them for a little while, I like animals.

The first time I was separated from my mother and father was when we first moved to Washington my mom left me with my cousin, Gus, so she could go and get a

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job, and get us a place to stay and she was gone [sighs] in my mind, being five, four or five years old, it was like forever to me but she came back before I turned five. Then we had a place to live. The next time I was away from my mom it was voluntarily and I was staying with my dad. I was 11 years old. I had talked my mom, so I thought, I talked my mom into getting back with my dad. Well, now that I'm grown I know that he manipulated me and it was all his idea but my mom did it because kids want their parents to be together, so she, you know, gave him another chance or whatever. She was there all of 10 months before she left again. And she asked me, you know, "You want to stay or you want to go with me?" Me, I'm thinking, hm, I can't get high with my mom because she don't want me to get high. She's going to be mad and I'm going to be getting high and then we're going to have problems, you know [chuckles] what I'm saying? So, "I'm staying with my dad." You know, so I was with him for almost two years and that's when I came back up here but other than that I ain't never been away from my momma. When I was four or five my mom left me with my cousin, Bess. I was there about three months, maybe four. It wasn't that long because I know now that it wasn't that long but at the time I thought it was forever but cousin Bess was okay, you know. She was my momma's second cousin, I think or something like that. Anyway, she was my cousin from my mom's side but she liked my dad, they was good friends. So, my mom was there for almost a week when we first got there, and then she left. And I cried, and cried, and cried, and cried, cried, cried. My momma cried, and cried, and cried too and when she came back to get me, that was one of the happiest days in my life, she came back to get me. I was like, "Yay!" and then we left, and we had a little place to live on Kilpatrick Street

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and I went to school that year, started kindergarten. She brought me to the school. She took me to school once and when I got out of school she was waiting for me at the bottom of the hill and we still had like two, maybe three blocks more to go and get home and she showed me that, that first day and the second day she walked me to the hill. I knew how to go up the hill to get to school and when I got out she wasn't there but I got home. I had a key and I became a latchkey kid in kindergarten. You know, and then, I remember the teacher, you know, and something with this book, the *See Jane* books, the *See Dick* books. When it came for me to read, I read the whole book and she was like, "Who taught you how to read?" I said, "My daddy," [chuckles] you know. She said, "So you can read." I said, "Yes, ma'am." You know, then she gave me a harder book and I read that one. So she was like, "Wow." You know, so she didn't know what to do with me, you know, because I was not a kindergartener. I wasn't in kindergarten. I was [chuckles] probably in second grade by then, but yeah. Then the kids found out I was smart, and then I had problems. Yeah, they didn't like that. You know, I was short and then, being in Washington you get black because the sun shines all the time and so I'm burnt-skinned, snaggle-toothed, bow-legged, and smart and I talk a mile a minute you know what I'm saying? They was like, "Oh, no." You know, so I would get in a fight with them girls. You know, they didn't like me. The boys was all right [chuckles]. The girls didn't like me. I think that might be why I don't hang out with girls too. You know, me and the boys always seemed we got along. You know, we always on the same page. "Let's climb trees. Let's throw rocks [chuckles]. Then let's do this, let's do that," you know. "You want to play with Barbie's?" "Well, not particularly." I mean, I had them,

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you know, and I'd cut their hair off, and draw on their faces, and pull their arms off, and my mom be like, "Diane, what did you do to that baby doll?" And I'd be like, "I drew on her face. I gave her some makeup," you know, trying to make her feel better because she just bought me this doll. She quit buying me dolls after awhile because she seen I wasn't going to do right with them. My daughter is so funny. She is so girly. She is a girly-girl. She is truly a girly-girl and I don't know how that happened because I'm not a girly-girl. I like dresses, and heels, and stuff but I prefer gym shoes and sweats [laughs]. I mean, I will put a dress on now and strut but you give me a choice, for real choice, and this is what you'll see me in, jeans, t-shirts, sweats and gym shoes, or sandals. Bare foot if I can really do it. I hate shoes and then I love shoes. I've got a whole bunch of them but I told my daughter, I said, "I could walk around barefoot if I could," but, you know, you just can't do that nowadays.

I was different and people, they generally don't like things that's different. I don't know, I guess their parents told them that. Because, I mean, I'm six, seven years old, and I'm having to experience being different, and these kids don't like me, and they want to try and bully me but see, what they didn't count on is that I would fight [chuckles]. You know, and I ran and then my mom was like, "If you run from this house one more time," she said, "I'm going to whoop you." I was like, "Okay [chuckles]." "I'm more afraid of her than I am of you, so this is what we're going to have to do here." And after I whopped up about two of them, then they quit messing with me. You know, I fought three girls. I came to a draw with one, and I beat the other two up, and then they left me alone. They was like, "Okay, she will scrap." "Yes, I will." You know, and they calling

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my mom out her name. My mom was like, “Diane, if they, you know, feel that way, tell them to come say it to my face if they want.” She said, “They’re cowards and you ain’t even got to worry about it.” So, by the time I was 11 years old, I mean, it would get to me but I wasn’t so quick to defend her. It would take a while. It was like poking a bull. You know, they would have to keep calling her out. “Listen, man, you know, you’re going to quit talking about my mom.” I ain’t play no dozens. I’ve never played the dozens. Your momma – “No. Uh-uh, stop right there [laughter]. Stop right there. No. We don’t do that one.” You know, but yeah, I had to whoop up one girl. She just kept on, you know, do you remember this, when they put the little twig on you shoulder and dare somebody to knock it off? Uh-uh. Yeah, see, so, I had to go through all that. So by the time I was 12, 13 years old I didn’t have, you know, to fight so much but I had to fight between six and 12, man.

Sexual and Physical Abuse History

My dad started molesting me when I was six years old and there was all kind of, uh, sexual abuse going on. You know, my, uh, cousin, Marvin, well, I don’t know if he raped me or if it was consensual or what but we had no business doing what we was doing. I had been about fourteen, fifteen years old which would have made him fourteen, fifteen because we’re both born in ’66. When I was really young and me and my mom lived in Washington for a while, um, her best friend’s youngest brother molested me and what made it so bad is my dad had already been molesting me. You know, none of these men ever did the intercourse. They did everything to me but intercourse. So, that was a blessing. My mom, you know, she was like, “Well, did he have intercourse with you?”

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And I'm looking at her like, "No [chuckles]." You know, it was a kind of a strange question. You know, because I never had thought about that one. You know, it's like everything else that was going on. Then this other guy molested me and I can't remember what his name is but I guess that don't matter. Let's see, my dad started when I was six. Um, my mom's friend, he did me when I was nine and then this other guy did me when I was eleven. I can't remember what his name is. Then my dad had me call one of my girlfriends over when we lived in Seattle and I was there visiting, so that he can molest both of us at the same time. I did, but see, what kills me is that the whole time all these things were taking place, I'm knowing it's wrong. You know, and I knew when I was six years old I knew it was wrong and he used to tell me stuff like, "Well, if you tell anybody you're going to get in trouble and if you tell your mom then she's going to be mad. Then I'll probably have to hurt you or kill her," something. You know, and it's like, okay, well, this not going well, we ain't going to say nothing to her then, you know, because when I was 13 that changed. You know, it's like, "No, I'm telling," you know, because yeah, he tried to kill me, so it was time to tell.

Yeah, my daddy was going to throw me off the Agate Pass Bridge. He was mad because he told me I couldn't go outside. I was at this lady's house, Linda. It was his friend. He left me there because he wanted to go do whatever he was doing. So Linda was like, "Get out." I said, "My dad told me I can't go outside." She said, "Well, your dad left you here and I'm watching you. Since I'm responsible for you I say you can go outside, so go outside." I said, "My dad's going to get mad if I do this." See, I'm already knowing because he had already jumped on me several times before that. See, I pretty

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much knew how my dad thought. She said, “you know, you’re not going to sit up under me. You need to go outside, do something.” I’m like, “Okay.” I went outside. I didn’t have on no shoes I just had on like little socks. And I was running up and down the street with these boys. You know, we’re skateboarding; we’re running up over people’s cars. I’m a tomboy, you know, so I’m doing what the boy’s doing. And every now and then we would all run back to the car where we’d be getting high. We’re snorting cocaine, everything. And I’m running up and down the street, and I looked up, and I see these headlights come on this car up at the top of this hill. And then it starts coming toward us real slow like. Come to find out it’s my daddy’s van and he had been sitting up there watching me and I didn’t know that. So when he comes down, and he says, “Come here,” and I go over to the van...and he tried to snatch me and I backed up, [chuckling] you know what I’m saying? It’s like, “No.” It was my automatic reflex. And, oh, I seen his face, just contorted. It wasn’t nothing but rage, “Just get in the house.” Yep. He whopped me all the way from the back of the house, he whopped me while I was trying to pack. He kept telling me to pack. He whopped me while I was trying to get in the van. When I got in the van he kept on whoopin’ me. I’m saying whopped but he was beating me. And when he decided that he didn’t want to hit me no more he just started talking to himself real quiet-like. “I’m just going to throw you off the Agate Pass Bridge and I’m like, whoa. I ain’t saying nothing. You don’t talk. My dad got like that, you don’t say nothing. You just answer the questions and pray he don’t ask you the wrong one, or something you know you ain’t got no answer for but yeah, he started driving across the bridge. I don’t know why he turned around, he made a decision—I don’t know. I was just sitting

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there and he just kind of stopped and turned around, went back the other way. We were actually on the bridge and driving across the bridge. He just stopped, like came to his senses, I guess, would be the best way to say it.

He made a U-turn on the bridge and we headed back to the city. Then he got mad at me in the middle of the night. He wouldn't take me back over to Linda's house. You know, he was going to make me suffer. That's what it was that's all it was. He wanted me to suffer. So he, um, made me sleep in the back of the van with him. And then as we were lying there, trying to go to sleep, which I wasn't, there was no way I was going to go to sleep right away [chuckles], you know. So I was kind of laying there, praying that this man passes out or whatever, because I know he's high and he just reaches out and punches me and calls me a bunch of names. Then he throws his arms around me, tells me he loves me and goes to sleep. I'm thinking this mother fucker's crazy. [Chuckles] Excuse me. But, you know, that's what I'm thinking, okay, you know what? He's crazy. The next day I call my mom. I'm like, "I want to come home." You know, I says, "I can't stay down here. He's going to kill me." "Your father's not going to kill you." I said, "Yes, he is." You know, I said, "If he don't do it today or tomorrow, he will. So I need to come home." "Let me talk to your dad." I said, "He's not here." She said, "When your dad gets there have him call me." I said, "Well, you can't tell him that I said I want to come home," because now I'm knowing how to deal with him now. She said, "Diane, I know what to say." I said, "All right," and I left it alone. Whatever she told him, he put me on the Greyhound three days later and that was the first time I had ever seen my dad cry too. You know, when he was putting me on that bus he just started crying. I'm

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looking at him like, “Why are you crying?” And it hurt me because, you know, that’s my dad. I didn’t want to see him cry, you know but I was just so relieved to get the heck away from him.

Disclosure Process

And as soon as I got here my mom was like...you know, she let me settle down. She made me some food. You know, and we talked. And she said, “Okay, Diane, now tell me the real reason why you wanted to come home.” And I’m like, “I told you why.” She said, “No.” She said, “I want to know why, the real reason.” I said, “You’re not going to believe me.” She was like, “Yeah, I will.” I said, “Okay.” I told her, you know, my dad been molesting me, and this, that, that, and the other, and he’d been jumping on me and beating me. She looked at me and she said, “Well, did he have intercourse with you?” I said, “No, ma’am,” you know. She said, “Well, what did he do?” I said, “Well, I don’t want to tell you everything he did.” You know, I’m 13 years old. That’s kind of embarrassing, you know what I’m saying? She said, “That mother, that son of a bitch.” [Chuckles] You know, so she’s mad. So she calls to Washington and she’s like cussing him out over the phone, and, “How could you?,” and, “That’s your daughter,” and, “What type of monster are you?” I heard something about Diane. And she said, “Here, he wants to talk to you.” And I’m like, “No, no, no, no, no, no.” She said, “Diane, you have to talk to your father.” I get on the phone to talk to the man. He starts screaming and hollering, talking about he going to kill me and I shouldn’t have said nothing and I peed on myself and I just gave her the phone back. You know, and that’s how terrified I was, you know what I’m saying. This man’s in Washington and he, I mean, I was just so scared that I

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literally peed on myself. Then she was like, “What did you do to her? This girl is up here peeing on herself. What did you do? You’re a monster and if you ever come up here,” she said, “I’ve got something for you. You can come up here if you want to.” Then she called the police and they were like, “Well, in order for anything to take place, as far as a trial and having him arrested, I needed to go back to Washington to face him in court. I said, “I’m not going there.” You know. I said, “There’s no way you can make me go.” I said, “We’ll get down there and he’ll kill you.” And, “Diane, he’s not going to kill me.” I said, “Yes, he will.” I said, “I’m not doing it.” So I didn’t so he never got charges brought up because I wouldn’t do it. You know, and my older sister never did. You know, and then it’s like a few cousins that he had gotten to, that my mom knows about. Um, I guess one of the babysitters, he was doing stuff with her and that was the last time.

My mom had left him once before and they got back together. And then he started messing with the babysitter and she found out because, you know, she came home and she couldn’t get in, because he had done double-bolted the door and so when she finally got in she said all she seen was the ass end of this little girl running up the stairs. So she was like done. She...you know. So then he jumped on her because, you know, I guess it was her fault that [chuckles] he didn’t get to finish doing what he was doing, and then she wants to leave to. So, my mom was like, “That was the last straw.” I was two and by the time I was four years old we was living in Washington but she had to leave the whole state because he kept stalking her and she was running around with guns and my mom’s a piece of lady. You had to know my momma. Well, she was like, “No.” So we just went to Washington and then he followed us out there. You know, and I know there was no

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reason for my dad to go to Washington besides me and my mom knew it too. He was following us.

Attempt at Reconciliation with Father

My dad terrorized me down there in Washington and then when I came back up here, a year and a half later, he was back up here. [Chuckles] So, I know he was following me. You know. And he didn't leave. He stayed until he died. I tried to reconcile with him. You know, I asked him why he did what he did to me when we was driving on the highway. This is after he done had like a triple bypass. So he's driving and we're smoking weed, and talking, and listening to jazz, or whatever and I said, "I want to ask you something." I was like 24 or 23. He said, "What is it?" I said, "Well, why did you do me like that?" And he's like, "Do what?" I said, "Why did you, you know, jump on me like you did?" or whatever. It's strange because, at the time, I didn't really want to talk about the sex part. It didn't bother me as much as him physically jumping on me and that's what I wanted to know about and then I asked him about the molestation. He said he jumped on me because I was being bad and he was punishing me. He said he molested me because quote, unquote, "Your dad's a freak." I'm thinking what kind of answer is that [chuckles]? You know, that's not no answer. You know, and I left it alone. I'm like, "Okay, he's not going to play and I'm not going to play either. I'm just going to leave this alone," so, yeah.

Effects of Sexual Abuse

My experiences being molested turned me into a paranoid she-lion when it came to my kids. You know, I used to ask my daughter like every few months, "Did anybody

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touch you? Did anybody touch you in the wrong way, make you come, did anybody make you touch them? Did anybody say something to you?" I mean, she little-bitty, five, six, seven. She looking at me like, "What in the world?" I said, "Have your brothers ever touched you?" you know and she's like, "No, ma'am." I said, "Have my nephew ever touched you? [chuckles] you know, your cousin? Anybody?" And she was like, "No, ma'am." I said, "Would you tell me?" "Yes, ma'am." I said, "You make sure you do." I said, "Because if anybody ever touch you," I said, "I'm going to kill them," and I think that [chuckles] that might have scared the baby, you know, because she's like, "Okay, for real?" I had been to prison once before. She was little, so I'm sure she didn't remember, but the boys remember and I used to tell them all the time, "Did anybody mess with you? You know, you know, a grown man's touching you or making you touch them." They're like, "No, ma'am." They're like, "Man." My son, Steven, "I'll jack the men up." He little, about eight years old, he going to jack somebody up. Okay. "I'm just going to beat" You know yeah. It just had me though, where everything looked like it could be that's what they're doing and it was probably very innocent but you know logically, I know it's probably very innocent but the part of me that's just paranoid and kind of, you know, not all there, "Uh-uh, no, that don't look right and why a little girl sitting on that man's lap like that?" "Why is he holding her like that?" You know, it might be totally innocent. "Why he got her, he done picked her up. Why he holding her up under her butt," or whatever. "His hand look like it's too close to her crotch." You know, and to this day, I do that. You know, I control it better now where I don't just blurt out, "What are you doing?" Because I used to be like, "Man, what are you doing to that little girl [laughs]?"

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People be looking [chuckles] at me like, “What does she, what [laughs]?” You know, and I be serious, “What are you doing to her?” “Why are you touching her like that?” They would literally look at me like I have done lost my mind. I used to get embarrassed, you know but I’d feel vindicated because it’s like if something was going on, at least I spoke up, you know what I’m saying?

It kept me where men could not be around my kids. If I wasn’t there or if all of them weren’t together, it wasn’t no, “My daughter would go off with this guy by herself.” Uh-uh. You know, I didn’t care who it was, cousins, uncles. No, she ain’t going by herself. Somebody got to go with her. Well, “Who’re you going to send with her?” “I don’t care, one of them boys. Which one of ya’ll, Steven, go with RoAnne.” I’m like, not, no. See. And I’m still like that. She be talking about she going through this, that, and the other. I be like, “Where are you going? And who are you going with? And who’s going to be there?” And then the little boy was supposed to be her boyfriend, I guess. I said, “Who the hell are you [chuckles]?” He said, “My name is Derek.” I said, “Okay, what do you want?” “Uh...uh...uh...uh...” My RoAnne was like, “Mom!” I said, “Well, who is he [laughter]?” You know, this little boy, he was like, “Uh...uh...” I scared him. I scared him bad, because like, “Who the hell are you and what do you want? Why are you over here?” You know. “I...I...I just want to talk to RoAnne.” I said, “Yeah, okay,” then I just sat there like this the whole time, you know. I guess they thought I was going to get up and like move away, and give ‘em some privacy. No, I didn’t budge. I was sitting right there. I’m going to hear all this. Yep. She was totally embarrassed. I did not care. I gave them no quarter. “You, what, how old are you? Where do you live? Who is your

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momma? Oh, you live across the street.” I said, “Well, that’s convenient.” Oh, I grilled him [laughs]. I grilled him and my daughter was like, “*Mom.*” I’m like, “I don’t care. I don’t know who that little boy is. He could be anybody.” Yeah, poor little thing. He didn’t come back no more, I tell you what. So that was good. That was my whole point. “You don’t need to be talking to my daughter. My daughter need to be doing something else. She don’t need to be messing with a little knucklehead like you.” She was nineteen at the time but as far as I was concerned, that’s my baby. I don’t know what you, you know, “What are your intentions, what are you going to do, you know, get my daughter pregnant, then want to leave her? No, get away from her. She need to be studying school or anything besides worrying about you.” “And you’ve got a car. Well, doggone well you ain’t faithful. And you all of 21.” “Get away from my daughter,” you know. So I was like, yeah, I was a she-lion [chuckles], claws out [laughs]. Don’t get too close [laughs]. Shoot. So I ain’t good with it. You know, I mean, it’s really hard for me to sit and watch kids interact with adults. You know, well, no, it’s hard for me to watch grown men interact with children.

I can’t get passed the innocence. There’s always an ulterior motive in my mind. It could be the man’s daughter, which means nothing. My daddy did me. It don’t mean nothing, that’s your daughter. That don’t means nothing to me. That just means that she’s even more readily a—you know, accessible to you. So, yeah, I’m not good with that. Like I said, I had to curb my tongue. I had to learn to curb my tongue and not just go around and asking people personal type questions. You know, God forbid I came across somebody that was really doing something and they decided to hurt me. So now I’m a

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witness. That wasn't nothing but God, you know, because I can't even tell you how many times it's like, "Why are you touching that child like that?" Strangers. It's like, "Lady, who the hell are you?" you know. "Well, I'm trying to figure out why you're putting your hand on that baby like that" and, yeah, it's crazy. What helped me kind of curb my tongue was I just realized that everybody ain't living like I was you know, that sometimes it is innocent. You know, it ain't what I think it is. Yeah. So, I put my faith in God, just leave a lot of stuff alone, take it at face value 'til I find out otherwise. Uh-huh. I mean, see, because there's so many children out there. Like me for instance, my momma, she had no clue because what it was is she didn't think that my dad would ever, in her wildest dreams, do that to me, me being his child.

Mother's Awareness of Father-Daughter Sexual Molestation

She knew that he would do, you know, the neighbor's child or, you know, then she's thinking 16 on up or whatever. She wasn't thinking about little kids, little girls. My mom, she didn't think like that. So when I told her, and that it had been going on since I was six, she snapped. She snapped. And I guess that's when she started remembering about Alicia and how he used to do her, and Fred, and Leslie up in the attic. And it all started coming back to her. I guess she repressed it away or whatever you might want to call it. Because it wasn't in her face she wasn't thinking about it. She never once said, "No, you're lying." She just wanted to know what in specific that he was doing. And then she started talking about Alicia and all my cousins and I'm like, "So he's done this before." Well, I knew he did it before. He did it to my little friend-girl. But it's like he did it to little people before. I didn't know that. Yeah, so she never was doubting me. She

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went into momma lion mode quick, “And I’ll kill you.” I can hear him screaming at her and the last thing my momma said, “You can come up here if you want to. I’ve got something for you.” She said, “I live in 5515 King Avenue North. Bring your ass on,” and hung up. I was like, “Okay [laughter]. That’s my momma.” Okay, she gave him the address. So I’m like, “Okay.” Now, she wasn’t scared. She said, “Diane, I am not afraid of your father.” She said, “I will kill him.” I’m like, “Okay.”

Resources and Treatment

I’ve been going to treatment on and off since I was 13 years old. My mom had me in chemical abuse services, and I completed that program but I didn’t graduate because I was getting high the whole time I was in there. So they sent me to Youth Progress. So I was there eight hours a day. Youth Progress was eight hours a day, 4:00 in the morning to 4:00 in the afternoon. So, basically, you know what I’m saying, the more hours, they figured, the more strenuous, that was going, no. Then my mom took me out of that because I was still getting high and she figured it wasn’t doing no good. Then, uh, from there I went to Fairview St. Mary’s, 20/20 Detoxes. I went in, Phoenix Care Group Home, in Milwaukee. I was everywhere. You know, and then by the time I was 15, I was in the shelter. They was trying to send me to Iowa, [chuckles] to the girl’s ranch and my mom was like, “Wait a minute. You’re going to send her where [chuckles]?” And I knew, okay, this is my opportunity. [Chuckles] She don’t want me to leave. “Okay, well, momma, momma,” I said, “I promise” I said, “You just get these White folks out of our business. I will be good. I’ll do whatever you want me to do. I’ll get back to school.” I was, you know, I was going to get “A’s.” I mean, I’m bartering with my mother because I

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don't want to go to Iowa either. She said, "Diane, okay." She said, "You've got one time." I said, "Yes, ma'am. I promise. I'll give you my word."

