ABSTRACT

WAKE, BRITTANY MONAE. Celling Freedom: Formerly Incarcerated Black Women Visualizing Prison Abolition and Mental Health Justice (Under the direction of Dr. Marc A. Grimmett).

Using cellphilming as a visual qualitive methodology, this dissertation is an examination of the lived experiences and perspectives of three formerly incarcerated Black women as they pertain to carceral abolition and mental health justice. As a participatory video methodology, cellphilming offers an agentic approach to narrative inquiry in which the co-production of this research project is made available to each of the women who contribute their stories. Combined with methods to elicit narrative and reflexivity including one semi-structured individual interview per contributor, two Sista Circles, reading Mariame Kaba's We Do This 'til We Free Us, and recording reflexivity journals, cellphilming excels as a tool for the advancement of collective liberation from carceral rhetoric and practice by illuminating the knowledge and wisdom held by formerly incarcerated Black women. Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis supports the construction and deconstruction of all emergent narratives, resulting in ten key findings pertaining to social determinants of incarceration, detrimental consequences of incarceration, deterrents of problematized behaviors, and alternatives to incarceration. With the intention of engaging clinical mental health and other counselors, counselor educators, and policymakers to become more active in dismantling the prison industrial complex to realize an abolitionist future and construct new possibilities of justice, this dissertation consists of five written chapters and the stills of the composite cellphilm reflective of the key findings which capture the shared experiences and perspectives of the women contributing to the research.

Celling Freedom: Formerly Incarcerated Black Women Visualizing Prison Abolition and Mental Health Justice

by
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DEDICATION

For my parents, Dionne and Art, my maternal grandparents, George and Goldie, and my paternal grandparents, Marvin and Christine. All I've ever wanted to do is create a life that demonstrates how grateful I am for all your love and all your sacrifice. I hope I make you proud.

BIOGRAPHY

Brittany M. Wake is a clinical mental health counselor with advanced training on multiculturalism and over ten years of experience. As a counselor, counselor educator, and anti-oppression activist, Brittany integrates her professional roles through an identity founded upon liberation frameworks such as Relational Cultural Theory and Black Feminist Theory. Brittany's research interests revolve around the historical and contemporary trauma of minoritization. An extension of this generalized orientation, Brittany currently works to explore carceral abolition as an urgent concept to include in counselor education and practice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The process of pursuing this research project and completing this dissertation was one of the most emotionally rigorous endeavors of my life and career. I could not have achieved this milestone or survived the many hurdles I encountered moving toward it, without the unyielding support of my family. To my partner, Collins, who encouraged me through the most difficult moments in this journey and resolved to stay next to me when I felt so intensely alone- thank you and I love you. To my siblings, Arthur, Tafairian, Courtney, Alana, Tyrele, Tyrese, and Michael, and my best friends, Ariel and Asha, all of whom celebrate my accomplishments as their own- thank you for giving me spaces to be joyful and playful while finding my way. To my colleagues and friends, Dr. Malaika Edwards and Dr. Felix Morton – completing this degree would have been miserable without your camaraderie; thank you for holding me down through it all.

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To the three women who courageously shared their most intimate stories with me – I honor you and hold your stories as a gift with deep reverence. Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Counselors and counselor educators often laud our profession as a progressive discipline that serves to preserve the dignity, growth, and development of all humanity through principles of advocacy and social justice. We evidence this pride in humanitarianism through our governing bodies and ethical codes. The American Counseling Association ([ACA], n.d.) identifies "Diversity, Equity & Inclusion," as well as "Social Justice & Empowerment," as core values to its mission for 2018-2021 to "ensure ethical, culturally-inclusive practices that protect those using counseling services" (ACA, n.d., para. 2). To this end, multiple perspectives and strategies related to multicultural competence have been suggested by leaders in the counseling profession to ensure fidelity with this mission on behalf of minoritized individuals and communities.

Among the most prominent of these perspectives and strategies are the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2015). These competencies, endorsed by the American Counseling Association Governing Council in 2015, stipulate that a baseline for providing counseling services appropriate for and attentive to minoritized communities involves the counselor exercising self-awareness, exhibiting a working knowledge of client worldview, maintaining a sustainable counseling relationship with the client, and employing social justice interventions that improve the quality of life for clients (Ratts et al., 2015). Although the various governing bodies and ethical codes that set the parameters for professional counseling aim to codify principles of multicultural practice using these competencies, explicit consideration of people experiencing the consequences of incarceration and carceral violence are omitted from this guidance, as is the role of counselors to advocate the end of this oppression. The MSJCC and the original Multicultural Counseling Competencies that preceded them were designed to "call for counselors to address the needs of various cultural