That's when I started going back to school, got on the "A" honor roll, started doing right. You know, because I gave her my word. And I wasn't going to go back on that. You know, I was tired of going around the shelter, and all these different group homes, and all these different treatments and all they would do is put me out [laughs]. It didn't make no sense. I mean, St. Mary's, they kept me, because I was locked in there and I couldn't leave. And if I didn't cooperate I would have been there longer. So I learned real quick in like the first three weeks, this is what I need to do to get out of this one [chuckles]. I'm giving lip service, a whole lot of lip service, you know and that fascinated my social worker. She said, "How were you able to manipulate these grownups?" I said, "I don't know." You know? She wanted to know because when I talked to her I was real because I liked her but I would manipulate them and they'd let me go. "Oh, yeah, she's cured." Um-hum. The first thing I'd do is go find some weed. You know, I wouldn't care. I just wanted to get out. You know, just let me get out. Yep. Or either they'd let me out and I wouldn't come back. They'd send me out on a pass and I just tell myself "I'm not going back in there. You people are crazy," you know, talking about, "Don't get high, this, that, and the other," and, "This is why you get high." I wasn't trying to hear all that rigmarole. You know, and I knew it was true. I just wasn't trying to hear it. You know, I'm fifteen, fourteen years old. I don't want to hear this. I want to go party. You know, so yep, [laughter]. I made a bargain with my mom and I stuck to it.

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Teenage Pregnancy, Abortion, and Marriage

The only thing I did though, I got pregnant at sixteen. That's when I fell in love with my ex-husband. I was trying to figure out what to do and my mom said, "I can't answer that." I said, "Well, what would you do if you were me?" She said, "Well, Diane," she said, "I'd have an abortion." I said, "Okay." I'm crying, driving down the street with my momma, and we're talking and we got back to the house. I got in the Yellow Pages and looked up, you know, the medical building across from the hospital, and made an appointment, went and had an abortion. Yep. My ex, he hated me for that for about three months or so. He said I killed a baby on purpose because I was mad at him, which, honestly, it had a little bit to do with it, because he had hit me for a first time when I was sixteen. I already knew the scenario, if he hit me now he's going to keep on hitting me, and it's going to get worse and I didn't want to have no baby. Then I was on the "A" honor, and I was working a job, and I just didn't want to. I wasn't going to do it. So I aborted that child and when I told him about it, he got mad, said I did it on purpose. So he wouldn't talk to me for awhile. But you know how that go? Makeup, breakup to makeup, breakup to makeup. We went on and off, on and off for like 10 years and I finally had two kids for him. My last two are his. My oldest two belong to somebody else and the whole time I was married, see, so to him [chuckles]. And he like, "You just keep getting pregnant. Is this one mine?" when I was pregnant with Melvin. I said, "No, this one ain't yours either." He said, "Well, what are you doing? You're my wife. How're you going to keep having kids for somebody else?" I said, "Well, James Brown, you really ain't never here. You're always in Atlanta." I said, "You just think I'm just going to be

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celibate while you're gone, for real?" He couldn't say nothing to me. He just looked at me, like really disgusted, and walked out. I was like, "Good. Bye [chuckles]," locked the door. "Bye." Jessica was like, "Daddy. Daddy, daddy." I'm like, "You're daddy gone. He'll be back." Yep. So.

Coping and Meaning Making

The most difficult thing for me about surviving sexual abuse is the acceptance and the guilt. You know, bodies are designed to react to certain stimulus and having orgasms with your dad is probably not a thing that a lot of folks are going to be able to deal with and I'll tell you, even though I was out there turning dates or whatever, it was many years before I could give a man, um, fellatio. I couldn't do it because every time I did I'd think about my dad and I'd want to throw up [chuckles] you know and it's like, "You know, we're going to have to do this, and this is all I'm doing. If you don't want to do that, then I'm leaving," you know what I'm saying. But my ex-husband wanted me to do it to him and I was like, "No, I can't." He's like, "Why?" "Because I don't know how." Lying, "I don't know how, I don't know how, and then you want to choke." And, uh, then it was like, when men's will go down on me, the cunnilingus, I'd be comparing them to my dad and it was just all real crazy. You know, and it's like this is not even good. This is kind of sick. You know, that's the way I was taking it. Then I'd feel guilty and ashamed and it's like I didn't really want to talk about it, you know. Truth be told, ain't nobody gay. My dad is probably the best orgasm I've ever had in my life and that is so sick to me and it's just a reality. There's nothing I can do about that and I wish I could, but I can't. So this kind of kind of keeps me all screwed up in the head, you know. Ain't nobody never going

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to be as good as my daddy and that's just fucked up. That really is, you know what I'm saying? That's really messed up. So, I ain't had sex not in awhile.

I told my daughter, I said, "I'm going to be a recluse. I'm going to be a spinster and kids going to be in my yard, and I'm going to be, "You kids get out of my yard!," [chuckles] throwing rocks at them or whatever. She said you're going to be a bitter old woman. You know, so I'm too young to be celibate, shoot. "Why you don't go get a boyfriend?" I said, "I can't do that." She said, "Why not?" I said, "Because I don't know what he's about," because I don't trust men. You know you can talk nice all day long and then you get in my house and we get together, and then you snap, switch, turn into something else. I'm not going to do it. You know, so I just don't. So I'm lonely, you know, but I ain't alone. I read romance novels. You know, I've got a battery-operated friend you know. So it's okay for now. But I would love to have some kind of human contact, you know what I'm saying. If nothing else, the comfort of a man. That would be all good. But I just don't, I'm not going to go out there and open myself up to just anybody though. You know. Plus I'm too paranoid. I'm just really too paranoid. That's what it boils down to. I don't know what you're thinking, what your motives are and I don't want to get hurt. I don't want to be put in a position where I might have to hurt you. So I just won't do it at all.

Being sexually molested has made me the person I am. Um, I'm more open-minded as far as sex is concerned, um, as far as ideas and, you know, preference. I, you know, still have a prejudice toward gay people marrying and raising children. Um, and bestiality, I damn sure don't agree with that but, I mean, ménage a trois and, you know,

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open relationships where swinging couples and things like that, okay, if you want to do, you know, homosexual act, whatever, and everybody's in accord, okay, I'm, who am I to tell you that what you're doing ain't okay? It ain't okay for me, although I've been there, done that. You know, I just, but if you, I don't, yeah, it's molded me. It has and I've got some prejudices, and some issues, and some deep-seeded ones that I probably need to work out and then again, I don't. I mean, you know? It is what it is.

You know, but for doing what I did [prostituting], I learned a lot of tricks. You know, as far as pleasuring somebody, I know a lot of tricks and I don't know, I guess that was good while, you know, while I was doing what I was doing, it was a damn good thing. You know, it made me sought after. You know, and that's a heady feeling. It's power. You know, when men's walk past, all these women looking for me, you know, I mean, and telling other folks, "Have you seen Diane?" That, you know it's like, wow. You know, and I'm off with somebody and I come around the corner, "Diane, my boy looking for you." It's like, "Who?" They were like, "That nigger over there, he want you." I be like, "Oh. Oh, okay." I be like, "What's up [chuckles]?" "Where have you been? Girl, I've been waiting on you. Come on, let's go." [Chuckles] You know, it's like, "Okay, for real?" I mean it's like, "You know why you didn't take Pam or why you didn't take Sherry? Did, you know, whatever." And. they like, "Nah, nah, nah, nah, girl, I want you. I want you. I want you." You know, and half of that was I was good at what I was doing, and the other half was I wouldn't steal nothing from them. I wouldn't set them up to be hurt. I'd watch their back, just like if it was mine, you know what I'm saying? And I was always honest about it. If it got to the point where I didn't like what was going

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on, I'd walk out and I wouldn't take no money, I wouldn't take nothing from them. I'd be like, "No, I don't want that." "Well, here, take this, and, come on, stay." "No, I'm not going to stay, and you keep this. You know, I don't need that. I don't want" "Well, how are you going to get home?" "I'm going to walk" and I would leave. You know, so it got to be where it was a certain kind of respect for me than what I was doing. They didn't put me in the same category as the hoochies, you know, and the chicken heads. You know, I was a different breed of crack head [chuckling]. You know, I guess I don't know, I had morals or whatever. You know, there was just certain stuff I wouldn't do and there was certain stuff I wasn't going to put up with and if you wasn't going to play nice, I would go away and you can keep your toys. It's just that simple. I would hand you my life because if you're tripping now and you're, you know, a monster now, then what's going to happen when it's all gone and you think I stole it? No, I'm not staying here to find out [chuckles]. I'm not going to do it. You know. So, yeah.

Onset of Drug Use

I started smoking crack cocaine when I was 15 years old. I started snorting cocaine when I was 12. So, this is how it go; seven years old I started smoking weed. Eleven years old I started drinking and I'm smoking weed the whole time, see, so that never ceases. By the time I was 13 I was doing pills, smoking weed, and drinking, and snorting cocaine. I tried LSD, uh, angel dust, PCP, LSD, whatever them things are. I tried all of them before I realized that two of them were the same [chuckles]. My cousin, Jerome, gave it to me. Bastard. Then, let's see, by the time I was 15, 16, I was smoking crack cocaine. You know, because one of my sugar daddy's, he sold cocaine and weed

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and he would give it to me. So, I'd go get it and bring it to the little shindig. All the little high school kids, we'd get together in somebody's house after school and this is how we would party. Somebody would bring weed and if they needed cocaine, I would go get it and bring it. You know, I'm getting it for free. It didn't matter to me, and one of our alumni graduates, an older brother, showed us how to cook it up and from there it was on. You know, and I'm fascinated by science, and creating stuff, and doing stuff. So for him to, you know, cook it up, take it from a powder, turn it into a liquid, then turn it back into a solid, then we smoke it, and now it's, you know, vapors. I was tripping about the whole science part of it. I'm like, "Wow, that's cool." So then I started doing it. I had to do it and then I had to perfect it and it was just crazy.

So, by the time I was 21, 22 years old, I had been in more treatments than I can remember. I had two kids. I was pregnant with my son I think. I was still smoking. I was homeless. You know, and the whole time I'm getting welfare. They'd just keep sending me checks, you know, to whatever address I give 'em. I'm still on Section 8. I ain't got nowhere to stay. You know, so it was always a race to find an apartment before my certificate expired and a daughter, I had her, and was six and a half months pregnant, um, she came out jonesin', and she had all these seizures, heart stopped, all that. You know, and they thought the baby wasn't going to live and then my daddy died six days later and, uh, then she started getting better. So, my spirituality says that his spirit strengthened my baby; you know what I'm saying? And, uh, because sometimes she'll say stuff and look like that nigger, and I be wanting to just, "You look like my dad." [laughter], you know, "Because wipe that grin off your face," or whatever. But yeah, she survived and she's,

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uh, artistically gifted. She's not as streetwise as I was, which is good. One girl said she's a late bloomer. Okay, I can get with that because RoAnne is not stupid. She's not and she has common sense. It's just that she ain't as mature as I want her to be, which that goes back to that other question you [interviewer] asked me about limitations. I just, you know, I have to really stop and just let her do, because she ain't stupid. She's smart as a whip and she's very artistically gifted. You know, she speaks Japanese, you know, and she writes stories and illustrates and, I mean, as far as I can tell, ain't nothing really wrong with the girl except she lazy. You know, but now she wants to go to the Navy, so that's getting ready to change and I'm like, "Okay, she's doing it at her own pace. She's going to be all right," and I tell her that all the time, "You're going to be all right." You know, because she be looking at me when them big old eyes. I be like, "I love you. I don't care [chuckles]. You can stay here with me for the rest of your days. I'm still going to be proud of you. You've already exceeded what, I thought, you know, you ain't got no kids. You graduated. You did some college. I love you." I'm very proud of my baby. You know.

Spirituality

I have I confidence that things happen when they need to happen. I'm very spiritual. My whole life is spiritually based. When I was born I was dead for almost two minutes. And the only thing I can think of is that I was trying real hard not to come here. [Chuckles] And God made me come here anyway for a reason. And my daughter was born jonesin' and died on the table once. And she's still here. So I figure she is here for a reason. So, I believe in good and evil, right and wrong, black and white. You either are or

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you're not, you know what I'm saying? All that maybe, don't maybe. Are you going to do it or aren't you? You know, if you can't do it, say you can't do it. You know, don't tell me you're going to do it then don't. I don't like really that. That's why I don't do it to my kids. I'm not going to tell them I am if I'm not. You know, I'll tell them I hope I can. It may not work out that way and it's not because I don't want to. It's because this is the way this here is.

But I don't know you know you're right when you're right and you know you're wrong when you're wrong. You can't say the devil made you do it. You can't even say that you were a child molester because somebody molested you. That's bogus. Man, you know, you know what you're doing. You can't blame that on nobody but your own choice, you understand? You're going to have to answer for it. You're going to have to pay. The way I see it, I ain't no saint and I ain't living up to the task that God gave me and I'm not using the talent that he blessed me with either but I'll answer for that. I'll answer for that. I am however content as I've ever been on my little 44 years on this earth. You know, I ain't running. You know, I was running and guess what? Everywhere I went, I took me with me anyhow. [Chuckles] So it's like, wow, you might as well just stop [laughter]. She can't get away because, I look around and there I am. You know, so say, well, whatever. Even when I was getting high, I've always had the opinion that this is what's supposed to happen. You could be mad about it. Well, if you didn't want that to happen then you shouldn't have chose what you chose and now you want to be mad and complain. Don't be complaining. You know, if you're going to complain, get away from me. See, because [laughs] I'm not trying to hear that. You know, you knew what you was

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doing and if you didn't know, somebody should have told you. So, yeah, you can't be mad about life because life don't do what you want it to do. Shit, make a different choice. It took me awhile to figure it out. If you don't have faith, that leaves the door open for all kind of negativity to get in and Satan's trying to recruit souls for his war. So, we ain't trying to do that one.

Drug Use and Turning Dates/Tricks

First time I used anything, my dad gave it to me and I believe I was three. I was either three or four. He had me and my cousin, uh, Paul, and my sister, we was all up in the attic in my grandma's house, his momma and he was getting all the kids high. He was giving us all weed and I don't know, he might have been giving Alicia liquor, her and her brother, Paul. I'm not quite clear on what happened, but I came out the attic, and Paul came out the attic and took off running and my grandma was like, "Peter, what are you doing to them kids up there?" My grandma was a Christian, you know, and all she did was cook, and go to church, and take care of kids. So she wasn't bothering with going up there to see what was going on and I think my grandfather might have been gone, or something or another because I know, for a fact, if my grandfather was at home he probably wouldn't have did it but when I started getting high on my own, I was seven years old. I started smoking weed. You know, I would take it from my mom and roll up these little weird, deformed joints, and share them with the friends, the little home girls, until my uncle found out. Then he told my mom. She whopped me. [Chuckles] Then you know, my uncle tried to whoop me but that didn't work out very well and so she ended up whoopin' me but I continued to get high. You know, that didn't stop nothing. I just

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was being discrete about it and my dad would let me get high, so, when I seen him like on summers and, ah, Easter break see, they don't do that no more, the Easter break. When all that s—you know, and then Christmas break, when I would go where my dad live, and he would let me get high. Yep. Yep, he thought that was a good thing. You know, and then I started drinking when I was 11. You know, and his momma died when I was six years old and I think that's what changed with him and me and our relationship. My grandma died, so he started molesting me. He had already done stuff to my older sister. I found this out later. You know, so, I guess he figured it was my turn, some kind of initiation or whatever but he continued to get me high. My mom finally gave up trying to stop me from getting high when I was 13. Then she got mad because I wouldn't go to school [chuckles]. You know, and I started turning dates when I was 13. So, it just got worse over the years, you know, what made it so bad is I'm an "A" honor roll student.

My mom didn't know about me being molested by my dad because she said, "Diane," She said, "Had I'd a known," she said, "there's no way that he would have still been living." And my mom was very adamant about that. I believe that she really did not know he was doing anything to me. We were very good at acting and hiding, you know, me and my father. I mean, because she didn't know he was getting me high for a long time. She just happened to see my eyes red one day. [Chuckles]. Yeah, "What's wrong with your eyes? What has your father done to you?" And then, you know, I didn't lie to my mom too good. I would try but it didn't work because she always knew when I was lying. So I just told her, he got me smoking some weed. Yeah, I just told her the truth, you know, "My daddy gave me some weed." Yep. Yeah, my daddy was the first one to

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tell me I was going to be a ho. He was arguing, mad at me about something, I think because I was hanging out with the boys. He didn't want me to hang out with the boys but I wasn't a girly girl. You know, like, I hung out with boys. That's what I did. I wasn't having sex with them. We weren't doing nothing. We was getting high and being a tomboy. I was climbing trees, and jumping over cars and roofs, and whatever but he didn't want me to hang out with the boys. So he said I was going to be a ho. "You ain't going to be nothing but a ho. That's all you're good for. That's all you're ever going to be good for." By the time I was 13 I was hoing and didn't stop until 2008. No, that's a lie because I did a couple of tricks when I first got out of prison in 2010.

It wasn't for drugs—it was just for the money but what made me cut the dude off, because he took care of me the whole time I was in prison, was when I met him he was a trick and that was my philosophy. That was always my philosophy. "I met you, you was a trick, dude. I cannot be your girl. I don't want to be your girl." "Why?" "Because you're a trick." "Well, you didn't say, well, you're taking my money." "Well, duh [chuckles]. You a trick," you know what I'm saying? And I had to keep saying this to this man.

So now I'm in prison and he's sending me money every month, taking care of me, basically, while I'm in there. So when I got out I felt a certain obligation, you know what I'm saying? And I went on and gave the man some coochie or whatever and he paid me anyway, still and I did it like three or four, maybe five times, until I finally said, "Uh-uh. No, see, now this ain't going to work." Then he tried to jump on me on Mother's Day and my son literally beat him up. So, I'm thinking, no, this really is not going to work and I'm not even getting high either? Oh, my God, no. So I just stopped, switching. I did a 360.

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I'm like, "Nope." I told the man I want nothing else with him. "Don't call me." I don't call him. You know, I even moved over here, really, because I don't want to be nowhere near Milwaukee and the people that I used to associate with because every time I would go outside I would see somebody, you know, and, "Diane, what's up? Where you going? Got a phone? Yeah, here's my number," you know, "So and so was asking about you," this, that, that, and the other. And then I would go downtown to the library to get my little books because, you know, I got this book thing and there he'd be, drunk and it's like, "Ugh." "Oh, D, you know, I just want to talk to you." "And I don't have nothing to say to you." "Well, why you don't want to talk to me?" "Well, you tried to beat me up on Mother's Day." "No, I didn't, D. That was just a misunderstanding." I said, "My son had to whoop you. What misunderstanding?" You know, and he want to talk and it's like, "Nah, I don't want to be over here. I don't want to be over here. I don't want to deal with you. I'm done." You know, so, I just, I'm done. I feel like I have to be done with everything. You know, I thought I could keep him. And, nah, I can see me keeping him, then one day he trying to mine in my pockets because this is the kind of slick underhanded thing he would do. I could just see him put some money in his pockets and dope fall on the floor. You know and it's like, "What is that?" "You know, why you got that?" First time, I might be able to be "No, get away from me." But eventually, there's going to come a time where it's like, "Look, give me that." You know what I'm saying? And then, "I need you to go buy me a pipe." And he said, "Why you bring that here and you didn't give me no pipe?" And knowing him, he'd probably be like, "Well, you know, I do got that little metal thing." See, no. See, no. No. No. It all goes together. You know,

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and let these people tell you that it don't. One goes with the other, especially if that's how he was doing it. There's no way that you can disassociate one. You just cannot. And if you can, more power to you. I can't do it. So, I don't play with myself. Yeah, so, I'm good.

Prison

The first time I went to Prison I was in there for eight and a half months. I got sentenced a year and a day. And I had to get eight and a half months. And basically that was for a old charge that I kept getting in trouble on. I was on probation and I just kept getting in trouble for a burglary charge. So they sent me to Prison. Well, actually, what it was is I executed my sentence because I got tired of going back to the workouts [chuckles]. So it was like, "Let me go to prison, do my time, and be done." The second time I went was in 2008, 17 years later. Okay? and it was for sales and distribution. You know, and see, let me tell you something about what I believe about intuition, your gut feeling, your sixth sense. I knew better than to go outside and deal with these people. I told my girl Blu, I said, "Don't go out there." She called, she woke me up, talking about, "D, I need you to get up so we can get ready to go on the block." Okay, cool. So, I'm up, or waking up, trying to be woke and the phone ring, and it's this boy. He want to get a eight-ball, does she know where? And the whole time I'm going, "Who is that?" And this so and so, my nephew's friend, something she was saying. And I'm like, "Nah, uh-uh." I said, "That ain't right. Hang that up, you know, this is her house, her shit." I'm trying to tell her, "Look. No, no, no, no." Well, the short of the long is, "D, go up there and just take these pills. See if they'll buy these pills." I said, "All right, I'll do that. He want an

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eight ball, and let me take these pills, these, you know, \$20 bags out there.” I’m getting ready to go out the front door. It’s around Christmas time. So, the blinds is open.

Christmas and the lights and everything on the tree and I look, and I see the white truck sitting in front of her house and I’m like, “Momma, I thought you told these people not to, you know, come to your house or whatever.” She said, “I did.” I said, “Well, then why they parked in front of your house?” You know, so she gets on the phone, she’s cussing or whatever and while she’s doing that, I get the brilliant idea to go out the back door [chuckles]. Right, go out, so I go out the back door. I jump over the fence. I go around, two blocks up. They finally see me. They want me to get in the car and the whole time I’m like, “No, I want to do this while I’m standing on the street, this transaction.” It’s dark. “I don’t care ain’t nobody going to see us, dude.” So I get in the car. I’m like, “Hm.” So I get in the backseat and I’m like, “Okay, what’s up?” And the whole time it’s like danger, danger, danger, Will Robinson, back up, get out, stop, stop, stop and I just followed through with it. The police, he never took the dope out of my hand. He made me set it down. He put the money in my hand. He kept asking me about these eight balls and I said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about. We don’t do that. So, is that it?” He’s like, “Yeah. How can I get a hold of you?” I said, “Your boy got the number,” and I got out. Halfway down the block, I’m on the phone. “Put your hands up!” I went just like this. I said, “Just a minute [chuckles].” “Get on the ground!” I said, “Just a minute.” And I’m trying to tell Blu not to answer the phone, don’t open the door, or so but they’re telling me to get down and then he said, “Just lean over the truck.” So, they take my phone and they got me down and I just happened to look up and I see her coming out of

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the back door and then she seen all the lights, and she stopped, and dipped back around the corner. Then I could see her peeking and I just went like this. You know, just don't even. "Well, who's stuff is it and where is Blu, Blu, and Lottie, Dottie, Dottie, dah?" I said, "I don't know what you're talking about, dude. That's mine [chuckles]." "Well, you know, she wouldn't do it for you." I said, "Who wouldn't do what for me, man? Can I just go to jail now, you know?" "You know, you're going away for 27 months" So they gave me 27 months. I did 24 out of 27 months, or did I do the whole 27? Actually, I did the whole 27 because I was downtown for a while. They tried to give me longer but [chuckles] you know, they were mad. I could have did a year and a day if I'd turned a snitch and the way I see it, I had a choice. Why am I going to tell on you? I knew better. The whole time I knew better. I got caught, you didn't. That's me. That's mine. That's, you know, murder, I might be inclined to say something. I might be inclined to say something. It depends on who it is and what happened but I just, you know, that's mine. I did it. I went and sat down and when I got out I was cool. I was like, "I don't want to do this no more." And so I said, "I'm not going to do it no more." So I'm done.

You know, when I wake up I'm like, "Today is a good day. You ain't going to get high today," and that's how I get along. It's kind of hard to get dope in prison [laughter]. You know, not to be funny or nothing, but, I mean, I'm not trying to be smart or nothing but yeah, it's, you know, it's possible. There was a whole lot of girls up in there, they were shooting up and doing stuff. You know, and I'm still trying to figure how they was getting needles but, you know, it wasn't my thing and it wasn't worth it for me to go to the hole. You know, it wasn't worth it for them to tack on a few more months. It just

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wasn't worth it, you know because I still had to do six months on parole. They could have just made me stay in there for them six months. I wasn't going to do it. You know, so 27 months I did the second time, total. Yep. And, I mean, I'm very, very pleased to say that I have not had a dirty UA. I have not relapsed, not one time and I've been out now for a year. Has it been a year? Almost a year, I don't know. I got out in 2010. You know, I'm big as a house, I don't like that because, you know, I mean, I'm 50 pounds overweight. I keep talking to my daughter about it. She be saying [chuckles] I be sweating, and grunting, and doing this stuff. She said, "What's wrong with you?" "I'm fat." I said, "Do you not see [laughter] that I'm fat?" And she be laughing at me but I'm serious. It's like, man, it shouldn't be this big. I weigh 180 pounds. There's no way on this earth I should be this big. I didn't weigh this much when I was pregnant. Not nary a time.

Well, so altogether I've been getting high for like 37 years. Yep, and when I stopped I was getting high for 37 years when I finally stopped. I was like, you know, I was smoking crack for shit, from the time I was 15 to 2008. I was 42 in 2008. That's a long time, smoking crack. You know, there's not too many drugs out there I have not done. I have not shot up heroin but I have done heroin. You know, so, I just look at people, you know, and I figure, do what you do. My kids, you know, I ain't never had them "X" pills and that's because by the time they came along, I was like, "Oh, no. I'd rather not." Yeah, that's for them kids. I don't mess with that stuff.

Relationship with Children

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How would I describe my relationship with my children? On a scale of 1 to 10 I'm going to give it a 9.5. That's pretty good. That's real good. What makes it good is that we communicate. You know, and, ah, it's honest and that, to me, is basically it. You know, we talk to each other and we try to keep it real. The most rewarding part of being a parent is watching them be better than me. I stopped whoopin' them kids when my daughter was nine. The way I used to whoop my kids was abuse. And it was just the way my dad abused me when I was young. What really got me to understand what was going on was when my daughter reacted to me in a same kind of way that I had reacted to my father a time or two. I seen it, and it's like, "Oh, my God." I felt really embarrassed and I felt all this guilt. I'm like, oh, no, we can't keep doing this and then the time that I actually stopped hitting her, whoopin' her, the last whoopin' I gave her, I worked myself over [chuckles] more than I did her. She was more pissed off and hurt her feelings and I was physically injured. You know [chuckles], and it's like, "Okay, we're not going to do this. See, this is not how this is supposed to go." So she was nine years old, and I sat them all down. I said, "If we can't talk, you understand, and work things out, and communicate, ya'll are old enough that you can talk and open your mouth. And you do understand what I'm saying, right?" And they're all like, "Yes, ma'am. Yes ma'am." I said, "Well, then this whoopin' thing" I said, "We're done." I said, "If I have to raise my hands to you then I ain't going to say nothing. I'm just going to walk away, because it doesn't have to be like that," you know. Consequently, they talk to me about anything. Sometimes it's like, "Son, I really don't want to know that [laughter]." With those things, you know what I'm saying? But they tell me anyway and it's like, okay. "You said we

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could talk to you about anything.” “Yeah, I did, didn’t I?” You know, and I’m sitting there, looking around, like, “For real? You know, I have a little girlfriend,” I don’t want to know those kind of details. God, no, um-um, just tell me anything. So, that one, I bit off a lot when I said that because they literally tell me anything. So I couldn’t go back on my word on that one. You know, and that’s something else. I just I quit promising them things also because it you know, excuse my language but shit happens, you know and I figured that out real fast.

My two middle kids, Treyvon and Matthew, they, um got involved with gangs for a little while, unbeknownst to me, better know that [chuckles]. I didn’t know and now they claim that they don’t, you know, do that no more, you know but just the other day a little boy got on the bus and my son and him were doing that little...I said, “What did you just do [chuckles]?” He said, “We didn’t do nothing.” I said, “Yeah, okay.” And I left it alone. “Because I already know what you’re doing.” “I just want to hear you say what you’re doing.” He said, “Mom, you know I don’t do that no more, right?” You know, because he works a job and he, you know, finished school. He was trying to go to college or whatever. He’s a good boy. I know he ain’t doing that but that was just their greeting, you know, their little respect thing.

Yep and my second boy and he said he ain’t been in there [in a gang] in almost four years but he’s still got the tattoo on him. I want him to get it off. He said he’ll probably get it changed into something else. You know, but that’s the boy that’s mad at me, so I don’t really talk to him a lot. You know, but he’s been at his same job for almost three years. Yeah. Don’t none of them have any kids except my oldest one and he just

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had a baby, um, four or five years ago. So, and that's it and I'm like, "Cool." I mean, I can't ask for more. By the time I was my daughter's age I was pregnant with Matthew, and I already had James. You know, and I was on welfare and I was living from post to pillar and, I mean, I was not being very responsible in the sense that I could take care of me and my kids. I was very irresponsible you know running around, wild still you know, trying to party and I've got these babies. [chuckles]. I'm very proud of them. They could have took a whole 'nother route. You know, even with that brief gang experience thing that they did, they could have stayed with it and one of them, or both of them could possibly be dead or in prison. So I ain't got no complaints. [Chuckles] I used to tell them, I said, "If I died right now I'd die peaceful, because I know I did four things right." I have no complaints. I just want them to keep on the right path. That's it.

Expectations of Children

I expected my kids to go to school. Definitely you're going to go to school, whether you want to or not. There were days when I felt like they were behaving rather ugly before they even made it out the door, so I would allow them to stay home because I didn't want to deal with the people, you know, the principal. Yeah, don't be calling me, talking about Matthew, Treyvon, or James. "No, I'm not trying to hear that. So you just stay home today," you know [chuckles]. "And we'll work on, you know, a chore or something that you can do." But school was definitely the thing. All of them have finished. And it's like, "You're going to finish whether you want to or not. I don't care what else you do, you're going to finish school and you're going to be respectable. I don't care how you feel about me, you know, but you're going to give me my respect.

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For nothing else...but, you know, if for no other reason, then the fact that I'm your mom, I demand my respect. I don't care about what you're going through or what I'm going through" you know. So and, um...you know, and to be nice, to treat people accordingly. You know, some people get into that, "Well, they were mean to me, so I'm going to be mean back." No, that's not how you do these things. You know, you treat people the way you want to be treated, regardless. I drilled that into every last one of them. And thankfully they believe it. That's how they live. So, and it's a good thing.

I tell them when I approve of them. Um-hum, I say it out of my mouth, give them hugs, and kisses, and, "Oh, I'm so proud of you, my baby." And then I tell everybody and their momma if they'll listen. You know, "My baby did this. Guess what my baby did," [chuckles] you know. Yeah, I'm very verbal. I'm very loving. So I ain't got no problem with that out in public, you give them a smooch, in front of little friends and all. "Ma!" "I don't care about your little friend watching me." You know, "Let me give you a kiss, and this, and a hug and you're going to give it back or I'm going to pinch you."

You know. So, again, they done got used to it by now. When I don't approve of something they doing, it's the same, I tell them, and my face be scrunched up and I'm mad. That's like, "You know you shouldn't have did that. That wasn't even right." It's like, "Why did you do that?" You know, we talk about it but I let them know, "No, man, that wasn't cool. You know, you shouldn't have did that." So, they know. And I'm always encouraging them. Like my oldest son, he's getting frustrated with, ah, the Navy and the politics. And I'm like, "Look, you just stay there and, you know, just hang in there. It'll be worth it in the end," and he's like, "I know, mom. It's just a little stressed

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out today.” And it’s like, “Keep your head up, baby. Just concentrate on today, or this power, or whatever you have to do to make it. Don’t give up. Not after three years.” He said, “Oh, I ain’t giving up. I just wish it was easier.” Saying, “It’s not going to get easier.” “You know, it’s hard work.” So, he says I’m always on time. You know, it’s like I know when he needs to hear me.

Parental Barriers and Challenges

Being a single parent is a barrier, for one. I mean, I was married but my ex, he wasn’t here. He was off doing what he was doing. Um, not having no formal education to get a decent enough job so I could take care of my kids. You know, and then like having to rely on Section 8, as, uh, welfare and then I messed the Section 8 thing up, which was definitely a wrong decision on my part. I had Section 8. Let’s see, I got Section 8 when my oldest son was almost a year old and I had it until 1997, when they actually kicked me off because my house got raided. They didn’t find nothing in the house but that wasn’t the point. You know, according to their rules you can’t be associated with, involved with or participating in anything that has to do with the illegal sale of drugs [chuckles]. So, that didn’t sit well. They didn’t care that they didn’t find nothing in my house. It was just the fact that they came to my house, which meant there was some type of activity going on. I tried to explain that we weren’t doing nothing but, you know, which was honest at the time [chuckles]. If they’d asked me two months before I got raided, then yeah, they were selling drugs out of the house. So.

I’m challenged all the time. Um, with my boys it’s the constant worrying of, you know, all these young guys, you know, shooting each other over little or nothing. I’m not

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worried, as far as my kids being involved in something. I'm mostly worried about them being bystanders. With my daughter, of course, it's, you know, one of these little knuckleheads trying to do something to her. Like rape her, you know, maybe try to put her on a track, turning her out to be a whore or something. It's like I just want them to have a better life than what I had. You know, priority's always an issue but I've taught them well as far as survival goes in the ghetto.

Parental Strengths and Limitations

[Sighs] I'm resilient. Um, I'm a go-getter. I...you know, if I need something, food shelters and all that, I would find it, utilize it, you know, and bring two or three girlfriends along. "Girl, you know, I find out about Fair Share. We need to go here." You know, I mean, I just, I know now that I'm strong. I would never have said that a few years ago but I'm a strong Black woman. And I'm a survivor. I'm going to survive. So ain't none of that, you know, fall into despair. I tried it a couple times. It's not a comfortable place. I don't like that. It's dark and it's miserable and everybody there is miserable and I'd rather not. You know, and then they're all complaining and whining. And it's like, no, I just, no. No, don't complain. Do something. You know, it's your fault that you're here so stop whining. Yeah, so, and then, I don't know, I love my kids. You know, God forgive me, I would kill somebody about one of my kids. I swear, I'd give my life for any one of them and that's just it. There's no if's, and's, or but's about it. My boys are all close to six feet tall [chuckles]. And I had gotten into a argument with...you know, this is like three or four incidences. You know, over the years I'd get into these argument with these men about how they're going to treat me and talk to me when I'm

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out there doing whatever I'm doing. But you still ain't going to just talk to me any old kind of way. And it seemed like my boys would always show up at the right time. "And man, I know you ain't talking to my momma like that." And "I'm all right, baby." And they're trying to push me out the way so they can confront this man. And then it's like, no. Then I would get in the middle because now, you're not going to hurt my child. I don't care if he is six feet tall [chuckles]. I just can't let you do that. So, yeah, I'll scrap for them.

Limitations? My son's in Seattle. That's the only way I see limitations. Um, I guess it's the limitations I put on myself, having to let them do, you know, and decide, even though I pretty much can guarantee the outcome. You know, it's like, "Look, man, you don't want to do that. This is what's going [chuckles] to happen if you do that." And, "Okay, you're going to do it, fine," and then I just have to sit back and watch. That's hard. That is so hard. It's like, "Man, I told you [chuckles]. Come and just listen to me." See, my mom could tell me stuff and 80 percent of the time, okay, I'd listen. I would do what she told me. There was a 20 percent where I'm like, "no, I'm going to go do this anyway." But my kids, my oldest one's like that. Matter of fact, my boys are all like that. My daughter, bless her heart, she has to go and figure it out. And it's really hard to sit back, watching her make all these decisions. She said she's going to the Navy. She made her first, you know, steps to get there. I'm supporting her all the way. You know, and I know she's going to make it and I'm going to hate to see her go but I'm going to love to see her leave. You know, "Go." "Go on, do that. You've got to

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fly.” “Go fly little bird.” So, yep. I don’t know, there ain’t really no limits. I’m going to be a parent ‘til I die.

How would other people describe me as a parent? [Chuckles]. That depends on who you talk to [laughter]. Um, shoot. Ah [sighs], some people would say I was irresponsible, but strong. I’m a loving parent. I love my kids to pieces. Yep. I don’t know. I guess, overall, they would say I’m a good parent. At least that’s what I want to believe. Yep. I know my mom would have said that. Yeah, she’d a told you I was a good parent.

Child Protection

I had lost my kids to the point where they was trying to terminate all my rights and then some crazy White woman was trying to take my daughter from me and this was after I had gotten clean and was doing okay and she decided she wanted to keep RoAnne, and name her Annie. I’m like, “What?” And, you know, she was the only child that was still in foster care. She was at a foster home with this White lady. My boys was at my momma house. And we was working to reunify, is what they call it, so that me and her could start doing what we was doing. I was, you know, allowed to go over there and visit and all this hear. But she decided she wanted the baby and the only way she was going to be able to do that, legally through the courts, was to terminate my rights for all my kids but she didn’t want all my kids; she just wanted my daughter. And I’m like, “Okay, you know what...” I called my social worker. I said, “See, you really need to do something because I’m about ready to go over there and whoop her ass, burn her house

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down, whatever I need to do, and snatch mine up out of there.” You see and my social worker, knowing me said, “Well, don’t do nothing crazy. Just hold on, okay?” So she goes to get my daughter and this broad is gone. When she comes back she brought channel 9, channel 4, I think, or channel 11. No, channel 9 and channel 4. She brought channel 9 and channel 4 with her and made this great big scene about, “Oh, they’re taking this baby out of this really good home to give her back to her crack head mom,” and lottie, dottie. “And she’s just going to wind up back in the system,” and, “How can they do that?,” and, “I really love her,” and she crying, slobbering, and snoting. Well, Geraldo got a hold to it and the next thing I know we’re all there in New York and I’m standing, telling my mom, “I don’t want to do this show.” “Why?” “Because I don’t like Geraldo.” I said, “He lies and I know he’s a liar.” “Oh, it’s going to be all right. You know, you just need to, ” and then the people that work for him, “Well, we just want you to, you know, tell, you know, your side of it. Because if you don’t, the show is still going to happen, and then she’ll just tell her side of it, and people are going to...” And I’m thinking, oh, man, you know what I’m saying? Okay, so, I go. I get there. They tell me the woman is not going to be there. Then I find out she’s there. They tell me I ain’t going to have to sit on the stage with her and when they bring me out to sit on the stage, there she is. So I was seething the whole time. I’m sitting there, literally, with my ass like this. Like this.

[Chuckles] You know, and all they got between us is a little space about as wide as this table and she said what she had to say and then they would ask me, and I would answer the questions and they break. “Okay, we’ll go to commercial.” And I said, “You know I’m going to fuck you up when we get into Wisconsin, right [laughter],” you know,

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“Brought me all the way up here to New York, trying to make me look bad.” I said, “You don’t even want all my kids. You just want my daughter?” I said, “You need to go have you a little Black baby and leave mine alone.” I said, “You wait ‘til we get back.” I mean, this is what I’m telling her. Yeah, I’m making sure nobody can hear me [chuckles] and my mom’s like looking at me and she said something to Richard and Richard looked at me. I was just sitting there like this [chuckles], like I ain’t did nothing, I ain’t said nothing. You know, and then they were like, “Well, can she give RoAnne a hug before she leave?” “Oh, *hell* no! Are you serious?” I said, “No. No, no, no, no.” Momma’s like, “Diane...” I’m like, “No. No, she cannot touch my child ever again. No. You understand? She better go have her a little Black baby. She need to leave mine alone.”

Parental Influences

Well, I remember how my mom raised me, and, um, as far as what she did and didn’t do. I know how I would like somebody to treat me and so I just treated them how I would want to be treated. You know, I mean, when they were kids I still looked at them as little people. I didn’t talk down to them. You know, but I didn’t get like just real vulgar and specific with my words but they understood clearly whatever it was I was trying to say to them and I made it known that they could tell me anything within the boundaries of respect to talk about anything. If you don’t like something and you’ve got issues with me, let me know. If you think I’m wrong, we’ll work it out. If I am wrong, I’ll always admit it. I let them know that I messed up and ask for forgiveness and that’s a humble pie that’s very hard to swallow. Um, you know, I always ask God for forgiveness but if I specifically do something to them, I have to ask them for forgiveness. You know,

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and they don't always give me their [laughter] forgiveness either. You know, "Mom, you said you wasn't going to do that." "Okay. You know, I'm wrong, whatever." Yep. My second boy, he holds grudges forever. Yeah. That one there, he just, oh, my God. He's still mad at me. And this is something that happened over [chuckles] 15 years ago. He's still mad [laughs]. I told him I wasn't going to start smoking crack no more and I did and to top it all off, I basically did is I chose being a drug addict over being a mom and I told him exactly that's what I was doing, out of my mouth, so it wasn't no misunderstanding and he got very pissed off about it. So, oh, shucks. He was about 16 or 17, something like that at the time. It was 2003. The other kids reacted basically the same way. Um, my the oldest two, James and Matthew, they were like almost out the house. If I had been doing what I was supposed to be doing, they probably wouldn't have been ready to leave the house that soon. My youngest two stayed with me as long, you know, as long as they could and my daughter actually was the last one to leave the house once I started getting high again and, um, I made her go because I was getting really paranoid about her being around me and all the people I was hanging out with. They went over to my sister's house. You know, I like to think of that time with the kids as bitter sweet because like there's a loyalty between us five that nobody so—you know, can really mess with but when they left, they, um, the last three, uh, the youngest three got together with my sister, and my sister's cousin, and decided to call child protection, which was for their own sake and, you know, so, like that's why I think it's bitter sweet, because I was very proud that they stood up to me to do what was right for them and I was mad because, now, where's the loyalty? So, I mean, I couldn't have both of it, you know what I'm saying? Right. So,

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I mean, I was hurt for many a year after that, but I was also very proud of them. It was no way for me to just be mad at them about it.

Child protection let my sister have temporary custody my kids and I was supposed to do what I was supposed to do to get them back and I just decided to let her have, um, legal custody. I kept my parental rights but she basically had them physically, um, 'til they all became of age. So, um, James was already 18, so it was just Matthew, Treyvon, and RoAnne. Then Matthew became 18 like in 2004, so it was just the youngest two that she had and my daughter is 20 so up until two years ago, but they were still living with her. Um, so up until like a month and a half ago she couldn't afford her house. I told her she's got all them grown kids in her house, and ain't nobody paying you rent or helping with the bills, and they barely put food on the table, and I said, "Man, put them on a route. That's the way I seen it. Put them out the nest and see if they'll fly," and she did. So, that's a good thing. Now my daughter's with me. She's doing, um, the steps to get into the Navy, which I am very, very proud of that. Yeah. So, we're waiting to see how that's going to turn out. She has to take some test. I don't know how to pronounce it, but she took it and she passed everything but the math. So the guy wants her to study the math a little bit more and then come back and take it again. Then after that, hopefully they'll be like, "Okay, we're putting you on this plane at this time on this day." You know, my oldest son's in the Navy already. Yeah, so she decided she wanted to go where her big brother was, which is probably a good thing. Well, I know it's a good thing.

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Parental Pride and Hopes for Children

I'm proud of my kids. I just...I'm proud of my...I don't know. Um, so far they've exceeded everything that I've...that I wanted for them. You know, and they're all very mannerable And they're all very polite and they just, I mean, it's beautiful when you see your son's get up to let somebody sit down, or open the door for somebody, or offer to carry a lady's bag. You know, it's like, "Yeah, I did that," you know, so it's wonderful. It's very wonderful.

What kind of a future do I want to see for my kids? Well, the first thing is not just for my kids, but I wish for peace, you know. I wish for discrimination to go away, basically racism and I wish success for them; I want them to be as successful as they want to be. I want whatever that they wanted for themselves, I want them to have achieve that and be content in their life. You see, I mean, because I want you to be a president only if you want to be the president. You know, and that discrimination and racism, you know, these boys and these gang-banging, and, you know, and my son getting dreads now, so, he's trying to get a job and I'm looking at him like, and they all over his head, bless his heart and I'm happy because he's doing the dread thing but I'm thinking, "Son, you're getting ready to go on a job interview where? Um, okay." You know, so it's, wow, I don't want to tell him not to do what he's doing, because that's us. This is our people, this is our culture sister, this is us, okay? So I'm like, wow, in a perfect world, yeah. And if they wanted to be real back in the day, everybody had dreads anyway. You know, it was just like shit, man, look, they didn't start straightening their hair out until a long time after they was walking the earth. Now, I know a little bit about my history. [Chuckles].

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So, everybody's hair was kinked up, knotted it. It wasn't just us [laughs], and just us. Uh, then the Egyptians figured out how to but then they figured out a whole bunch of stuff.

So...I don't know. Yep, but that's it.