groups and societal inequities" (Singh et al., 2020, p. 238). Singh et al. (2020) specify that the specific issues of oppression that result in inequities intended to be addressed by the MSJCC include "ableism, classism, ageism, adultism, racism, ethnocentrism, colorism, colonialism, linguistic imperialism, sexism, heterosexism, cisgenderism, and religious imperialism" (p. 244). Despite carceralism intersecting with several of these categories of oppression, its distinctness and pervasiveness as an aspect of social inequity with over 1.3 million people incarcerated in the U.S. and many more experiencing the incarceration of a loved one (The Sentencing Project, 2022), requires explicit attention from counselors. This facet of oppression is even more alarming when considering the disparities in incarceration rates for communities of color, specifically Black communities. The purpose of this study is to explore the mental health experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women to demonstrate the urgency of ending carceralism and the responsibility of counselors and counselor educators to adopt an abolitionist politic.

Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies

The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) developed by Ratts et al. (2015) have been endorsed by the ACA as reinforcement of its mission to develop professionals with vested interest in the wellness of minoritized communities. The MSJCC outline four domains, each of which indicate a developmental marker for counselors engaged in culturally competent practice, including: counselor self-awareness, client worldview, counseling relationship, and counseling and advocacy interventions (Ratts et al., 2015). These developmental domains require the counselor to engage in critical reflection and perspective taking regarding their own sociopolitical position and that of their clients, as well as the extent to which each of these shapes the therapeutic relationship and resulting interventions. This

requirement of culturally responsive counselors is not solely reflective in nature, however. There is an action component to the MSJCC in which counselors are expected to act as advocates within society to improve the socioecological circumstances impeding the lives of minoritized communities, as detailed below (Ratts et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2020).

Within the first three domains (counselor self-awareness, client worldview, and counseling relationship), the MSJCC utilize "aspirational competencies" related to the assessment of counselor *attitudes and beliefs*, *knowledge*, *skills*, and *action* to determine efficacy in multicultural counseling (Ratts et al., 2015). In addition to reflecting on their own attitudes and beliefs, the counselor must have the ability to accurately assess the attitudes and beliefs of the client to conceptualize their worldview. This conceptualization necessitates some knowledge about the client's cultural perspective and the skill to implement this knowledge. Assessment of the successful acknowledgement of the counselor's worldview and attention to the client's worldview can be accomplished through various methods. Methods of evaluation include eliciting client feedback, clinical supervision, and consulting with skilled colleagues who consistently embody the MSJCC. Finally, the aspirational competencies within each domain insist upon action from counselors, both in the context of the counseling dynamic and sociopolitical contexts external to the counseling space. Integrating social justice into the framework of multicultural counseling delegitimizes the concern for counselor neutrality and implores counselors to intervene in various humanitarian crises.

In its fourth domain pertaining to counseling and advocacy interventions, the MSJCC extends its expectations of effective multicultural and social justice counselors to include action across a socioecological model (Ratts, et al., 2015). The MSJCC states that competent "counselors intervene with, and on behalf of, clients at the intrapersonal, interpersonal,

institutional, community, public policy, and international/global levels" (Ratts, et al., 2015, p. 11). This fourth domain implores counselors, as a matter of professional responsibility, to be actively engaged in the lives of clients at each socioecological level (intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy, and international/global) to increase the agency and freedom from oppression that threatens the wellness and livelihood of marginalized clients.

Problem Statement: Confronting Carceralism

One such crisis requiring the attention of counselors and counselor educators is mass incarceration in the United States and the expansive traumatic effects it has on individuals, families, and communities globally. Explored in more detail in chapter two of this dissertation, these traumatic effects are experienced because of increased risk to sexual and physical violence, isolation, exacerbated substance use challenges, and other events correlated with trauma symptoms. According to The Sentencing Project (2022), the U.S. boasts the highest incarceration rates of any other country with more than 1.3 million people confined in State or Federal prisons in 2019. This number does not include the communities of people confined in jails, anti-immigration camps, and other detention centers. To complicate an already troublesome depiction of general incarceration rates, communities of color are disproportionately at risk of incarceration. Black people, specifically, are six times more likely to be locked up compared to their white peers (The Sentencing Project, 2022). Much of the racial disparity in imprisonment and surveillance can be connected to the racial disparities in policing and police brutality. In a press release catalyzed by the extrajudicial murders of Black people by police, ACA (2020) stated the following:

> Our stance is: Black Lives Matter. We have a moral and professional obligation to deconstruct institutions which have historically been designed to benefit White