What would I hope my children learned from being parented by me? Phew, communication, honesty. [Sighs] Loyalty, even though mine was questionable a few times. Um, love, unconditionally. You know, I learned that from my momma. Yeah, wasn't nothing I could do, that woman...there's nothing. Nothing. And I did some horrible things to that lady. She still forgave me, she still loved me, regardless. "Diane, there ain't nothing you can do to make me stop loving you. You're my child." [Chuckles] Okay, and I'd be crying, blowing snot because I done messed up, but yeah, you know, communication, and trust, and honesty, I tell them kids that all the time. You know, love...you love somebody; you're going to be honest. And you're honest, and you communicate, and trust, then everything else is just kind of going to fall into place. It just kind of...it all kind of go together. You know, make sure that you...these babies that...that you have, that you want. You know, don't have no babies and be getting to talking about accident. Ain't none...none of mine an accident, I'm going to tell you. I knew what I was doing. I knew exactly what I was doing, and knew I was pregnant. It was [chuckles] so strange. My cousin, Steven, me and him have remained close through the years. And I used to tell him...you know, I would be in...would have just have been with their dad, with each of them's dad at the time. And I'd get with him, talking about, you know, "Yeah, I think I'm pregnant." And he's like, "What?!" And it's like, "Yeah. I...I...I...I believe I'm pregnant." You know, I could just feel like something's happening down

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there. And he be looking at me like...and see, by him being a spiritual person too, you know, he look at me kind of crazy, but he be like, "Okay." And nine months later them babies would be here [laughs]. You know what I'm saying? And when I went and got pregnant with my daughter, I was determined. I said, "I need to go to Chicago." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because I've got to go get my daughter." And he's looking at me, "You're daughter?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "It's time now." And when I came back from Chicago, 40-something days later, I was pregnant. And here she is; she's here now. So, man, people think that's the strangest thing. It's like, "No, you're just listening." All you do listen. You know, be still. So, yeah, none of them were accidents. I...I wanted all of them. The ones I didn't want, I...boy, I had two abortions, so, I didn't want those babies.

Relationship with Mother

Were there any kinds of experiences that you...any opportunities that you didn't have in terms of getting your basic needs met when you were growing up? Not until I became grown. My momma...my momma never...my mom worked. That's what she did. She went on welfare one time to try and get some food stamps. And after she filled out all the papers and did what they wanted her to do...I'll never forget this. They sent her a \$4 check. And my momma looked at that check, and she was like, "What and the hell am I supposed to do with this?" And she mailed it back to them. You know what I'm saying? Seriously. And I was like, "Cool." You know, I...I never...no, my mom...I ain't never suffered with my mom. And my mom was a chronic alcoholic, you know, drug addict, all

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that. And she just made...there...there was just something about...I always had a house, always had food. And she was there. So, that was my momma. She took care of me.

And I learned that from her, even though I didn't always do it. You know, just something about that crack is...is wicked. You know, I would wish that on an enemy if I had one.

It's a really, really wicked drug. You know, and it makes you do things that you know ain't right. So...I would say, Hm. I don't know, she's my best and only friend. Yeah.

That was my old lady. My mom, that was my friend. That's it, in a nutshell.

Because she used to tell me that. "One of these days, Diane, you're going to realize that I'm your friend." I said, "Okay." Because I used to run around saying "friend" a lot when I was young, until [chuckles]...mom said, "That girl's not your friend." I said, "Yes, she is." She said, "No, she's not. She's not your friend Diane. She's going to do something to you, watch." She said, "Mark my words." She said, "That girl's jealous of you. She don't like you. And she's going to do something to try to hurt you, as sure as I'm sitting here." And all I could do was say, "Mom, you're right. You was right." She said, "I told you." You know, because I made that mistake twice. And each time my momma said, "That child is not your friend." She knew it [chuckles]. And I'm like, "Yes, she is momma." "Nah, she wasn't. [Chuckles] No, she was not."

So, it was like, okay. I'm a better judge now. I mean, I can associate with you all day long but I'll never call you my friend.

Yeah, that takes time. That's something is built up over time. Yep. It's got to be a lot of trust, honesty, and just...you know, to the point where you can tell me stuff and I know you're not telling it to me to be, you know, mean and facetious. You know, you're

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telling me because you generally care. You know, and you know if I say something to you it's not because I'm trying to hurt you either. You know, and there's boundaries. You ain't going to try and get with my ex. You ain't going to try, uh, you know, steal from me. You ain't going to try and leave my kids astray. I mean, this...you know, there's things that you do. You're going to love mine like I love yours and we're all going to be all right. And Kita, yeah, she is my friend. Yeah, she's my friend.

Relationship with Father

My father? Tsht. I don't know, he taught me a lot. He didn't always molest me. I can't just...you know, that would be an untruth for sure if I said that he was just a monster all the time. I don't even know what five words I can give. My daddy was, um, borderline genius. He was like two or three points off the IQ...you know, from...away from them saying he was a genius or whatever. So, I mean, he...he was a very smart intelligent man. He taught me stuff, like how to read, how to roller-skate, how to tell time, you know, how to count money because we'd play Monopoly. He'd show how to count money, make change, whatever, you know. He...he taught me how to survive, you know. A hustler. I was braiding hair for \$10 a head when I was nine years old in the projects of Watts. So, I mean, he taught me a lot of stuff. He did, you know. And he taught me some stuff he didn't have no business, as far as sex goes, and getting high and what not, you know what I'm saying. But five words for my dad. Let's see, may he rest in peace. That's about it. I can't...I can't say nothing, really, about my dad without saying a whole bunch. You know. Because he was a thug gangster type. Yeah, my...him and...my uncle and my daddy was a twin. Yeah. So, my uncle David's still alive. He's like 78 years old. But my

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uncle, David, and my dad...and then they had a best friend that they called Nimrod. I guess by the time they were about 13, 14 years old, Nimrod was over six feet tall. And my daddy and them was short, but they went to Redgranite together like twice. And they all wound up in Highview [chuckles]. They all wound up in Racine. I mean, so they was bad. They was gangsters back in the day. They was doing stuff that, you know, teenagers didn't have no way of doing and going to prison. So, they said my daddy changed. The second time he came out of Redgranite they said he was changed. So, something happen to him. I think the guards probably raped him, a whole bunch of other stuff because he...They said my daddy went up in there and he was bad. But when he came out they said he was just mean. He was a evil kind of mean. So they did something to him.

I don't think that my mom ever knew that my dad was molesting me. Nope. Because she said, "Diane," She said, "Had I'd a known," she said, "there's no way that he would have still been living." And my mom was very adamant about that. I believe that she really did not know he was doing anything to me. We were very good at acting and hiding, you know, me and my father. I mean, because she didn't know he was getting me high for a long time. She just happened to see my eyes red one day.

[Chuckles]. Yeah, "What's wrong with your eyes? What has your father done to you?" And then, you know, I...I didn't lie to my mom too good. I would try but it didn't work because she always knew when I was lying. So I just told her, he...smoking some weed. I told the truth. Yeah. You know, "My daddy gave me some weed." Yep. Yeah, my daddy was the first one to tell me I was going to be a ho. He was arguing, mad at me

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about something, I think because I was hanging out with the boys. He didn't want me to hang out with the boys. But I wasn't a girly girl. You know, like that's...

Relationship with Siblings

My...all my siblings...well, except for my...except for Felicia, my younger sister's momma's White. My younger brother is White. But their momma's is White. And Felicia, um...She's older than me. Yep. And she was, um...she was mixed with something, I just don't know what. I know what Midge was. But I was the only Black child with a Black momma that he had, except for the oldest, oldest one, which they was young when they had her. I guess she got —got given away for adoption. So we never met that one. But we know that she existed. And she was the other only Black child my daddy had, but I was the one that he had contact with or whatever. So, that's why my momma say he followed me. And then I looked him. I walked like him. And it was just like he followed me. You know, if I was a little boy I would have been a spitting image of my dad, at the time, so..Felicia denied it [sexual molestation by father] to the day she died. Felicia...would not...she would not...she just... “My daddy never did nothing to me.” I said, “My mom told me,” you know. I said, “I know he did.” I said, “Why are you lying? Why are you trying to protect that old man?” She said, “My daddy was a good daddy. He didn't do nothing to me.” And me and her actually got into a physical fight about that. You know, she... “My daddy, my daddy, my daddy...” I said, “Your goddamn daddy is a pervert and I hope he rots in hell.” And she was like “Ah!” you know. And I'm like, “Matter of fact, just get out of my house.” You know, and then me and her got into a physical fight with it. She forgave me. And then she died like a year later. She died of,

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uh, liver, cirrhosis. She lived ten years longer than she was supposed to. She's in the Wisconsin medical books, as a medical oddity that they don't have no explanation for. So she made the book. [Chuckles] She said, "You know, them crackers told me I'd be dead by now [laughs]." We're sitting around drinking beer and I'm looking at her. I'm like, "Yeah, I guess you did prove them wrong." I said, "Don't nobody run this but God. They're always thinking they're running something," you know. And she lived like 11 years past her due, you know, and —and getting high. That's all. I mean, we...God. I said, "After that dope been holding you together. As soon as you stop is when you'll die." And she, you know, got it down to where she was just drinking vodka like...like once or twice a day, and sure enough, she died. And she was a trip. She was a...she was a gangster. Yeah, Felicia...Felicia was a gangster. She was gifted, got skipped up all kind of grades, smart as hell. Grew up and turned into a gangster, prostitute gangster. And, me and her did, you know, what our dad probably would have been...and, you know...and my dad was proud of my sister. I think he was proud of me too, you know, in a sick kind of way. You know, and...we're both like...I wasn't no gangster but I wasn't no saint either. My sister was the gangster, and she would rob you at gunpoint, do all kind of stuff. You know, I was just like...I was mild, very mild compared to my older sister. And, um, I think my daddy liked it, you know. I really do. I think he was proud of her to be that way.

Relationship with Friend-girls and Girlfriends

Came up here to start doing it. Of all places, my God [chuckling]. And my grandma used to hear stuff and tell my mom. It was so embarrassing. I'd be on the bus, and we're in the back, me and two of my little friend-girls, we're just cussing, and acting

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real ignorant, and, you know, just nasty-mouthed in the back, thinking we're doing something, smoking weed. And by the time I got home my mom knew all about it. Some lady on the bus knew who I was, called my granny. My granny called my mom. So by the time I walk in my front door, like an hour or two later, my mom was like, "So you think you're this and you're that. And you just..." Oh, man [chuckles]. "And you need to act with respect. You're a Whitaker." And I'm like, "Oh, my God, how do you know this?" "Your grandmother told me. There was somebody on the bus who knew you and knew my momma. And how do you think I feel, my momma!" And I'm like, "Oh, wow, for real [laughs]?" So there wasn't really a...you know, I kind of...that's when I really started doing stuff on the down low. Like, "I'm too well-known around this city, that if somebody knows me that know one of my people, then they're damn sure going to tell my momma. So I need to be quiet. Yep.

Friend-girls are females that I deal with. They's like associates. My girlfriends were closer than that. Yep. I have a whole lot of friend-girls. I only got a few girlfriends. And I don't think I got...I probably have one, maybe two women that are actually women that I will say friend. I don't use that word. That...that word means something to me. You know, my momma was my best friend. And Kita is my friend. She...she ain't my best friend but she's truly my friend. I love her dearly. But, you know...and Red might be. But I think if it came down to me and the right thing to do and some dope, she would not do the right thing. That's what I believe. So, she can't be like a real true friend.

I don't deal with friend-girls no more. If I see them on the street I say hello. Back in the day they was just associates. They was girls that we would run into. And then all of us

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will hang out for a little while and get high, whatever. And then, you know, we'd part company. You know, most of us all...most of us went to the same schools. So we would see each other, you know, on a daily basis. But, you know, there was them few that didn't really hang out with us. And when we'd see them, we'd kick it for a little while. And then they would go back wherever they was. And we'd still be in the ghetto, you know.

So, it...yeah.

Yeah, I had more friends that were guys [chuckles] than anything. Yep, the guys. But then it got really weird when they'd start hitting on me. It's like, "Oh, no. Now ya'll want to have sex? Oh, no." You know, so, I had to like stop hanging out with a lot of them because they was tripping. Yeah, I mean we were 15, 16. Now you want to change. We was just climbing trees last year. Now [chuckles] now you're talking about coming up into your room and shut the door. Nah, I ain't going for that bad. "Come on tell...I want to talk to you." "About what?" "Come here, I want to talk to you." I get up in the room, or down in the basement, or wherever, they want to shut the door and just get to doing the feely, touchy. "Oh, man, if you don't want to get away from me..." You know, I had fight it. I had to fight a lot of guys, keep them...You know, because they just thought I'm high, I hang with them. Some kind of way they found out I was dating, you know, and doing a little stuff on the side for money, or weed, or whatever. So I guess they figured because I was doing that, that I would give them some too. No. You know, first of all, you ain't got to money [chuckling]. And second of all, to me you're a boy. You know, you ain't no grown man. I don't want...I don't...you know, get

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away from me. You know, and they...you know, you think you're better than everybody.

Whatever. So...I had a lot of static, a lot of static, had to fight.

Supportive Kin

Um-hum. Okay. Okay. Who are the family members that I was the closest to?

Ooh! Besides my mom? Um, I would...have to...yeah, I would have to say my cousin,

Robert, and Mark, and my cousin, Sam. All first cousins. Um-hum. Me and

Matthew...Bill is three years younger...younger than me. Me and Mark are the same age.

And Sam's six years older than me and Mark. So Sam and Mark are brothers [chuckles].

And Robert's our cousin. And I'm their cousin. Uh, so...but I just...the girl cousins, there

wasn't really no girl cousins my age, when I w—because I was born in '66. and a lot of

the girl cousins were already like...like 15 and 14. You know, they were older already.

So they wasn't there to play with me or nothing. It was me and them guys. You know,

and the only reason why Sam got in the clique...because that was back when everybody

was getting high. And he was doing it, would supply us with weed. So he became, you

know, the big cousin to hang out with. "Where ya'll going?" "We're going to Sam's

[laughs]," you know. "And he got something over there, you know. Got a few dollars.

You want to go [chuckles]?" You know. Yeah, so he became a good cousin to hang out

with. What made them particularly close was they was my cousins. It's...yeah, it's family.

You know, we...I'd be mad at them and still go, you know what I'm saying? And we

could say anything to each other. You know, I could tell them about themselves. They'd

tell me about myself. And then I had friend-girls, so they liked that. You know... "Why

don't you bring Trina, and why don't you bring Cat? I'm like, "Why? You're going to try

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and mess with her, aren't you?" They like, "Nah, cuz, just bring her over and we'll talk to her [laughs]." So that kind of helped. But... mostly, you know, it was just because we was family. We was family. We just hung out. You know, they didn't have no sisters and I didn't have no brothers, so that's...that was it.

Family Proximity

Uh, the way I'm understanding, my grandma, and my great-grammy, and all them, my uncles and aunts, came from Omaha Nebraska, down there, through there somewhere. My grandfather, um Harvey Witherspoon, yeah, he came from Wichita. That's the way I understand it. Um, and I don't know for sure but I'm pretty sure that's what it is because my great-grandma Roberts, that's where she was when she died. She was in Wichita. So I'm assuming that's true. Well, my aunts and uncles, they travel a lot and visit each other. Because I have an auntie in Washington. There's one in New Mexico. And there's one in Vegas [chuckles]. And my aunt that lives in Washington, my auntie, Dianne, she's still singing, and making CD's, and stuff. So every now and then she'll go to Japan, you know what I'm saying and do her thing and then come back. Well, now, all...and their...all these ladies are all tiny. It is so cute. I'm taller than all of them. And I'm only five [chuckles] feet tall. But they were all together here for my, um...my youngest auntie, she just turned 60. So everybody was here. And, you know, it's like the first time all of us were together in a long time, especially me. And they was just really tripping because I was there, you know, because I've been estranged. And I'm like, "You're all short [laughter]." They say, "Yeah, you going to shrink too. Just wait." And they're like, "Look at, she's got gray hair." And they're all tripping, you know, because

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I...they're used to be me being little. But, yeah they...we get together. We do stuff. You know...

Familial Support

We're there when someone needs help. Whether it's monetary or whatever, we're there. You know, a lot of us ain't got no money. But we do what we can, you know, because, you know, the support, the moral support, you know, food, shelter, whatever we've got to do. You know, if we need to give them information to get something. You know, "Well, this is who you call to do this." We're there. If someone's not able to function in their role as a parent somebody gets...like in my case, my mom took my kids the first...first few years when I was getting high, when they was really little. And, you know, like I said, after my mom died, my sister stepped up you know. And she took my kids, you know, keep them from out of the system. And that's the way it is with all of us. You know, a lot of the time we don't even know about...you know, like my...like my uncle's daughter had to have a little bout with child protection. And her mom took her child. You know, and that's what we do. You know, I don't believe in...we're not going to give them to the system. Yeah, I don't care what I'm doing. I don't care what you're doing. The kids ain't going into the system if we can help it. You know, they come...they're going to stay with family because that's where they're supposed to be at.

Family Traditions and Celebrations

Um, we always got together for my grandma's birthday, my grandfather's birthday, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas Eve. And I believe that's it. And we'd have a family reun—we used to have a family reunion like every year but then...and

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as...all the first cousins, we're...I'm the first...I'm part of the first cousins. After we all started getting older with our own kids, they...they kind of slacked off with the family reunions. And then my grandfather died. And so, my grandmother, you know, she was determined...well, my aunts and them were determined to keep everything going. My grandma I guess...I don't think she really cared after that, you know. And then she got sick, and then she died. Yeah, this is my mom's side. My daddy's side, th—uh, those people died like when I was young, all...most of them died off. I know if...I know my cousins. But we don't keep in touch like we should. You know, we know each other, we love each other. We...we grew up, you know, knowing each other and all that. But as we got older, you know, we just lost contact. We just don't do it no more, we do stuff. And my uncle tries to keep the Christmas thing going. So this year we was all at like...my auntie Ellen, we went to her church to celebrated Christmas, like we used to when my grandma was alive. We used to all go to my grandma's...my grandmother...my grandfather's house and sing carols. And they'd make homemade eggnog and homemade fudge. And oh, my God...oh, my God, I have to get that fudge recipe. Somebody knows it, you know. And I just have to have that. So...Yeah. Oh, it's so good. God, it's like sinful good [laughter]. You know...you know, you ain't got no business eating this fudge. But you've got to have it anyway. [Tape pauses, then resumes] You know, so, I've gotten a lot of support from these...from...from here. You know, they...I even live...I live in their housing. And it's wonderful. You know, and I don't know where I would be living right now if hadn't been for Breaking Free. So, I commend them. I do.

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Oh, yes. My goodness. I mean, they used to have to make me stop because, you know...especially when I was little. I used to like try to eat as much as I could in...in hour. Another would always see me. "You know, Diane, that's enough." It's like, "Okay." Then I'd sneak some more anyway. Or I'd talk one of the cousins in to getting it. But that didn't work because usually they would eat it before they'd give it to me. Yeah [chuckles]. So...yeah. But it...the...it's really good. It's...it's really, really good.

Family Heritage and Values

All right. Okay. Wow. Well, what do you...you shared a lot about your grandparents. And what do you know about your grandparents or your great-grandparents and their history? My great-grandma was raised under Jim Crowe law. She's half Choctaw and her daddy was a...a slave off of a ship. I'm not sure what tribe. Um, she raised my grandma and her four brothers. They were all raised under Jim Crowe law. And they're all part In—part Native and Black. And I think they all have different dads. And my grandma moved from Omaha to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to raise her kids after my grandma was like 15, 16, something like that. And then my grandma me my grandfather when they were 18 and got married when they were both 19. And my grandfather went to the Navy, or the Army, or something. And then when he got out he worked at the railroad. He worked at the Ford plant. And he worked on shining shoes. And my grandma and grandfather had nine kids. Well, they had 13; nine survived. You know, then my great-granny, they say that she was a wild child and...uh, we would say fast and sluttish, you know, nowadays. You know, they said she was always with, you know, a man or whatever. But she was living in a house and raised five kids without ever getting married and not without ever

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having a job. So whatever she did, okay. You see, how I'm...that's how I look at it. You know, she had enough money to Wisconsin and buy house. So yeah, whatever she did, okay. My mom and my grandma shared this history with me.

Another important belief in my family is first and foremost, God. All of us believe in God. I don't think there's one person in my family, immediate or extended, that does not believe in God. You know, some of them are Muslims, but, for the most part, they all believe in God and they all know who Jesus is. You know, and whether they were...whether they're Muslims now or not, they were brought up Christian. So...yeah. I come from an old family. My mom and them's name was Whitaker. So, my mom was Sandy Whitaker, so, I come from an old family. We've been in Wisconsin for years. And my dad's family is the James's. And they've been in Wisconsin for years. So, I come from two old Black families. [Chuckles]. And they've been in Wisconsin since like the '20's and the '30's. I tell people this and they look at me, "You're really from here?" Yes, I'm really from here [chuckles]. And they're like, "Eh, how can you live in Wisconsin?" If you don't like it, get out. This is my state. You ain't got to like it. I love my state. So, Yeah, the north side. The north side of this. Yep. That's my people. Yeah, you know, I'm proud of my family. [Chuckles] you know. And it just makes me wonder sometimes, why in the world was I doing what I was doing. But then I have to remember is because that's what I was supposed to do. I had to figure stuff out. I had to find me. And I wasn't going to find me doing it how they wanted me to do it. So...because I'd probably be crazy and buck wild right now. I'm glad I did do it and get over with. Now I'm all calm [chuckles] for the most part, you know, calm. And it's like I don't care about

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all that now. I've got girlfriends that's still out there, my age. Like Trish-Anne, bless her heart. She ain't faded out yet. You know, and I just pray for her. So...

Extended Family Network

Yeah I have friends that are like family to me. Um, my friend, Trina, I've been knowing her since I was 13 years old. So that's a good 30 years. And, uh, Cat and her sister, Sam, same thing, been knowing them guys for 30 years. Haven't seen them in awhile. Um, and the reason why I haven't seen Trisha, specifically, is because she's still getting high and I don't...you know, she gets belligerent when she gets drunk. She you know, over the years she just got worse. Now she's just an obnoxious drunk. So I don't really want to be bothered, you know. And, uh, Sam and Catrelle, now, as far as I know they're both still here in Milwaukee. I just don't know where. Because when I went off on my binge this last go around...well, I lost touch with everybody. Um, let's see, I've got a second cousin that likes to call me all the time. And I don't really...I mean, I love her dearly but she's still getting high. And I don't want to be w—you know, it's just like I don't...that's...I'm not on that page. You know, I talk to her on the phone or whatever. She wants me to come visit. She wants to come visit. She wants to do stuff. And it's like, "Nah, cuz, I ain't going to be able...you know, not today," or whatever. And then I've got like another friend, girl, from when I was getting high who I really care a lot about. You know, me and her got real close. And it was...it was more than just the drugs. Me and her really got close. You know, and she tried to be sober for a little while. And we...you know, still hanging and doing stuff. And as sure as the sun rises, she kind of eased back on into it. So, now I don't talk to her anymore either. Um, so honestly, um, I have

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extended people that, you know what I'm saying, I know, and love, and care about. And though they ain't no blood relation to me...but because of the circumstances, I don't mess with them. You know, I'm pretty much...I told my daughter one day, "I think I'm turning into a recluse. You know, because I stay in the house. I don't go out and do nothing. There ain't nothing to go out and do. If I go outside and I don't have a destination, then there's a problem. So I just don't go. You know, and I'm almost three years clean. I...I just...I still...I'd rather be safe than sorry. We don't have nothing in common now. You know, because I ain't getting high. But we ain't got nothing in common.

Losses

Yeah, there are certain relationships that I really honor and respect the most, with family. Yeah. Uh, they would have to be all my kids for sure. And then all my aunts and uncles. You know, when my mom died, they...they reached out to me. But I was temporarily insane. And, um I mean that literally because I wasn't trying to talk to them, my kids, or nobody. I just wanted to get high. That's all. I wanted to do. I didn't care how I got it. I was going to get it. And, you know, if you got may, then God help you. You know, see, so I just went really, really ballistic. when my mother died. And then...Yeah. Yeah, that was my best friend. You know, my dad had five chil—children that we know of. But me and mom was just me and mom, until I had kids, that...you know what I'm saying. So, being that only child, being independent...you know, and my mom...I mean, I used to get up...I was in kindergarten. I'd get myself to...get myself together to go to school and that, and give her a kiss on my way out the door. And I was in kindergarten. See, I was a latchkey kid before I ever heard the term you know what I'm saying? See,

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so, growing up with my mom, and then having her die...and I knew she was going to die. And then she kept trying to talk to me about it before...you know what I'm saying? Every now and then she's bring it up, "Diane, you know I'm getting ready to die." And I'm not trying to hear that like...You know, I...I don't know...I don't want to talk about that. "You're going to have to face it." "No, I don't." And that's what I would tell her. "No. No, I don't [laughs]. I don't need to talk about this now." So...uh, then the old lady died on me. Um, in 2003, so I don't know. I guess I would have been like 32 or something like that. Thirty-four, thirty-six, something...I don't know. Yeah, my mom was a diabetic. And she was suffering from a lot of ailments due to being a diabetic. And the bottom line was she needed a kidney. And I went through all the test and everything, to give her a kidney. And I'm terrified of needles, okay? And I went through all the blood work, and the die that they shot up in me, and, you know, the poking and the prodding, and...you know, and...and everything was cool. They said I was a perfect match, and that it...they was scheduling...actually scheduling the operation. And within the time limit that they had, from "A" to "B", "B" being the actual operation, she went into some type of coma, or they put her into a coma to help her. So...you know how they put people in a coma to keep...And I still don't...I...I...to...to this day I...sister, look, they killed my mom. That's the way I see it. Because when she came back around, after all that coma mess and two or three blood transfusions, now all of sudden I can't give her no kidney because we don't match no more. So, in my mind they did it on purpose. And I think they killed her, used her as a guinea pig. You know that's the way I see it. So...because wasn't nothing wrong with her. She went in for a routine check. And they got to talking about potassium levels,

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or ammonia levels, or something, one of them things that'll kill you. You know, and the next thing I know she's in a coma. And they're talking about we don't know if she's going to make it, and we don't want to wake her up because of the stress, and this, that, and the other. And I'm talking about we're supposed to be having a trans—you know what I'm saying, a transplant operation. And they're like, "Ms. Brown, I don't know if that's going to happen." "And what the hell do you mean you don't know if that's going to happen? This is my mom. You just told me you're going..." Oh, so I was, yeah, very crazy. Very crazy. And she died about a year and a half, two years later. So I wasn't trying to. I wasn't trying to talk to nobody. And I started getting high and getting to...oh, just...you know, it's like you know.

My grandmother had just died and I just knew. It's like, okay, my grandmother dead...died. My mom ain't holding on no more. I could feel it. I could feel it. And it's...So...and that's just what she did too. She died three months later after my grandma. Yep. Um, my grandma had gotten a stupid flu shot, and got sick, and never got well. I told her. I told all them people. I don't mess with that stuff. I really...I'm...I'm [chuckles]...people think I'm paranoid. I might be paranoid but I have never gotten a flu shot, thank you Jesus, and I've never had the flu. Okay? My kids...well, my son, he in the Navy; he got to do it. But, for the most part, they never had a flu shot and they never got the flu. And then no sooner than my grandma...I mean, she started doing it like three years before she actually got sick and died. Up...up until the end she was never doing it, and she was fine. See what I'm saying? So, I'm thinking these people are doing stuff to...they don't have no business, all for the sake of science. So you're not going to put

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nothing up in me that I don't know what it is. And even you can tell me what it is and I ain't never had it...but you're talking about building up my immune system. My body's designed to fight it off anyway. I don't need your help. You know, and I'm not going to take that, so...I don't do it.

No my mom's death wasn't the first loss I've experienced in my life? My dad died when my daughter was born. And then my sister died like when my daughter was 11. And that was my older sister. She was 10 years my senior, almost exactly. And then, I've had like pets die. And like I said, my grandfather died. My great-grandma died first. She was the first in...on the matriarch side. My great-granny died and she was like ninety...92. And then my grandfather had started getting sick before that. He had diabetes. And then he passed away. It was just, you know, a bunch of stuff going on. And then my dad died in '90, after my grandfather. Oh, shucks, and my sister died like 11 years later. Then my grandma died [chuckles]. And then my mom died. And then my aunt died. But I didn't know my aunt died because I was out on the street, doing what I was doing. And I just happened to see Steven one day, which is his mom. And, you know, I was asking him, "Well, how is your mom?" He said, "My mom's dead." And I looked at him, I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "My mom died." I said, "When?" He told me when and what had happened, and I just cried. I felt so bad because had I'd a been keeping in touch, I would have known that. And I didn't know. So he had to go through it all again to tell me. You know, so I felt bad. You know, I was like, "Damn. You know, I'm sorry, dude," you know. But out of all them sisters, there's seven girls. Two of them, they're...they're gone. So there's five left. And we're all...they try to

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be like mother-type, auntie-type. You know, I think they still think I'm little. And it's like, I've got four grown kids and two grandkids. I...I'm not little no more. You know, so, we...we're getting to where we are getting in an adult relationship. And it's taken some time. And they get overbearing. And when they do I just retreat. You know, I ain't been to church in two months and they're trying to figure out why and how to get me there. My uncle tried guilt. That doesn't work [chuckles]. You're not going to guilt me into coming to church on...you know, I love you, but no. You know so they know. I think they're worried I might go back out there but I'm...I have no intentions of going back out there. If I go back out there this time I'll die. And I know this. So, I ain't ready to die.

Cultural Pride

Wow. Okay. Do you feel connected or a sense of pride with the African American communities at all or Ooh, that's a double-edged sword. I'm proud of my people and my heritage and, you know, our ancestors, and the struggles, and the legacy that they left us, and all that there. But then when I look at the fact that there's no unity in...within Black Americans...I mean, the...the Muslims, the Mexicans, Somalians, I mean, all of them, the Jews, the Asians, they all came over here, and they banded together, and they have made something of themselves (sic) and their children, with the stores, and the restaurants, and the clothing, and all that. You know, and they're slowly but surely taking over little ghettos that we used to dominate. And all I can really see of our people is, you know, somebody shot my friend's 18-year-old son outside of Burger King while we was both in (? 48:59). And that's...you know, they had the chaplain come to get her, to take her back

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to the chapel, to tell her that her son is dead. And I'm like, "Nah, you know, this is...no.

No. No. See."

Neighborhood

I would describe the neighborhood that I raised my children in as a ghetto. That's it in a nutshell, you know, the ghetto.

Missed Educational Opportunity

Yeah. I tell people that. You know, they're like, "Well, what did you... You dropped out?" "Well, yeah, actually I did, you know, from the "A" honor roll three weeks before graduation, with three scholarships. I just said, 'I ain't doing it.'" I was mad. Much like I tell my daughter, I cut off my nose spite my face. I wasn't keeping with my credits. You know, and then the ninth and tenth grade I was barely at school, you know, and...and just...I didn't have the credits to be a senior. You know, on the "A" honor roll, they was all right with that. But I wasn't...you know, so I got pissed off and told them a bunch of vulgar type things and left [chuckles].

And my mom was like, "Diane, you've got three scholarships. You just need to go back." And even the guy was saying, "All you've got to do is do one summer, and you can graduate next year." And I'm like, "Nah, I want to go...I want to do it now." I said, "I want to walk with my class." He... "No, you can't do that." "Well, can I just sit...you know, when they're sitting in the front can I..." "No, you can't do that either." I said, "Well, what can I do?" He said, "You can go to school over the summer, and get your credits, and graduate next year." And I told him what he can do with his credits. And I quit. So my mom wasn't happy about that. I had scholarships to - Morehouse,

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Tuskegee, and Spelman, I think. Four...four years, full...full scholarships. But then I went and had my kids. See, I look at stuff like that and the choices that I made. And I...I'm a firm believer in destiny. It...it was to be. You know what I'm saying? I was going...I'm still going to end up where I'm supposed to be, regardless. That...that was where I was supposed to be at the time, I imagine. So...Yep. That's what I tell my kids. You know, you can do what you want to do. You've got...you've got a choice. You sure do. But if you're supposed to go to Bloomington and you're...you know, you're going to take 35W as opposed to 62, you're still going to wind up in Bloomington when you get done. You know [chuckles] what I'm saying? So you...you know, do what you've got to do. You're still going to wind up where you're supposed to be at. So...yeah.

[Chuckles]. It's strange. It works. I was going to write a book. I actually started a book. And then someone would steal it. This is when I was out there in the street though. It's...you know, I just got a...“I'm going to write a book.” So I get this notebook [chuckles]. And I just started writing down from... “Well, remember...,” and this and that, “And I was born in...,” blah...You know, and I just started doing the whole thing. And I'd go somewhere and set my bag down and not go back and get it for three or four days. And when I went...you know, when I would go back, either it would have been rifled through or just be gone altogether. So, I mean, I did that like six different times before I said never mind, let me just stop 'til I get somewhere settled for real. My cousin said I need to get a tape recorder, and then give it to somebody to put it to paper. So, I'm...I'm thinking about it. I ain't got nothing else to do. [Chuckles].

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Education and Social Class

I didn't have that paper. Right, because I can do all kind of stuff. You know, I cook my butt off. I can drive. I do hair. I can sew. I can do art. You know, I can do just about anything I set my mind to. It's just having something to show them people, to say that, okay, she's been trained in this, and this is what it do. You know, it's...it's crazy. It's like, well, why can't you just see that I'm qualified and give me a job? No, it don't work that way. Which is another reason why I stressed for my kids to go to school, and make sure they got that education, and get them papers. You know, you can always fall back on them papers if nothing else. [Chuckles]. Um, I was a...I skipped...I'm a gifted child. I was skipped up two grades. And I don't know, I just...English is my favorite subject. And I read all the time. My daddy...my daddy taught me how to read when I was four years old and I've been reading ever since. You know, I love books. And I read just anything [chuckles]. I do. And my...my daughter says...because I...I mean, I spend my last money on books. Which is good to me because I used to spend my last money on dope [laughter]. You know, and now I spend my last money on books.

And it's very...it's very comforting, you know. Because they ain't going to go up in smoke. They'll be there. And I love it. But I don't know, I guess...I guess I just...I'm just...I just pick stuff up, you know, I listen. And I know the correct grammar and all that. I...because that...that was a joke between me and my mom. It's like we could talk ghetto as...look at, get down and dirty with the best of them, but put us in front of the White people when my mom was singing or whatever, and we turned into them good upper Black niggers, you know, them northern Blacks. Yeah, our language turned up. It

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changed up quick. You know, and I...I knew exactly how to act, and how to speak, and everything. You know, so it's not like I don't know. And when I listen to my kids talk, you know, by them growing up in these Milwaukee schools and that, and going to school with these little White children, and they speak proper English, correct English, and I love it. You know, they used to get teased when they was little by little, they used to come here from Chicago or whatever. I said, "Man, don't pay them no attention," I said, "Because they don't speak, you know, correct English. They're not grammatically corr— Look, keep talking the way you talk because that's what it's about." That's what it's about. So you won't sound like no ignorant country bumpkin. You know, and I'm...I shouldn't say that because some of our southern brothers are very intelligent also. You know, I...I do like southern brothers. I've got kids by southern brothers so [laughter], it...it ain't that I don't like the South. You know it's just that...don't be talking about my kids because they know how to speak correctly. Leave them babies alone.

What Helping Professionals Should Know

Okay. All right. Now I've got the last five questions here. If I could communicate anything to helping professionals about my experiences as a parent, I would] want them to know to how to communicate. Honesty and a whole lot of humble pie. And by all means, choose your battles. Them kids...you know, it's a fact that all children, myself included, we turn into aliens between. I'm going to say 10 to 18. You know, it's like, "Who and the hell are you? Where's my baby and...and...and where did you come from?" You know, I used to do that too because...I mean, they...they're just tripping. It's like, "Well, who's child are you anyway? And I've got a better question. Do you know who I

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am?” They’re like, “Yes, ma’am. You’re mom.” “Well, how long have you known me?” “All my life.” “Well, act like it [laughter].” You know, “What is you do—what’s wrong with you? I’m saying, why would you do that if you know it’s going to piss me off? Why would you do that?,” you know. I mean, so, I talk...talk to the babies.

Be...be very, uh, you know, specific, honest, and always admitting when you’re wrong, and ask for forgiveness with them kids. That’s very important because kids tend to think that parents can do no wrong. And that’s bullshit. That’s...that’s the biggest load of crap that a parent has told a child. “Do as I say and not as I do.” I don’t play that one. No, I don’t play that one. If I can do it, you can do it too. But you better know what you’re doing. See, because I’m a little older and a little wiser. You know. You don’t...you may not want to follow me. So I let them know, “You may not want to follow me.” [Chuckles] You might not like the outcome. “Be careful. Make sure you’re going to be all right with the consequences before you go to choosing what I do.”

What Community Should Know about Parenting

You know, it doesn’t have to be as hard as they make it for single parents, especially single women of color. You know, there’s a lot of barriers out there that prevents us from...from just simply providing healthy food and a safe place for our kids to grow up in. I mean, a lot of them babies, especially over a lot of them little young girls, you know, they...they done been abandoned by their mom for whatever reason. She ain’t even got to be a drug addict. It could be that she’s working two jobs to make sure that they...you know, her kids got a roof. So they’re basically left to raise themselves in the ghetto, which, you know, it don’t have to be like that. You know, we used to have the

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way back in the day. You know, they took that from us, turned it into a police station of all the damn things. I mean, you know, and then Hospitality House. And my understanding, they trying to shut Gary...Jerry Gambles down too. And it's like, "Well, what do you expect these kids to do? Where do you expect them to go, to hang out, that's safe, that is...you know, ain't got no drugs, and there's people there that's going to mentor them to do the right thing, you know? And [sighs], It was called the Way. It was on Plymouth, where...you know where the police station is on Plymouth and Morgan? That building...well, that new building was the new Way when they tore the old one down and they rebuilt it. And then a year later it was the police station. So, I mean, we didn't even get to enjoy it. It was a community center. It's where all of us went to, and hang out, and go down the basement and shoot pool, play pinball, darts, whatever, cards, just hang out. There was staff there that helped us. They mentored us, you know. And upstairs there was like computers, you know. And when the computers started getting real popular they had got a hold of a couple computers. So, you know, they...I mean, it was a...it was a community center. And it was...because it was in North Milwaukee, it basically catered to Black children. You see? And my dad...man, the Way is so old that my dad went there when he was a kid. You see what I'm saying? That's how long it had been in the community. It was one of the few buildings that didn't get burned down in the riots. It was the Elks, the Way, and Zion's, uh...uh, Funeral Home, and King's Center, and Dr. Johnson's office. Other than that, all of Plymouth Avenue got burnt down. And all...of Olson Highway burned down except for TCOIC, the library, and, uh, Zion Church. You see what I'm saying? It was...but everything else got burned down,

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including my grandma's restaurant, my daddy's mom. You know, so it's like we ain't got nothing, you know, to begin with. You...you know, you White folks is still mad about the riots, if you ask me, so that's why you won't give us nothing. They need to make it easier for these kids, raising these kids. You know, these little girls don't know what they're doing. And these little boys ain't trying to help them. When I see these little young cats and they've got their kids with them, I...I tell them loudly out my mouth, "I command you, young man, for doing what a daddy's supposed to do." I said, "I don't care if you ain't got nary a quarter in your pocket. The fact that you've got that baby with you is good enough for me." So....it's just...it's just...it's...yeah, it's sad the way life is now.

Education About Sexual Abuse Prevention

Hm, places like this, is the best way to educate people in my community about the prevention of sexual mistreatment. Breaking Free, you know, all this...the...like on...on the 14th and the 13th we'll be at the capitol, doing a little protest, march kind of thing. I...I think that helps. Um, there needs to be more...more...I think there need to be more, uh, free publicity on TV's or whatever. Camel J's good but what...you know, when...every now and then they'll...they'll throw something out there for the kids. But that's only if you listen to Camel J, when you get that information. I mean, word of mouth is probably the best thing that there...that...you know, they're ever going to be. And I tell mine. I've been telling mine since they knew what sex was, and been giving them condoms before they were...I mean, they were virgins and I was handing out condoms. I still give my kids condoms to this day. You know, I...because I ain't using them [chuckles]. Give them to somebody you know. So I give them to my kids, especially my sons. It's like I explain to

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them...you know, word of mouth. I'm going to say it again. Because I had told my daughter. And I put a condom over my whole hand, up to my elbow one time, to prove to her that they cannot tell you they don't fit. "They they will fit, sister..."

"...you understand me? And always have your own." And she was like, "Yes, ma'am," you know. And then my boys, I was like, "You see this?" And they was like, "Yes, ma'am." I said, "Don't trust these little hoochies. I said, "I'm going to tell you about little girls, see, because I used to be one." I said, "They will poke holes in your condom, especially if they want your...your baby." I said, "So you make sure you've got your own. And if you've got to use two, use two." And all that sexy stuff, "Well, let me put it on you." "No, uh-uh. Put your own on. Don't...don't be...and the same go for that girl." I mean, I was breaking it down to both of them. And he talking about he going put it on, he might be poking a hole and... "No, uh-uh, you do it." "Well, why should she do it if we can't let our girl do..." I said, "Because this is my daughter," you understand me. "This is my daughter." I said, "I'm telling her for her safety. And I'm telling you for your safety." I don't know what somebody else is telling their kids.

You see what I'm saying? You know, they want to know why she can do it but then they can't let their girl do it. And I broke it down because that's my daughter. So whatever you get through, you know, I'm very...I'm very specific. I'm very literal, "Put two of them bad boys on [chuckles]. If you need to wear two, son, wear two. If a little girl smelling like fish but you've just got to have it, you better put two on or you'll come home with something that you didn't leave here with [chuckles] you know. And so, I mean, I just...I just told them. I told them. They know that I used to sell my...my body.

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They know. They've seen a few of my...you know, there's few of the tricks. You know you're either leaving or coming. You know, I...I really try not to do that one. But n—you know, and have them around when that was going on, you know, and make sure that they was either at school or if I was...you know, during the day, or they was asleep, or I could go to the guy's house or something. I mean, I...I...I really...I really frown on that, you know, have them exposed to that, even though they knew. It...you know, you just don't put it in their face. It's a respect thing, you know. They can know but, you know, they ain't got to see it. What do I think is the best way to educate people to stop, or men to stop harming women and children? It ain't going to happen. [Chuckles] They've been doing this since the beginning of time. It's not going to happen, sister, I'm sorry to say. You feel me? So...I mean, you know, I...I would love...in a perfect world, yeah. But as long as there's men out there and...and...that are, you know, attracted to, you know, a certain type of women's...and...and young boys too. And as long as young boys and young girls are being, you know, oppressed, and...and terrorized, and trying to survive, there will always be prostitution. You know, always.

There's going to be somebody to capitalize on that...on that [chuckles] somewhere. You know, we could take a hint from our brethren across the sea and just have a certain district where, you know, that's what takes place over here, right here, but no further than here. You know, and as long as you ain't murdering nobody or beating a girl half to death, and whatever you do in this little district is legal. But you come up out of it, doing it, then we've got to arrest you. Now, see, I think that places like that would help. But Americans are so crazy, you know, it would probably backfire. You know,

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because, I mean, like our brothers over the seas, even up in Canada, they have a different way. I want to say they're more calmer. They're like wiser, like...like...like white bulls and elephants. And we're like the cats and...you know, and we're just all hyper and strung out. But yeah, I don't think it's ever going to stop. I really don't. You know, she...she...when they did...when she did that over there, she knew what she was doing. And the crime rate and all that, it didn't go away but it dropped down significantly, you know, when she made it that it was okay right here to do this. You know, Vancouver, you know...yeah, they...they know what they're doing. You know, uh, what is it, Colorado, that got it where you can grow weed legally, now, as long as it's for medicinal purposes or something to that effect. You've got to pay a certain amount of money. And then, see, they need to do that across the whole country, in my opinion, because they're not going to stop the drugs and they're not going to stop...stop prostitution. So you should make it where they could be taxed, or you can watch it, or something, you know, or you're going to keep having these little girls found in ditches. You're going to keep having AIDS, and you're going to keep on having unplanned pregnancies, and that's just the way it's going to be. So...

Again, talking, communication. I mean, watch your children better. You know, be careful who you let them be around. But when family members are capable of...of such perversion, I mean, how can you...you know, I mean, unless you're going to lock your children away until their 18 years old, you really can't protect them all the time. I had...see, and that was one of my things I really had a problem with, you know, not

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knowing that I'm...couldn't protect my babies all the time. They go to school. Anything can happen between the house and the school, if they made it to the school, you see.

So, I don't know what to tell parents about that. You know, talk to your kids. Ask them.

Pay attention to the signs because there are signs. They do act different, unless they were exceptional like me. See, because my mom, I'm telling you, she had no clue.

And I just did like any...like I always did. I...I...I didn't switch...I really did not switch up, that I can see. And I'm...you know, I'm pretty honest about my life. I...I didn't switch up.

I still did what I was doing. The only thing that changed with me is I started getting high more. See, and I don't know if that was because he was molesting me or because he was letting me get high. See. See, so, you know, that's really hard to answer that one.

Case Study # 20 – Audre

Audre, a 44-yearold step-mother of three children ages 28, 26, and 24-years old, was sexually molested by her stepfather and his three sons when she was between the ages of nine and twelve.

Sexual Molestation History

I disliked being sexually molested and thinking that it was my fault. Um-hum. It happened when I was nine years old, from the age of nine 'til twelve. Never forget it. I'm seeing a psychiatrist now so...it's a touchy area. I was molested by my stepfather and his three sons. He's dead now. I just let it happen, and didn't say anything because he threatened to kill my mom. Said he'd hurt my mom real bad. Oh, his sons was much older than me. Yeah, they was teenage boys. Yeah, I think he knew what they were doing. I think he did them like that. I don't know, that's what the prognosis turned out to

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be, that it happened to them. So it happened to me. I don't know. I just know he used to do it in the middle of the night, okay, come in my bedroom, and pull my panties down. And I just lay there and pretend like I'm asleep. And then they used to do it like...they didn't all do it at one time; they took turns. And when my mom and them would go to the grocery store, or go out, and my mom leave me at home you know, they would do it then. It stopped because my mom, um...one day we had came home from, um, church. And, um, we was all in the den watching TV. And my...one of my broth—stepbrothers was in the bedroom, doing something. And he called me in there, then told me, come and get my baby doll out his room. I'll never forget it; he said, "Come and get your ba—baby doll out of my room." And then I went in there to get my baby doll. And he laid me on the bed and s—in the bright daylight, now, while my momma cooking dinner. And my mom's a creeper, right? So, you don't hear her coming. And, um, he pulled my panties down and started doing it to me. And my mom tiptoed back there, opened the door up. And once she opened the door up she started screaming. And he pushed me on the side of the bed. And she was screaming, and hollering, and crying. Then she grabbed me and my brother, my oldest brother, and took us out the house. We...I remember standing inside them glass phone booths that they used to have. And it was raining. My grandmother came and got us. We never went back to the house. My mom never took us back to the house. Um-hum, that's my sister's father that did that. Yeah. Me and my brother got the same daddy. Then my sister that's her dad did that to me. Yeah.

I can't remember her saying anything else about it to me. Well, one thing I remember, one thing was he let me watch...he got in a fight with a guy in the middle of

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the street. And he beat that man. He...blood was flowing everywhere. And he let me see that. "This will happen to...this will happen to your mother." Yep, that's what he said. Yeah. And he would buy me baby dolls, big wheels. The next day after he do it, he always buy me a gift. Whatever I wanted. I used to have questions about why he did that to me. But...sometimes I still do. And then sometime I...a lot of times I just don't want to think about it because it puts me in a frame of mind...and it puts me in a depressed stage. And it puts me in a mood that I don't want to be in, you know.

Sexual Molestation Treatment

I talked to the doctors, the psychiatrist about it When I was about 19 or 20 because I needed to get it out. I just didn't feel like living. You know. Um-hum. So I went to a psychiatrist. It helped a little bit. I stopped going because I got addicted to drugs. I started using drugs when I was about 22. That was when I met Kevin. Um-hum, my husband. Yes, Lord. Hm!

Coping and Meaning Making

I don't know. Um, the hardest part was like...I think was, ah, just not being able to tell my mother and thinking that, I mean, this is what's supposed to happen. Yeah, that this is part of growing up. Didn't nothing good come out of it.

Effects of Sexual Molestation

First of all, by them doing that to me, ah, I didn't start a period 'til I was 18. And I was sterile. I couldn't have...and they damaged me. I was not able to have any kids due to me being sexually abused. And so, I, ah, took that in life, parent my step kids and parent my grandbabies to the fullest. You know. But I'm kind of like regretting that that

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happened. Well, I have always regretted that it happened, but now that I've got this man in my life, you know, he has...he has one child, six years old. And sometimes I just want to have his...his boy. I wish I can have a...a child by him, you know. And, um, that can't happen. And I told him the reason and the consequences before we got deep into this relationship. And he said we can adopt. This...but I don't believe that. I believe he want his own. You know, so I don't know how long I can stick this out. You know, if we can adopt, then maybe four or five years down the line, um, we can start on adoption procedures. But I think he want his own. He got one girl. He got a little girl that's six years old in Ohio. He said that's enough. But I don't believe it for some reason. Maybe I just should. Yeah. Yeah [chuckles]. It don't sound truthful. I mean, I don't believe it. And that's probably just my beliefs, but we've never talked about it since then. We're not ready for it. I know that. But, um, I just don't believe it. You know, I think he just said them things at the beginning of the relationship to, ah, make me feel at ease. So...I think he want a baby boy, you know.

Relationship with Children

With my kids? Well, the baby girl, I'm really, really close to her. It's nothing that...that she doesn't tell me that she know I will I understand. And she knows that, ah, she can talk to me and she can trust me. Now, the...the 28 year old girl, she's more like to herself. Quiet, to herself. Um, ended up in penitentiary. She's in penitentiary now. No...no, she didn't share what was going on with her. Well, she was having a baby drama, baby father drama, ah, with the baby father, other girlfriend, and stabbed a girl, and you know, and, um, they found her guilty, sent her to penitentiary. It'll be a year next

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month that she been there. She gets out next month. They only gave her a year. Um-hum.

So...and then the...my stepson, ah...I mean...yeah, my stepson, he's a...oh, my God, he's,

um, really, really off the hook. He...he's just like his dad. He's...he's...he does things the law does not require. And ain't no stopping it, to him or his dad. He's in the streets.

He's...selling drugs. He um, you know, messing around with this girl, that girl. Smoking weed, drinking, strip clubs, might come home, might not come home.

Influences on Parenting

Because I hadn't had any kids. I couldn't have any kids And so, I thought it was a blessing and a gift. And I still do believe that, that my husband was able to give me a family that he already had. So, my baby girl, she looks up to me to the fullest, you know. Um, and then my three grandbabies by her...okay, I actually held her leg up on the first grandbaby, and watched Rolanda be born. Pushed out of her. So, that was really special to me. So I thought she was mine. Rolanda's mine. Then they came home with me after they had...after she had the baby, stayed with me. So, Rolanda...Rolanda is...is, ah, the oldest. And...and, um...um, she never let me have to, uh...I discipline them the way that I need to. The...the...my baby girl never said anything. I've never put my hands on them, never. That's not my responsibility. I don't care. You know, so...and then, as she kept on having them, um, I...I had to be an example. So, I will pick them up on Sunday mornings. The grandbaby. The ki—they go...they're would—they...they wasn't trying to get in church. So I pick up the grandbabies and we would all go to church and they go to kids' church and I go to adult church. And they will call me the day before, "Mimi, you come and get us?" "Yep, Mimi be there in the morning, pick you up for church." Take them

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out, McDonald's or somewhere after church, or just home with me for a couple hours or whatever, you know. Yeah, so...

Rewards and Challenges of Parenting

Kerry was thirteen or fourteen when I started parenting her. They were some years. Um, just knowing that they look up to me. Um-hum. They respect me. The most challenging part of being a parent is um, trying to get them not to do the wrong thing. Yes. It's really hard. So, they ain't trying to hear that. So they got to bump their own head. Their father um, he's back in jail. He's fittin' to go to penitentiary, so, he's never been a father figure. So I tried to...to at least be a mother figure, you know. The mom, the real mom, and the, um...the real mom and the kids, they smoke weed together. I wouldn't allow that. You don't smoke weed with your child. You don't condone none of that with your child. So...my mother didn't. So, I don't believe in that. Um, just being able to see them grow up and give me some grandbabies that respects me, and then looks up and call me Mimi, you know, I'm proud of that. Mimi doesn't have a specific meaning. I just wanted them to call me, ah, something that they could...that's close to mommy besides mommy. I'm a...I'm not mommy; I'm Mimi. Yeah. Next to mommy. So a typical day look like for me as a parent um, it lookeded (sic.), ah, pleasant. Yeah, a lot of days lookeded (sic.) pleasant. The smiles made it pleasant. Me being able to feed them you know, me giving them a bath. Um-hum. Crawling up in bed with me is pleasant.

Expectations of Children

I...I just had...I wanted at least one of them to get some education. That didn't happen though. They all dropped out but Kendra didn't. The oldest didn't. Ah, she got

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a...she graduated. But the other two, I just wanted them to really get a diploma, you know, at least. So they didn't though. I expected them to respect me, you know, "Yes, ma'am, no, ma'am" um, no cussing around me, you know, regularly cussing. I can understand if you're pissed off and you cuss, you know. Ah, no smoking around me, not weed or none of that. So...um-hum. I'd take them out to let them know I approved of things that they did. I'd reward them with a gift. Yep, take them out to eat. And when I disapproved of what they did, I'd tell them that was wrong. "You know that was wrong. You was taught better than that." Um, that's...that's it, I'd just tell them. I never whupped them. Never spanked them, never whupped them. It wasn't my responsibility. Their real mom or their dad was responsible for that. So they wasn't doing nothing about it but I'll try to like tell them what's right and what's wrong. But, you know...um-hum. Um, I...I think they knew by the way that I responded to them that I cared about them. And, you know, they had to be. I'm not really sure about that. They knew though.

Yes. They knew. And I would tell them that I love them.

Hopes for Children

Um, it was hurtful. to be separated from them. It still is. Um, I miss them. You know, I miss them a whole lot. If I had three wishes for them 20 years from now I would want them to get a education, Um have a healthy relationship with whomever they get with. And some faith. I think they would want a good job, ah, better housing. And some peace. What I would hope they learned from me is not to get on drugs. It's not too late to go get their education. Um, stop having babies. Um...make a better life for themselves and not depending on no man.

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Parental Strengths and Limitations

My strengths were...I guess just, um, one of my strengths was just keeping it honest with them and just trying to do the next best thing for them, especially the grandbabies. I think it was kind of too late for the...for the kids. But the grandbabies, I knew it wasn't too late for the grandbabies, but the kids, they was already into doing what they wanted to do when I met them. And, you know, the grandbabies...I just didn't want them to, um, grow up like that. You know, I wanted them to know church. And they do due to me, they do. Um-hum. My mom is the grandbabies life. They call her grandma. No, I don't have any limitations as a parent. Other people would describe me as a parent, um, as a good person. They know it. I have already heard it.

Personal Strengths and Challenges

Um, God gives me strength. My parents...my mom gives me strength. Um, just knowing that it wasn't my fault gives me strength. I don't know what limits me. Thinking about the experience sometimes drains me. Yeah, thinking about the experience. Um, listening to other women that has experienced something s—you know, something like mine. Um, maybe knowing that it's happening to someone else, and they're not a—able to speak up right now. That bothers me. Yep, that's it.

Family Traditions

We celebrated holidays when I was growing up. Christmas. Thanksgiving. Fourth of July. Easter dinner. Memorial barbeque. Um, all of them except St. Patrick's Day. There certain relationships and traditions in my family that I respect the most like Thanksgiving

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because the whole family be together, and my mom cooked the best dressing in the whole world. And, um like this past Thanksgiving I wasn't there but I cried like a baby and then they had me on speakerphone when the whole family got there, put me on speakerphone and I just talked to everybody, you know. I'll be there this Thanksgiving. I did go home Christmas, you know. Yep. Another tradition I respect is going to church. Every Sunday. Yep. I was in choir. I was a usher. I was a...you name it. I tried all the positions in the church.

Supportive Kin

I have one brother, one sister. I'm closes to um, my brother. He's older. Um-um. I just wanted to be like him. [Chuckles]. He was a basketball player in this school. And he, ah...a lot of colleges...well, a couple colleges wanted him. And he dropped out his senior year. That devastated the family. Yep. And, um, my father was a...a...a famous basketball player. And my daddy...then my brother followed him. And I followed my brother. I was a...I got trophies for most valuable players in high school, and, ah, you know, did the same...just follow him, you know. Dropped out too. [Laughs]. Yep. Dropped out too. Um-hum, because he did. That's all I can remember, I was following him. Yep. So he's a big influence in my life. Yeah. Still is. I love him.

Socioeconomic Support

Um-hum. Okay. Now I'm going to shift into some of the questions that have to do with...they're still about family members but they're about supports and things like that. So like are there ways in which your family members support each other, either financially, emotionally, or in terms of...like with tangible goods? Okay. Um,

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emotionally, my mom is the person that, ah, you can talk to sort out whatever problem that you've got. Well, shoot, financially, my mom is the one that'll help you pay the next bill [chuckles]. Keeping it real you know. Ah, what else? Ah, that's about it. [Short pause].

I would describe my...my mom's house as home. Yeah, that's home. She tried to make me see the difference in home while I was up here because, uh...was it Easter? (? 36:21 I said...I called,) "Wish I was at home having dinner with ya'll," and blah, blah, blah. She said, "Baby, home is where you lay your head at and where you make your bed at. And...and you've got to get to know the difference between home." And so, ever since then...well, even before then I appreciated the little apartment but, ah, I really appreciate it now you know, that I want to just make it...I...like I said, I...I don't have anything. I've stepped out on faith up here. I've got the little couch from St. Vincent. I got the bed from another donation place. And it's like I've got a queen size mattress and a full-size...ah, I mean, a queen-sized box spring, full-sized mattress. But God going provide, you know. I just want to make it look homey and I just...I don't know. So, it'll happen. And I...I will appreciate it, you know. You know, at least I'll be able...they had me on a month to month lease. The first person that I moved...the...the white lady who's house I moved, in St. Louis Park, ah, had to have a background check on everybody that moves into the suburbs, she said. That's what I said, "Wow," you know. And then a week after she gave me eviction notice, you know. And then, I was like, "I don't want to move to another place." And I moved over here. They put me on a month-to-month lease, but day by day I'm thinking, "When I come home, I'm going to have eviction notice on the door. What's

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going to happen?” And then when me and Eddie went inside the lease Friday, you know what? They upped it to a year-to-year lease. Wasn't that beautiful? That's God. Well, now all I can think about was, “Wow, I can have a Christmas tree this year.” “I ain't got to worry about if I'm going to be put out this month, that month. I ain't going nowhere,” because I mind my business. Um-hum. Yeah. Yeah. I ain't going nowhere but right here.

Relationship with Husband

Yeah. I've been with their dad, ah...we've been married...ah, it'll be 12 years July 24th. But we've been together 22 years, since I was a teenager. But I had to let him go. I had to let him go. That's the reason I'm up here. He's a drug dealer. I couldn't stay clean. I couldn't stay clean around my husband. And, um, just things he was doing when I was clean, trying to stay clean, you know, the hanging out at the strip clubs, not one or two nights a week but every night. And people coming over to buy dope and...I'm going to work and I'm going to church, and then I've got the dope dealer in the house, and then I've found him downstairs cooking up pounds, and pounds, and pounds of dope, and...Oh, it was ridiculous.

I decided to leave because I just couldn't take no more, you know. I could not take anymore relapses. I could not take anymore of, you know, his shit when he...he went to jail. And, ah, actually, what really made me leave was when he went to jail...they gave him...only gave him 90...90 days for something petty. They didn't catch the big stuff and, ah, they gave him 90 days for it. And, um, three guys came in our...in our house, that he knew, knocked on the door. I knew that they knew him and I opened the door up immediately. And, um, they asked me where my husband... “Where Kevin at?” I

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said...before I can get it out, two men came from behind him with pistols, put one in my head and one in my mouth, and guide me in the kitchen floor, had me on the ground, and robbed...took [smacks hands together], you know, the money, the, ah, drugs, the...I mean, the camcorders and...that scared the...that scared me. I said it's time to go. I...in...in Ohio you only hear good things about this state, besides the weather. They don't tell you that the weather is ridiculous. So, I said, "Well, I'm going to try it." I said, "I'm going for it." The next week I was on the Greyhound.

Yeah. And I...I'm...the marriage is over. I done tried and tried. And my husband, at the end, at...the last thing, my ex-husband, he gave me was *everything*, I mean, from...everything. I had two cars. I had, oh, my God, 42-inch, 52-inch flat screens in every room of the house. Every material thing that I possibly wanted, he gave to me. But that wa—I...I...I didn't want that. I just wanted him to spend some quality time with me. He couldn't do that. The streets had my husband so caught up. Oh, my God. And I knew it, and I felt it, and...and I knew it, you know. And I wouldn't let him go. So, I did now, honey. I'm free. And my momma told me, she said, "Until you, um, leave that...leave that nigga, 'til you leave Kevin alone, you will never be able to stay clean." And that was the honest God truth. Yep. Um-hum.

Steppin' Out on Faith - Drug Abuse Treatment

I came out on faith. I did. The friends that I did have up here, that was telling me, "Come on, come on," you know, "Get yourself together, get clean, get your...get clean again, get yourself together," ah, when I got here, they, ah, actually was using. And I was like, oh, my God, I'm all the way up here and don't have nowhere to go. Stepped out on

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faith, and one lady...one of my friends from Ohio, she got six years clean up here, heard that I was here, I got in contact with her. She let me stay with her for about a week and a half. And then I went to treatment and I ain't turned back. Have not...I've been here since November 2010. So I got up here and I got me, uh...um, some recovery up under my belt, still going. Ain't found it necessary to use at all. Ain't had no desire to use. Pray, go to church every Sunday. Now, I don't go to too many AA or NA meetings, but I do go to church every Sunday. I ain't going to miss it.

New Boyfriend

And, ah, actually ran into a few guys up here, you know. But I was like, "Okay, God, now I'm messing around with Dick, Tom, and Harry. I don't want to do this. That's not what I came up...please send me somebody that you want me to have." I'm going to be with somebody. You know, so, ain't no need to telling me I need to focus on myself and none of that because it's not happening. I've been like this all my life. I met me a really good gentleman, make it so bad, he's from Alton, Illinois. Never seen him. My mom's a pastor, ah, in Ohio, New Hope Baptist Church. His dad is a pastor in Springfield. That was amazing. He got here October the 14th. And I got here October the 19th. We met, ah, in December, like right after Christmas. Ain't that something? And he love God too. Uh-huh. We met in December and we...we, uh...we call our ann— anniversary date January 1st. So yes, really good sweet guy, open the door for me, shut the door for me, um, pull my chair out. A really calm guy, you know. Ain't fittin' do a whole lot of arguing, ain't hollering at all. Oh, a really calm guy. Make...just really makes me complete, you know. I'm okay with this bald head, six-foot tall man. I'm okay with it.

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I'm up here. A lot of people know I'm up here by myself but now that I'm with him, that, you know...so it's okay.

I describe him as a...oh, my God, a wonderful Black king. Yes. Breath...oh, his breath just smells good all the time, and pretty white teeth. We both stopped smoking. I got patch marks on me. I finished my last pack Sunday. I ain't had a cigarette in over 40-something days and he stopped too. So, he hasn't had one in about two weeks either. Yeah. I love him, boy. I love him. And if...first, I've got to get a divorce. My mom asked me Sunday, as a matter of fact. So, he's moving in with me on the 1st. We signed the lease Friday. And, ah, she said, "When are you going to go..." My mom [chuckles], she said, "Now when'd you say you're going to get a divorce [laughter]?" Right [laughter]. Right. But I said...I said, "Tomorrow [laughter]." This was Sunday. I said, "Tomorrow." She said, "Oh, okay, Okay." Um-hum. So I think I'd better jump on that. I know I've better jump on that, because she ain't going to let it end until it happens because it's only right, you know.

Relationship with Mom

I don't want to talk too much about her. She's just a beautiful person. And it makes me emotional because I miss her. I talk to her every day. Now, we're a hour behind from Ohio, so, she calls me at 4:30, or I let...I can just...the phone...up here it'll be 4:30, down there it'll be 5:30. She get off work at 5:00. So every day on her way home from work or going to the "Y", I can just feel her spirit. And when the phone ring I'll be like, "There go mom." You know, and it's a beautiful thing, just to see her name, "Mom's cell" pop up, you know? Every day I talk to my mother.

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One time, when I first met the good guy I'm with now, honey, all my focus went towards him for like the first two weeks. And, um, I got a call from my mom. And my best friend live in Augusta. My mom said, "What's going on with you? Why ain't you call me? Why ain't I heard from you?" "Well, mom, you heard from me." "I ain't heard from you, Stacy, in almost two weeks. What you..." so that she immediately thought I was up here getting high. I said, "Oh. Well, let me keep it real with you," and I did, told her about him. And usually she would be like, "Well, who is this nigga?," you know. And she a pastor, right but that's her way of cussing. "Well, who is this nigga you're messing with now?" She didn't have no problem with this one. She didn't ask me who he was. I didn't choose to talk about him until she was ready to talk about him. Up to this day she never met him. But she love him to death. Um-hum. Ain't that great? Um-hum.

[Chuckles]. Oh, yeah. She's a very important part of my life. She paying...we're going to Myrtle Beach. In July, we're going to Myrtle Beach. She paid our way both of us. Yeah, she paid our way. Taking a family vacation to Myrtle Beach for 10 days. Yep. Oh, yeah. And then he's from Bermuda, so, that makes it even nicer. I would describe my relationship with my mom, as loving, patient. Um, hopeful. believed and forgiving. I felt closes to my aunt growing up because she was around my age. There wasn't anyone that I didn't feel close to growing up. My step father came into my life when I was about eight.

Relationship with Friends

Okay. So let's talk a little bit more about that. You talked about how...and when you first got here...you know, and then having to move a couple of times. What do you

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think are some of the barriers that you've faced in trying to get established here and trying to...? Well, one of...a couple things I have already faced was I was trying to, um, have a couple friends, women friends that I can, ah, talk to, and be around, and, you know, just...just share some of...you know, from going through some feelings, with ah, my man, or anything, period, you know. And what I've come to have a problem with is that [sighs], ah, they're not to be trusted, females. He...I ain't never seen nothing like this before in my life, you know with the he-say-she...she...she-say, with the petty talk. When...when I say petty talk, um, like I had...I had a...I had...all together I had one, two, three, four friends, women friends that I consider associates and friends. One of them relapsed and decided they wanted to go use. And...well, no, two of them did. So, I couldn't join them. You know, ain't no way I can keep hanging out with you, and you are steady, stopping at the dope house, getting dope, or staying in a dope house while I'm in the car. And I...I...I couldn't...I had to let them go. So I did. And then another one of my friends, she, um...she just, you know, let me go, some he-say-she say that she heard and...That's not how friends do it, you know. And then I still got...I've got one friend here. That's the one that gave me your number, Trina. And she is a hot...she a hot mess too. You know, she...yeah, she a hot mess too, honey. I had to give her a certain space. Um-hum, she know it. Hang up on each other all the time but love each other like sisters. Yes, we do. So...I just told her this morning, she was the only one that last.I met her in treatment. Um-hum. Um-hum. Yep.

Neighborhood Safety

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All right. Okay. All right, how about neighborhoods that you've lived in, have you found the neighborhoods that you've lived in...do they feel comfortable, safe to you, in terms of ...The first one wasn't. It was nice. I'm going to shut this window a little bit. The neighborhood was out nice out in St. Louis Park. But, um...I mean, It was really nice. I mean, the living rooms in the apartment was nice. It doubled...the living room doubled this size out there, you know. And, ah, the only thing I didn't feel safe about was the landlord. Pat. She did not make me feel safe at all. She sent the police down there. Said that my boyfriend...now, the good boyfriend I've got now, she said...the...the sheriff knock on the door, and we look...ain't nobody ever knocked on my door. And so it's...like startled both of us. And I jump up and look out the peephole. He go back in the bedroom and put shorts on. And, um...um...um, two sheriffs came in there and said that this man look like somebody that ran to this apartment building. I said, "He the only one that look like him." And I said, "Officer, can I see that picture." Now this boy was 5'2", had no French braid. I said, "Officer. Mr. Officer, this don't look nothing like him. This man 5'2". That man's 6'1" and completely bald-head. He don't look nothing like him." He said, "Yes, he do. Sir, go get your ID." I felt...I...out there I didn't feel comfortable at all. At all. Out here I do. I feel really like at home, you know. And soon as I get me a little TV in here, and a stereo here, and another couch or something, some end tables in here, make it look more like home, I'll feel a lot better. Yeah. I like this neighborhood even better than the neighborhoods in Ohio. Yep. Um, part of it was, ah, the kids grew up in, um...in the projects. Um-hum. I don't consider this the projects.

Childhood and Lessons

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Mm...hmm. Um, I would describe my childhood as being...I don't even know how you describe it. Um-hum. I enjoyed, ah...let me see. I was on the drill...drill team. I went to camp. I enjoyed basketball. I enjoyed volleyball. Um-hum. That's about it. Um, my friends, our relationship was good. Like, you know, I pretty much put all of that, that happened to me, in the back of my head and never thought about it again you know, until something surfa—surfaced it as I got older, you know. Um, my family...um, I still enjoyed my family, had fun, played two-hand touch football with my brothers, or my...well, you know, my brother and his friends, um, still continued doing girly things, you know. Yep. When I was upset as a child, I would pout. Poke my lips out...like this. That's it. [Chuckles]. [Yawns] Oh, boy. My mom didn't respond to that. She didn't respond. She ignored me.

Is there any particular thing that I think I learned above all from my own childhood experiences? Um, yeah. Boy, I would have...I would have did a lot different. I would have done...got all of my education. I would have stayed away from my ex-husband. I would have...what else? I would have just not like...I don't know, I would have got me...well, I already said education, didn't I? I would have got me some, ah, spiritual life earlier, and stuck with it, not dip and dab. That's it.

Separations

There are no separations that stand out in my mind growing up. None at all. Besides now. Um-hum. Yep. That's the only separation, is right now. I never believed, honey, I'd be in another state...by myself. Phew. God is good. Um-hum.

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Losses

Oh, yeah, important people in my life have passed away. Oh, yes. My gr—both my grandmothers. But my main grandma...I thought my father's mother, Dona...I...I thought she was mean to me but my grandma, Marie, my mother's mother, oh, I miss her. I love her so much. That's my baby. Um-hum. Mmm, grandma Marie been dead about...ooh. I can't...I'm not even for su—it's been some years. Maybe eight, nine, ten years. Um-hum. Every Sunday, she was the best cook that you will ever...I mean, ev—well, to me, she is the best cook in the world. So every Sunday she would cook dinner for the whole family. So after church, we'd go to grandma's house. Our friends would go up to grandma's house. Um, and I'd get a...and she dranked (sic.) Windsor and Coke breakfast, lunch, and dinner and by the time we'd get there on Sunday, she feeling the juice. So I would always get out the car, shut the door, and holler from outside, "Grandma! Grandma! Grandma!" She will say, "Sta! Stop f'n calling my name!," cuss me out. "Well, I want to make sure you're in there and you're all right." "You knew I'm in here," cuss me out. She didn't care about cussing nobody out. *Um-um*, with her little small self. She'll cuss you out in a heartbeat. She told my husband one time...she called him and told him...and he felt every bit of it. I had left and went to the store, and when I came back he had this look on his face like somebody just died. I said, "What's wrong?" He said, "Your grandmother just called me and said she hate my guts. She's taken it to her grave. She hates what I had done to her grandbaby." She said, "She hate my guts, Audre." I said, "Whoa, Kevin." He said, "And she was not drinking." I said, "Ohhh..." and she did. She hated his guts. I'm...I'm her oldest, ah, grandbaby. My brother, then me.

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The girl, and I'm named after her. So yeah. Yep. Her name is Marie Ann. And my name is Audre Ann. Um-hum. Yep. I can imagine how he felt. Um-hum. She died of cancer.

What Helping Professionals Should Know

I would want them to know, um, how to comfort your child well enough that they will be honest with you and open to you, to share anything they need to share. Yeah, that's what I would do. If I could communicate anything to my community about my experiences as a parent, I would want them to know to love your kids unconditionally, no matter what. Yep, comfort your child. Um-hum.

I think is the best way to educate people in the community about the sexual mistreatment of children is to speak it, ah, being a speaker. Yeah, going to certain areas, certain schools, and speaking on it, certain rehabs, you know. Shoot, I don't know the best way to encourage people to stop harming women and children sexually. I don't think they will stop until something happens to them, 't— 'til something happens. Like they get busted, like...You know? Um-hum. Kids need to tell it. Yep. I don't think kids tell it because they were scared. After, um...after I was able to tell my mom I was comforted. And it still is. I'm comfortable telling her anything that's going on with me, today. Um-hum, because she believes me.

Case Study # 21 – Mahalia

Mahalia is 44-years-old with four children. Three girls ages 26, 19, and 11 and one boy 19-years old. She parented her children with her former husband and father of the children. Although she is separated from her husband, he still plays an active role in providing care for their children.

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Sexual Mistreatment and Disclosure

And then...I probably felt disappointed in me in some sense. When I ended up in a situation where my mom let a friend of hers, um, started babysitting me while they go and do something and I never did feel comfortable with that fellow. He was like fifteen, sixteen, somewhere around there. And first time was me was at church. I remember I had to use the bathroom really, really, really bad. And my grandfather couldn't find the keys. He lost the keys to the bathroom...well, not to the bathroom, to the doors of the church. So we're outside and you know you can only hold it for so long. And, um, I just remember that the boy kept telling me to pull my pants down, so he could take me to the bathroom, how it started on this. And I'm like, "I don't think so." And I would say, "I'd rather pee on myself than do that one." I just didn't feel comfortable. And I remember him pulling them down anyway. And I remember him doing something to me. I don't remember exactly what he did. And...and I remember the pain and then feeling so ashamed, and embarrassed, and all that stuff. I had already peed on myself, but then him still trying to pull my pants off of me I didn't understand the reasoning for that. And then I remember, um...I was probably three, four years old because I can remember my clothes that I had on vividly. I'm...I've got a very strong memory from when I was real little. It's weird. to...to be able to still see those things. And then I used to think it was a dream until I talked to my dad. And he was like, "How could you remember that?" So, you know, stuff I did. He told me he never hit my mom but I remember sitting underneath the table, crying, and watching them run around the table. And he used whip on her, my biological dad.

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I couldn't have been more than maybe a year old, two years old. Because, um...like my mom, she didn't...she couldn't keep me. One time my aunt, they let her have me for a little while and they end up taking me back, after they had first got me. Well, anyway, um, I just remember just the little things. And because, you know, St. Louis my and uncle lived there for a while. So, like I said, one time her and her friend had to go somewhere and their son was going to watch me. And he was...be fixing on something. Until I remember her telling me that he would be there and that, um, he'll be down...downstairs in the basement, open the door so you come upstairs in the front. And I couldn't have been, I don't know, probably four, maybe (four years old at the time). But I guess there's been a lot of (? 1:56:19) open the door and all that stuff. And I just remember him coming up those back steps and banging on the door. And, um, he wanted to come inside. And I was like, "Uh-uh." I wouldn't let him in. I went...I remember, I think I went and sat in the front room and waited and my momma to come home [chuckles]. I already knew, I was going to make sure that the lock was still locked. I remember really good and me were walking back to that door to check on those locks. Because I thought at one point it seemed like he was trying to put a key or something in there. And I would not let him in. I remember him getting out, going back around the house, and coming back up the front, because his was a flat. They were called a two-family flat. They had a front door, and him banging on that door. Then I remember looking down the steps at him, and I could see, and he could see me. And I just looked at him, and I just went back in the room and sat down. And I remember, momma came home finally. And she was like, "Baby, why didn't you open that door and let Araon in?"

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And I just looked at her, and I just grabbed her, and just hugged her, and just cried. And she never questioned me about what happened and what's going on. But from then, she never, ever let that boy around me. I just remember I was little then. I could see what to tell her. I didn't know what to say. But I knew that he had molested me. And I didn't want him nowhere near me. I had enough sense to know that I didn't like it.

Relationship with Children

I would describe my relationship with my children as growing closer. We have been separated for six years. Me and my drug history, drug abuse resulted in their dad, my husband caring for them. He took them when, let's see, my son was probably about 12 and my daughter was, uh, she was about 11 and my baby girl was about, she was about five when I started abusing drugs. Prior to my drug use there was a lot of time that I was single so sometimes I co-parented with their father and sometimes by myself. I'm most proud of finally being able to keep my word. We would do things together and I was spending their money. I was coming to see them and didn't show up when I was using.

Intergenerational Sexual Mistreatment

The most traumatic is that not being able to protect my oldest daughter from somebody that molested her. She told me she was about two, three years old. I let her stay with her aunt and uncle for a little while, while I got myself together. I was pretty young mom, at that point, I was like 18 or 19 years old. My cousin [male] had molested her. I didn't even know about it. I never found out about it until just recently. I found out when I was going through therapy. She was in the same program as I am and she was going to

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therapy and it came up in therapy that that happened. She just chose not to think about it or maybe suppressed it somewhat. It came up basically because my other daughter's going to college and she wanted to go to California to visit the schools and stay with some family members there, the 18 year old. And my daughter got really upset about it. She...she was like, "I don't want her going there." I was like, "What's the problem? Why not?" She said, "Because what happened to me and..." that it wasn't good and she told me about "living with your cousin." She's like, "I don't want her to stay with those relatives because I don't want nothing happening to her." It shocked me. It was shocking. She is in therapy dealing with her, um, emotions and feelings, and trying to get a handle on her own self-worth because, um, her lifestyle in prostitution. The molestation was never disclosed to my 18 year old daughter. She's going with a friend and another cousin of hers, because they're not from that part of California. They're in another part of California but we still didn't talk to her still because she's got her heart set on going to school in California. So eventually there is a chance that she'll meet up with those relatives and so she could be forewarned. We discussed talking to her about it but more or less we wanted to pick a time before she left and just sit down and talk to her about it, which, that'll be coming up in the next month. So she wants to go during...during the school break you know to check out whether the school is right for her.

Parental Challenges and Influences

The most challenging experiences that I have as a parent was dealing with guilt and shame. Now I really don't have time to deal with that. I've just got to parent because I have a eleven-year-old living here with two boyfriends and a nephew which isn't mine.

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My mother, which is not very much, influences me in parenting my children, my grandmother, my great aunt, and the love of God. Trusting in him more than anything. My great aunt and grandmother influenced me with, I would say, firm values. Um, I would say, um, well really a foundation and such. As you get older you realize that that's what it's really about and now I understand it and you pretty much make a decision. You just kind of just do the best you can.

Expectations of Children

My expectations is just for them to be respectful and honest, do your best in school. Um, no time for, um, you know, bad behavior, and, um, just to be children and enjoy their life, or their childhood. Raise them to be as productive as I could. It didn't always work out quite that way but that was my intentions for them. Well, my concern with my oldest son. Parents need to parent. A lot of the time we don't realize the things that we do. Our children are especially, I think the girls pay very close attention to what mothers are doing because I had the same lifestyle that my daughter has and I thought I was very secretive about it. Evidently, she's still end up doing the same thing, as far as the prostitution goes. I would like for her to get out of that life. Her dad told me that she had been stripping or something. She was about 19 at that time. I have concerns about my 11-year old daughter but I don't know if she is aware of her older sister, I hope not but, um, I've talked to her father. I want to look at putting her in an all girl's school right now because, um, by me not being in her life for six years she really didn't get to have a lot of family bonding and she's always longed for her mother. I think her self-esteem got twisted somewhat. She probably got, I think, lost in the shuffle, even though she's looked

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at as the baby girl. Everyone's always seem like yelling at her about stuff and she has a habit of, um, playing stupid. Like he'll [dad] say, "Um, Lori, can you hand me that remote?" "What remote?" and it be like right in front of her and she does that all the time. I want to get that message full across to her that you don't have to act like that. I'm here and I can see everything you're doing and I'll give you all the love and affection and attention that I know that you desire and need and that's the issue, I want to address with her.

It's become such a habit. I thinking she's in depression and I didn't realize she's doing it anymore. It's attention-seeking, but it's become negative because I hear her brothers and sisters saying, like, "Oh quit acting stupid." you know and when kids hear that word, "acting stupid," they equate that as being stupid. I see her eyes get downcast. And I'm very sure that it's...it's affecting her. I was telling her dad, I really want to look at getting her into that school, because the school works a lot on your self-esteem, which is...it's in school, so of course they do all the good academic work that, you know, I know she needs to work on. But I really want her, before she gets into high school life...you know, she's still fresh enough to do all those things to do that. I try to get her into some other activities because she has too much idle time.

I let them know I approve and don't approve of their behavior by telling them. There are some things I know they have to experience for themselves and then, when their head gets bumped that's when they realize okay, don't do that again. I experiencing that as a grandmother because I have him (her grandson she was caring for during the

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interview) in my care all the time. I'm basically raising him right now but he's not a guest [laughter]. He's a fixture [laughter]. That's my oldest son's.

I disapprove of lying, cheating, stealing, meanness towards each other and just trying to give up and be a victim. I approve of working hard, being honest, being a good, um, friend, being true to themselves. Um, being or becoming spiritual people and striving for their independence.

Losses and Drug Use

I still have not dealt with my own pain and issues, that I just didn't care. The death of my mom was, I think, a catalyst for it [drug use] all. She passed away, it would be, May 11. It's been nine years and then I just did not deal with that at all. You know, I realized that her death was like, just like I said, just catapulted me into just not caring anymore and really, I just became so, you know, relying on drugs just to make it through the day. I didn't care about anything. She died of cancer. Her death wasn't the first loss in my life but it was the most substantial loss and meant the most to me. It was like everything kind of shut, started shutting down. I think it was unconsciously and then it became conscious. That was the, I guess the main thing but there was a whole lot of other things that were going on too. You know, my marriage was pretty much in crisis, had fallen apart and I was still using drugs and I just couldn't stop dousing the alcohol. So, I just think I've got a lot of hurt feelings from being, um mistreated. You know, my husband cheated quite a few times. After a while you get a little tired of that. Well, I mistreated him too because we played stupid you know what I'm saying? Well, he came and got my kids. That was, um, like, a with the children some I, you know, met someone

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else and that relationship was like, stayed pretty much a user relationship. I had lost contact. Well, I could contact my kids but I just didn't feel worthy, you know, and I wasn't living properly, so what could I bring them to? So I kind of just shut myself down for a minute. I stopped really contacting them a lot. I was, oh gosh, eight, nine, ten months without talking to them. My husband and I broke up. So I had the kids with me and my drug addiction just started getting crazy. I started just, you know, using all the time and I wasn't taking good care of myself or the children at that point like keeping food and stuff, and the electricity was still on, just barely [chuckles]. So at that point it was like, um, I'm getting drunk, they can't be proud of me. You know, I honestly wasn't thinking, you know, being responsible.

Um, just a whole lot of heartache and pain. A lot of heartache and pain, being out in the streets, being robbed, being raped, being abused. It wasn't always everything bad. I was in near death situations almost overdosing, suicide attempt, homelessness, always being cold, always being hungry. And I would have all kinds of good jobs but, um, I was losing jobs that I had because of my addiction and not having a place to live. And after a while it just got to the point where I made up my mind, it's got to be, you know, easier to try to live, you know, a normal life, or a somewhat normal life than keep living like this. And then I just kept thinking about it, and praying, and praying all the time all the time I was out there.

Reconnecting with Daughter

Yeah, so I wanted the kids back in my life. But it was just a nightmare, you know, trying to turn off of those feelings and me thinking about my children. And then my

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girlfriend, she uses Facebook and I asked her to look up and see if she's sees one of my daughters and she seen my daughter's picture, and she's was on Facebook.

You know, she was on the Facebook, pregnant [chuckles]. I mean, it looked like me but she had a big belly [chuckles]. So I had her to send her a message to her, tell her I want to talk to her. And she ended up contacting me back. And I knew something wasn't right from the way the pictures. They were so provocative. I just didn't know why she would take a picture that looked like that. So that was a big clue that she was doing something she wasn't supposed to be doing. So, as I kept talking to her she finally told me what was going on with her, at that point I was still in active addiction. And, um, I just told her that, um, "You can't do it by yourself. You're lonely, you're going to have this baby being born," said, "What do you want to do? You can't live in the streets with the baby." So I talked to her. And, um, see if I could try to help her. Sometime after she did Lansing, Michigan. Um-hum. So, um, I went there and got an apartment. And then from there, um, I still was using and, um...but I was working. So I ended up giving the apartment to her. She stayed with, um, her...her aunt on her dad side until the birth of her son. So a couple weeks after that, she, moved into the apartment. It...it didn't end in a chaos, it's still going on. She was still in and out, leaving town, moving building to building. And I was still using and my nerves were shot because I was worried about getting into some kind of trouble, like my house getting busted in, or, you know, she was threatening to take the baby and go out of town. And I was scared that something was going to happen to him. And, uh, so something's got to give. She was in and out of town and just deeply in prostitution.

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Parenting Again, Addiction, and Homelessness

She was gone, you know, and had a newborn baby at home . And I had...I went from not having my kids at all to having a little baby. And to me that was like a gigantic huge sign from God, “Hello! Time to change your life!” “Because I’m going to make you change it [chuckles].” So that was a big wakeup call. I still was having a hard time letting go of the addiction. But the more I kept going here, the more I kept going...thinking about dealing with it, having this baby and the what if...would have, could have, should have that can happen...with not having a stable life can...So, for me, that’s why if it was just me, who knows how long I would have been in active addiction...until something just finally happened or God or something. Why take a chance with his life. So I just kept praying, kept praying and praying and asking God to give me the strength to turn away. And, um, I had a really, really good job, the best job I ever had in my life there. And through my addiction and all the other crazy things happened, I lost that job. And I got another one right away again. And it was, um...I couldn’t get my life in order, I couldn’t stand it. And, um, finally, my electricity got cut off. And I got this new baby. By then he was like maybe four months old or something maybe five. And I was like, “I can’t live like this.” So I took my last paycheck and just...something, just go and I packed up my bags and came here. I have a sister here. But she didn’t know I was coming until I called that day and told her I was getting on the bus, and come pick me up. She was like, “What?” [laughs]. She was shocked. And I’m like “And I’m bringing my grandbaby.” And she’s like, “Well come on Annie May [chuckles].” Cuz she calls me Annie May. She was like come on, and I was like, “All right,” and so we came. And, you know, she was

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like, “ Well, you can’t stay with me,” because she had one bedroom, and two big old dogs, and all that. And I don’t know, I’m really...I’m not a dog lover. There’s no way I can stay with her, and nasty dogs. She keep ‘em clean, but hair everywhere. You go over to the refrigerator, there’s hair in the refrigerator. It stunk.

Treatment, Recovery, Spirituality

I’m a hairstyler, so I handle some hair, but ech. Anyway, I didn’t stay and I had to pull some strings for myself. You know, you’ve got to do what you’ve got to do to make it out here. So, I talked my way into a women’s abuse center. You know, it wasn’t like I had not been having the shit beat out me quite a few times in my life. That’s when I need some place that was safe. I knew if I’m clean and I could get, you know, I could get some kind of housing for me to stay in instead of living in this shelter. But then, you know, I wanted to like...what’s that place? Day by Day Center or Saving Souls, it’s just a lot...a mess in those places the way they’re structured and they need to hire more help for you. I went in there and I just kept on searching and trying to find us a place but couldn’t find nowhere to go so we were still homeless. I finally just said, “Well Lord, you know, brought me this far. I’m going to have to do what you want me to do. I’m trying to do it my way, you know, it ain’t working out.” So I said, “Well, I know I’m an addict. I know I’ve got some issues. It’s just struggling, just barely hold on by my feet.” So I’m just saying, “Do what you want me to do.” So I called this crisis line and so I haven’t been smoking no crack after I got here. I did drink a couple of times in the first few months. But I haven’t done anything else. But basically I have just totally, you know, one-eighty degree turnaround with my lifestyle. And so I called a treatment facility and I talked to

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this gal on the phone and she told me about this, um, place called Welcome Manor. It was a treatment place. And they accept kids. Because my time was running out at that place. So I'm like so we need some and if its treatment, then it'll be treatment.

I wanted a home [chuckles]. And you...when you...when you pray...I've learned, when you pray...you can be specific, and people tell you to be specific. I wanted a home. And he gave me a home and a treatment center [laughter]. I needed it. It wasn't easy. It was almost four months we was in that place. I had never been through anything like that in my life. But I do believe. I know I take it very spiritual but I can't help it. I just truly believe in a God, just did a total intervention on me. He just...because I done tried everything under the sun. I done went through at least 15 to 17 treatments and that's no exaggeration by any means.. I just believe that God just worked some things out. It wasn't...didn't flow as easy. Because I have encountered a lot of, um, as you say, struggles, what I had to endure. I had to endure enough to prepare me for what I gotta do on a day to day basis in recovery for life and that's the key to life. You know, that was the key, the key to dealing with the day-to-day life, dealing with, you know, having to go through a divorce, dealing with all the emotions that I did not deal with at all, you know, the six years of separation from my husband, dealing with raising, you know, children, having them back in my life, accepting responsibility of a grandchild, even though his mom is definitely able. She just can't, right now, take care of him. I had told her that she can't have him until she's come close to stable. And now, looking like that, um, she got her a job so we got a wait and see what happens, so she might be having a place to live, pretty soon, with me. We've just got to wait and see.

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Supportive Kin

So the bigger ones, they kind of do what they do. Well, my son come over and he'll stay the night at the apartment and my baby girl, she comes early these days. I'm kind of thinking her dad is trying to get her to stay here period [chuckles].

Because she keeps telling me he is. Yeah, I'm just really in no hurry being the person that she is abuse her. You know, you've got to raise her. Um, family members I feel the closest to? Um, I really...at this point I'm just now getting back in...trying to have a relationship with the different family people. I guess my sister. It changes.

And then, I guess my family, as far as I see, it they're looking at me now. It's like, "Oh, wow, she's just woke up." It was a long sleep [chuckles]. And they're just trying to embrace me again. But I used to be closest to my aunt who's probably a year and a half older than me. So we used to be the closest. Well, we grew up together in Racine. And I always just had a fondness for her. She's always been so close in age. And I have cousin who I'm pretty close to also. And she's in St. Louis too.

Um-hum. I keep saying I want to call her. I'm close to her.

Relationships with Parents

My mother and father. They have passed on. Uh, I was closes to my mother. I always honored and respect her. Because she's the backbone of our family. She was the one that always showed up for her family in everything that she did. She would keep everybody together, to come over to the house, check up on people, call all the time, write letters. She's bring out Christmas cards. There was a lady down south. [Chuckles]

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My mom always made sure she had a little box of Christmas cards, and sending them off.

Made big dinners. She just was one of those women they had such a giving heart. She

was a little bitty lady, teeny...teeny weenie person. But she just was so...her...everything

about her was huge, yeah. You know, just beautiful woman. And, um, she didn't take a

lot of mess. She used to, ah, stand her ground, even when it came up against my dad.

She...she was the type of woman that taught a woman how to be a woman. In this day and

age, I guess they would look at her as not being as, um, independent or feminist, or what

have you. But she was right when the time was to be that person.

Race and Gender Socialization

She did taught me, I think, how to stay alive and survive as being a Black woman,

and how to deal with the powers that be, you know. Just the way she explained it to me, I

explained it to my children. Because, um, you won't be able to live and make it in this

society. You have to know who you can trust and who you can't trust. And, me, myself,

personally...and I feel that way, even though I have faith in my family. Teach my son,

don't ever get comfortable with the police. Because there's just too many jails and they

[chuckles] are packed with African American men that got comfortable with the police in

the short term.

Now, they say us killing each other, it's a huge thing, why so many of us are

dead. I believe they play just as major of a role as people that hurt each other.

Um, therefore, I'm saying how to act and conduct yourself. And I still feel that way with

my children. They have to do things different even though we have a Black president,

you know, for four years, it's still a *huge* difference. It's more southern and it's scary

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when you can't really see it coming. Well, and I know, I teach them that, to pay attention.

That's what I say, as far as not being a victim.

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Appendix C Consent Form

Study Background Information

You are invited to participate in a study designed to learn about the parenting experiences of African American mothers with direct experience regarding sexual mistreatment. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you expressed a willingness to participate and because you possess significant knowledge about the area under investigation. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Valandra, MSW, LISW an African American doctoral student at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, School of Social Work.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning women give to their experiences as survivors and mothers and how these experiences shape their relationships with their children and others who may provide them with child rearing support. Recognized as an under reported social, public health, and public safety problem, sexual mistreatment seriously impacts the quality of life for many individuals and families in the United States yearly.

Procedures

If you consent to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in three interviews that are between one hour and one and a half hours long for a total of 3 - 4.5 hours. The time between interviews is one to two weeks. If you have children 10 years old and older, I will also ask your permission to interview 1 to 2 of your children for the study. Children will only be interviewed if they also agree to participate in the study. Children participating in this study will be interviewed once for one to one and a half hours. I will also ask your permission to interview any others you feel are important in caring for your children and/or providing you with parenting support. Any others will be interviewed once for one to one and a half hours. You can still participate in this study if you choose not to allow your child(ren) to participate in this study or ask others who provide child rearing support to you to participate in the study. The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. The researcher will code and analyze the information you provided in the interview.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

There are no benefits for participating in this research. The risks for participating in this study are related to the stirring up of painful memories and emotions as you talk about your life. Some people experience anxiety after the interview is completed. You are encouraged to share only what you feel comfortable sharing. Your decision whether or not to answer questions of a sensitive nature will not affect your participation in the study. Should you require a referral for services following the interview, a list of services will be offered to you. If during the interview you share any information that leads me to suspect that a child is being neglected or abused; or has been neglected or abused in the

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past three years, I am legally required to report the information to law enforcement or child protection services.

Compensation

You will receive the CD “Rhythms of My Heart: Healing from Within” by Valandra as a token of appreciation upon completion of the interviews. The CD contains inspirational songs of hope and encouragement, 24-hour help/hotlines, and resources. If you withdraw from the research before the three interviews are completed, you will be offered the CD at the interview in which you stated you wish to withdraw.

Confidentiality

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified related to you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your written permission. Details of any unreported crimes occurring within the last three years will not be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable. The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. The recordings are digital. They will be destroyed within three years of the completion of the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the University of Minnesota or the social service agency where you may be a client. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Valandra. If you have any questions about this form or the research, please feel free to ask any questions you have now before signing this form. If you have any questions at any point, you may contact Valandra at 105 Peters Hall, School of Social Work, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, St. Paul, MN 55108. Her phone number is 612/963-3767 and email address is Valandra@umn.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, contact the Research Subjects' Advocate line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked any questions I have and received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of participant Date

Signature of Investigator Date

Appendix D – Study Flier

Can I Get A Witness?

You're Invited

To be part of a research project about
African American Parenting Experiences



Purpose: to understand the parenting experiences of mothers with direct experiences of unwanted sexual advances, harassment, and/or mistreatment.

What's Involved: you participate in 1 – 3 interviews where you share your parenting experiences. The interviews are private and confidential. All family relationships are welcome (married, single, lgbt, grandparents, kinship caregivers, step-parents, etc.)

Compensation: As a token of appreciation, you receive \$10.00 in cash and/or the CD “Rhythms of My Heart: Healing from Within” by Valandra.

Contact: for more information, phone Valandra at 612/412-2191, e-mail Valandra@umn.edu

This study is voluntary. You can change your mind about participating at any time.

Valandra is an African American doctoral student in the School of Social Work, at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, 1404 Gortner Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108

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Appendix E: Interview Guide

African American Mothers

1. How long have you been parenting your children?
2. How many children do you have?
3. What are the ages and genders of your children?

Mental Representations of Parental Caregiving - Attachment Relationships

4. How would you describe your relationship with your children?
5. What things influence how you relate to your children?
6. What are your most rewarding experiences as a parent?
7. What are you most proud of as a parent?
8. What are your most challenging experiences as a parent?
9. What factors influence how you experience yourself as a parent?
10. What is a typical day for you as a parent?
11. What is a typical day for your children?
12. What are your expectations of your children?
13. How do you let your children know when you don't approve of their behavior?
14. How do you let your children know when you do approve of their behavior?
15. What kinds of things do you approve and disapprove of in your children?
16. How do your children know you care about their well-being?
17. Have you changed the way you parent overtime? What do you do differently? The same? And why?

Parenting Networks – Afrocentric Intergenerational Solidarity

Associational Solidarity

18. Tell me about your family traditions? (Holiday celebrations, Sunday dinners, family reunions, special events, and so forth)

Affectional Solidarity

19. Who are the family members with whom you feel close?
20. What makes you feel particularly close to them?
21. Who are your extended family and others who are like family? Do you feel close to them?
22. Are there certain relationships or issues that you must honor or respect?

Consensual Solidarity

23. What do you know about your family's history – your grandparents, great grandparents, and so forth

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24. What were/are important values, beliefs, and traditions in your family?
25. What are some of the values and beliefs you share with your family members?
26. Do you feel connected and/or a sense of pride with African American communities?
27. In what kind of cultural activities do you and your family members participate?

Functional Solidarity

28. How does your family respond when one of its members needs assistance?
29. Who are the family members with resources (good, steady job; a home; savings; and so forth) in your family?
30. Are they obligated to help out others in the family? Is there an exchange of resources?
31. Do older family members feel obligated to help out younger family members, and is this help reciprocal?
32. From whom, if anyone, do you receive support (financial, emotional, social) in general?
33. Describe the nature of the support? In what ways are the person (s) identified supportive?
34. From whom, if anyone, do you receive support in parenting your children?
35. Describe the nature of the support? In what ways are the person (s) identified supportive of you as a parent?

Normative Solidarity

36. What roles do parents, grandparents, children, adult daughters and sons, aunts, uncles, and so forth play in your family?
37. In your family, what happens when someone is not able to function in his or her role as a parent, son, daughter, caregiver, and so forth?

Structural Solidarity

38. Where do your family members live?
39. What led them to move to...? Do you visit?
40. How do family members travel when they visit one another?
41. Are there any barriers to visiting?
42. Does your family have a "home place," a residence where family members gather for special occasions?

Sociocultural Context

43. What opportunities (housing, education, employment, emotional, social supports, etc.) have you experienced in general? As a parent?
44. What barriers have you faced in general and as a parent?
45. How would you describe the neighborhood in which you are parenting your children?
46. What do you consider your strengths in general and as a parent?
47. What do you consider your limitations in general and as a parent?
48. How do you think other people would describe you as a parent?

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Mental Representations of Internal Working Models - Adult Attachment

49. How would you describe your childhood?
50. How would you describe your relationship with your own parents and/or caregivers during your childhood?
51. How would you describe your relationship with your friends and relatives during your childhood?
52. What five words would you use to reflect your relationship with each of your primary caregivers during your childhood?
53. Which of your caregivers did you feel the closest, and why?
54. Why don't you feel this way about your other caregivers?
55. When you were upset as a child what would you do?
56. What is the first time you were separated from your caregivers?
57. How did you respond? Do you remember how your caregivers responded?
58. Are there any other separations that stand out in your mind?
59. Did you ever feel rejected as a young child? What were the circumstances?
60. Were your caregivers ever threatening with you in any way, jokingly or as a disciplining measure?
61. How do you think your overall experiences with your caregivers have affected your adult personality?
62. Are there any other aspects of your early experiences that you think might have held your development back, or had a negative effect on the way you turned out?
63. Why do you think your caregivers behaved as they did during your childhood?
64. Were there any other adults with whom you were close as a child?
65. Did you experience the loss of a caregiver or close family member as a child?
66. Have you lost other close persons in your adult years?
67. Other than what you have already described, have you had any other experiences which you regard as potentially traumatic or challenging?
68. Did you experience any changes in your relationship with your caregivers after childhood? Changes occurring roughly between your childhood and adulthood?
69. What is your relationship like with your caregivers now as an adult?
70. How do you feel when you separate from your child(ren)?
71. If you had three wishes for your child(ren) twenty years from now, what would they be? What kind of future would you like to see for them?
72. What do you think your child(ren's) other caregivers would wish for them twenty years from now?
73. Is there any particular thing you think you learned above all from your own childhood experiences?
74. What would you hope your child(ren) learned from his/her/their experiences of being parented by you and their other caregivers?

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Sexual Experience History – Constructivist Self-Development Theory

75. How have experiences of sexual mistreatment affected you personally?
76. How old were you when you were sexually mistreated?
77. Where you sexually mistreated by someone you know and/or a stranger?
78. Where you sexually mistreated more than one time?
79. How has being sexually mistreated affected you?
80. In what ways have you dealt with being sexually mistreated?
81. What forms of support, if any, have you used in dealing with experiences of sexual mistreatment?
82. What things influenced how you deal(t) with being sexually mistreated?
83. What has been the most difficult aspect of surviving sexual mistreatment?
84. What has been the most useful/helpful aspect of surviving sexual mistreatment?
85. How has being a survivor of sexual mistreatment influenced you as a parent?
86. How would you describe your relationship with your children after experiencing sexual mistreatment?
87. In what ways do you believe your experience of sexual mistreatment shaped your approach to parenting?

Information for Potential Intervention/Prevention

88. What gives you strength as a parent and survivor?
89. What drains or limits you as a parent and survivor?
90. If you could communicate anything to helping professionals about your experiences as a parent what would you want them to know?
91. If you could communicate anything to your community about your experiences as a parent what would you want them to know?
92. What do you think are the best ways of educating people in your community about sexual mistreatment prevention?
93. What do you think are the best ways to encourage people in your community to stop harming women and children sexually?

Demographic Information

94. Demographic Information
 - a. Age, Income range
 - b. Education level
 - c. Employment status
95. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experiences as a parent that you have not shared already?

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APPENDIX F

List of Preliminary Pre-Established Codes

	Demographic Characteristics
	Relationship Status
0102	Single (never married)
	Married/similar relationship
0103	Separated/divorced
0104	Widowed
	Domestic Partner
	Number and Gender of Children
0106	1 – 3 children
0107	4-6 children
0108	7 or more children
0109	Male
0110	Female
0111	Transgender
	Education and Employment
0201	Less than high school
0202	GED or high school diploma
0203	Some technical college/trade school or community college
0204	Technical college/trade school or community college degree
0205	Some 4-year college
0206	Four –year college degree
0207	Graduate or professional degree
0208	Employed – Full-time
0209	Employed – Part-time
0210	Unemployed
0211	Temporary
0212	Seasonal
0213	Contract
	Household Income
0301	Less than \$20,000
0302	\$20,000 - \$59,000
0303	\$60,000 or more
	Sexual Orientation
0401	Heterosexual
0402	Homosexual
0403	Bisexual
	Age

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0500	10 – 15 years old
0501	16 – 18 years old
0502	18 – 25 years old
0503	26 – 35 years old
0504	36 – 45 years old
0505	46 – 55 years old
0506	56 – 65 years old
0507	65 and over
	Religious/Spiritual Affiliation
0601	Yes
0602	No
	Sexual Victimization Characteristics
	<i>Age of First Sexual Victimization</i>
0701	Under 18 – Child-Teenager
0702	18 – 25 years old – Young Adult
0703	26 – 43 years old – Middle Adult
0704	44 and older – Older Adult
	Frequency of sexual victimization
0801	Once
0802	Rarely
0803	Occasionally
0804	Sometimes
0805	Often
	Relationship to Perpetrator
0901	Parent/step parent/guardian
0902	Sibling (brother, sister)
0903	Other family member (aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent, etc.)
0904	Intimate partner/lover/significant other
0905	Friend/Acquaintance
0906	Stranger
0907	Public Official (Coach, Teacher, Clergy, Prison Guard, etc.)
	Race/Ethnicity of Perpetrator
1001	African American/Black/African descent
1002	American Indian/First Nation/Indigenous
1003	Asian/Pacific Islander
1004	Caucasian/White/European descent
1005	Latino(a)/Mexican/Hispanic/Chicano(a)
1006	No dominant racial/ethnic identification
	Gender of Perpetrator
1101	Female
1102	Male
1103	Transgender
	Responses to Sexual Victimization

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1201	Shame
1202	Silence
1203	Disclosure
1204	Anger
1205	Self Blame
1206	Promiscuity
1207	Substance Use
1208	Dissociation
1209	Withdraw
1210	Resist
1211	Activism
1212	Seek help
1213	Legal action
1214	Forgiveness
1215	Love
1216	Intergenerational transmission
	Disclosure
1217	To self
1218	To family
1219	To friend
1220	To police
1221	To human service professional
1222	Other
	Systems of Oppression
1301	Racism
1302	Sexism
1303	Classism
1304	Ableism
1305	Homophobia
1306	Colorism
1307	Segregation
1308	Discrimination
1309	Stereotyping
1310	Racialized sexual stereotypes
1311	Prejudice
1312	Internalized oppression
1313	Race-based trauma
1314	Gender-based trauma
	Family Dynamics
1401	Supportive
1402	Unsupportive
1403	Distant/Estranged
1404	Silent

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1405	Angry
1406	Believe you
1407	Don't believe you
	Afrocentric Intergenerational Solidarity Codes
1408	Associational – frequency and type of intergenerational interactions; family traditions, special events, celebrations
1409	Affectional – expressed closeness and respect of family members; honored or significant relationships
1410	Consensual – transmission of family history; values beliefs, cultural pride
1411	Functional – frequency of exchanges of family assistance and resources; responses to needs
1412	Normative – family roles and function; responsibilities and obligations; adaptability to role shifts
1413	Structural – family accessibility to each other; opportunities for interaction; proximity of family
	Sources of Support
1500	Relatives
1501	Nonrelatives
1502	Professional
1503	Clergy
1504	Stranger
	Type of Support
1600	Emotional – Advice
1601	Emotional – Comfort/Encouragement
1602	Emotional – Companionship
1603	Emotional – Listening
1604	Tangible – Transportation
1605	Tangible - Childcare
1606	Tangible – Housing
1607	Tangible – Food
1608	Tangible – Financial
1609	Spiritual
1610	Agency – Nurturing Environment
1611	Agency – Task Environment
	Attachment – Parent-Child
1700	Secure – demonstrate confidence in attachment relationship; responsive, emotionally available, and loving
1701	Avoidant – tend to turn away from parents and to depend on themselves rather than seek attachment
1702	Ambivalent/Resistant – anxious about the availability of their caregivers

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1703	Disorganized/Disoriented – displays contradictory behaviors, inconsistency in attempts to elicit comfort from attachment figure.
	Attachment - Adult
1800	Secure
1800.1	- Values attachment relationships
1800.2	- Belief that attachment relationship is a major influence on their personality
1800.3	- Objective and balanced in describing relationships
1800.4	- Readily recalled attachment relationships with ease
1800.5	- Took a realistic rather than an idealistic view of their parents and their attachment experiences
1801	Insecure - Dismissive/Avoidant
1801.1	- Dismissed attachment relationships as being of little concern, value or influence; minimized care; emotionally disengaged
1801.2	- Lacked vivid memories of attachment experiences
1801.3	- Described current relationship with parents as distant and cut off
1802	Insecure - Preoccupied/Ambivalent/Resistant
1802.1	- Preoccupied with dependency on their parents and actively struggled to please them
1802.2	- Hold themselves responsible for difficulties in their attachment relationships
1802.3	- Idealize parents
1802.4	- Showed anxiety about current relationships & worried about how others perceive them
1802.5	- Self-centered intrusive care
1803	Insecure - Disorganized/Disoriented
1803.1	- Fearful about loss
1803.2	- Irrational views – blaming self for abuse; or “causing” death of parent
1803.3	- Lack of coherence in accounts of attachment experiences
1803.4	- Inconsistent, random care, inadequate care
	Womanist/Black Feminist Theory
1901	Knowledge construction through lived experienced
1902	Interlocking systems of oppression
1903	Self empowerment
1904	Political, economic, social transformation
1905	Other
	Constructivist Self-Development Theory
2001	Trauma as complex experience (devastation & resilience)
2002	Meaning Making influenced by experience of bio-psycho-social self & sociocultural environment
2003	Frame of reference – usual way of understanding self and the world
2004	Self-capacities – ability to recognize, tolerate, and integrate affect and

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	maintain kind disposition toward self and other
2005	Ego Resources – ability to be self-observing, use cognitive & social skills to maintain relationships and protect self
2006	Psychological needs – cognitive schemas about safety, trust, control, esteem, and intimacy
2007	Perceptual & memory system – biological adaptations & sensory experience

Appendix G

**African American Female Leaders and Activists
Listed to Correspond with Order of Case Narratives**

1. **Ida B. Wells-Barnett** (1862-1931) – Journalist, suffragist, organizer of anti-lynching campaign, founding member of the NAACP in 1909.
2. **Billie Holiday** (1915 – 1931) – One of the most influential Jazz vocalists. Infamous for the song “Strange Fruit” – about lynchings in America.
3. **Rosa Parks** (1913 – 2005) – Civil rights activists and catalyst for the Montgomery Bus boycott in Alabama.
4. **Harriet Tubman** (1820 – 1913) – “Moses” conductor of the Underground Railroad leading African Americans to freedom in the North. Anti-slavery activist and suffragist.
5. **Angela Davis** (1944 –) – Radical educator, civil rights activist, and writer. Advocate for prison reform and author of several books including *Women, Race, and Class* (1980) and *Are Prison’ s Obsolete* (2003). Professor at the University of California – Santa Cruz.
6. **Shirley Chisholm** (1944 – 2005) – Teacher, politician, and social activist. In 1969 she became the first African American congresswoman representing New York State in the House for seven terms. In 1972 she ran for the Democratic nomination for President.
7. **Senator Barbara Jordon** (1936 – 1996) – Civil rights activist and U.S. Representative. In 1966 she became the first woman elected to the Texas Senate and the first African American congresswoman from the Deep South. In 1972 she was elected to U.S. House of Representatives.
8. **Nina Simone** (1933 – 2003) – singer, musician, composer, arranger and civil rights activist.
9. **Mary McLeod Bethune** (1825 – 1955) – Educator and activist. Founder and leader of the National Association of Colored Women and the National Council of Negro Women. In 1904 she founded and became president of the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute, which became Bethune-Cookman College in 1929.
10. **Aretha Franklin** (1942 -) – Singer known as “The Queen of Soul”. First female artist inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Her rendition of “R-E-S-P-E-C-T” became an anthem of the civil rights movement.

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11. **Henrietta Lacks** (1920 – 1951)- Diagnosed with cervical cancer after the birth of her fifth child. During her radiation treatment cells were removed from her cervix, without her permission and became the HeLa immortal cell line, a commonly used cell line in biomedical research.
12. **Josephine Baker** (1906 – 1975) – American-born French dancer, signer, actress and civil rights activist. First African American female to star in a major motion picture. First American-born woman to receive the French military honor, the Croix de guerre
13. **Sojourner Truth** (1797 – 1883) – Abolitionist, activist, and reformer of prison reform, property rights, and universal suffrage. Recruiter for the Union Army. In 1851, she delivered extemporaneous speech at the Ohio Women’s Rights convention that 12 years later was entitled “Ain’t I a Woman.”
14. **Cicely Tyson** (1933 -) – Academy Award nominated for the film *Souther* and three-time Emmy winning actress committed to presenting positive images of women. She was inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame and is founding member of the Coalition for a Healthy and Active America.
15. **Maya Angelou** (1928 -) – Author, poet, actress, orator, and civil rights activist. Her five autobiographical novels are critically acclaimed. She is a Pulitzer Prize nominee.
16. **Octavia Butler** (1947 – 2006) – Referred to as the “grand dame of science fiction.” Recipient of the Hugo and Nebula award. In 1995 she became the first science fiction writer to receive the MacArthur Foundation Genuis Grant.
17. **Michelle Obama** (1964 –) – The first African American First Lady of the United States of America. In 1985 she graduated cum laude from Princeton University and in 1988 earned her law degree from Harvard Law School.
18. **Toni Morrison** (1931 –) – American novelist, editor, and professor. In 1988 she received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *Beloved* (1987). In 1993 she was the first African American recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her work examines the lives of African American characters living amidst racism and hostility.
19. **Audrey Lourde** (1934 – 1992) – Poet, writer, activist. A self-styled “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet” who confronted injustice. In 1980 she co-founded Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.
20. **Diane Ross** (1944 -) – American vocalist, recording artist and actress. Founding member and lead singer of The Supremes. Recipient of seven American Music Awards. In 1972 she received a Best Actress Academy Award nomination for role as

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Billie Holiday in *Lady Sings the Blues*. In 2012 she was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award.

21. **Mahalia Jackson** (1911 – 1972) – American gospel singer and prominent civil rights activist. Her powerful contralto voice earned her fame as “The Queen of Gospel” and the World’s Greatest Gospel singer.

Sources: Biography.com

Women in History: Living vignettes of notable women from U.S. history