> America. These systems must be dismantled in order to level the playing field for Black communities. Allyship is not enough. We strive to create liberated spaces in the fight against White supremacy and the dehumanization of Black people. The burden of transgenerational trauma should not be shouldered by Black Americans even though they have remained resilient.
>
> All ACA members must be willing to challenge these systems, but also confront one's own biases, stereotypes, and racial worldview. Moving forward, our actions will be based on input from our members and the voices of others. We are committed to change. (paras. 5-6)

Despite an episodic reference to the trauma of police brutality and the imperatives for intrapersonal, interpersonal, systemic, and cultural dissolution of oppression, the issue of mass incarceration remains absent from the association's ethical code, strategic plan, and general discourse for "leveling the playing field" ([ACA], 2020, para. 5). Similarly, ACA's most prominent divisions emphasizing multiculturalism and activism, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) and Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ), seem to ignore the urgency of counseling intervention in the increased confinement, surveillance, and brutalization directed toward Black, Indigenous, and other people of color by the prison-industrial-complex (Davis, 2003). Perhaps because of this absence, in addition to the absence from standards set by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) and Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), Burkholder et al. (2020) found that "the majority of counselor educators were not covering mass incarceration or families of the incarcerated in their coursework, nor had they received training to do so" (p. 323).

As a result of the apparent need to better inform counselors and counselor educators of the perils of mass incarceration and assist them in providing meaningful advocacy on behalf of individuals experiencing the consequences of carcerality in the United States, I conduct this research project. I explore the narratives of three formerly incarcerated Black women in relation to their mental health journeys as well as their visions for an abolitionist future which can be loosely framed as a world without prisons. I chose to focus this research on Black women given their sociopolitical location in the carceral context and their intra-community marginalization on the subject due to the prioritization of Black men. A more detailed review of the literature informing the need for this research follows in chapter two.

Statement of Purpose: Black Women and Carceralism

According to The Sentencing Project (2020), women's incarceration rates have increased at twice the rate of men since 1980, despite men representing the highest number of people incarcerated, overall. Black women's incarceration rates have declined significantly despite this trend, yet they remain overrepresented as the most incarcerated group of women at a rate 1.7 times higher than white women (The Sentencing Project, 2020). The emergent field of abolitionist feminism (Davis et al., 2022) elucidates these disparities and the consequences they have on women and the resulting functionality of society. Abolitionist feminism as articulated by Davis et al. (2022) is "an insistence that abolitionist theories and practices are most compelling when they are also feminist, and conversely, a feminism that is also abolitionist is the most inclusive and persuasive version of feminism for these times" (p. 2). Additionally, in discourses that reify the carceral system, supposed feminism is cited as a point of reasoning given women's vulnerability to patriarchal violence. In other words, there are common discourses and rhetorics that extol the carceral system as an important protective force for cisgender heterosexual women

against the abuses of men. This is the employment of carceral feminism, defined by Whalley and Hackett (2017) as the "hegemonic and dominating feminisms… that seek to leverage formal institutional powers – including the carceral state – vis-à-vis a white supremacist state order with the hope of securing equality between (cisgender) men and women" (p. 457). An emphasis on women's experiences of the carceral system using abolitionist feminism offers a counternarrative to the perspective that the carceral system is a progressive enhancement to the lives of women, effectively mitigating or reducing their exposure to patriarchal violence. Finally, Black women are critical to this research given their historically prominent roles in activism and support for incarcerated and carceral-involved peoples (Crenshaw et al., 2015) despite their relative invisibilization in conversations about carceralism. In the revolution to end police brutality, which results in disparate fatalities for Black people in the U.S., it is ritual for activists to evoke the names of slain individuals during protests in reverence to their humanity, as much as to illuminate the inhumanity of their extrajudicial murders. This tradition of saying the names of women, specifically, was instituted by Black feminists, such as Intersectional theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, who implore activists to "say her name" during call-and-response style protesting to discontinue the erasure of Black women who have been killed by police (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Crenshaw et al. (2015) advocate saying the names of Black cis- and transwomen as an affirmation of their existence in opposition to their invisibilization engendered by intersectional oppression and associated Black male exceptionalism, which is the idea that cisgender men represent the group most harmed by structural oppression in Black communities (Carbado et al., 2013; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989).

In this study, I take an action-oriented, narrative approach to qualitative inquiry utilizing participatory visual methodologies intended to honor the spirit of the "say her name" tradition.

By centering living Black women with experiential wisdom relevant to the carceral system and asking them to visually narrate their own mental health journeys and visions for a world without carceralism, their wisdom can support transformation and political action within the counseling field. The central research question guiding this project was originally the following:

> How do formerly incarcerated Black women describe and depict their mental health experiences before, during, and after incarceration?

I believed that the data derived from this research question would inform counselors and the counseling field of our collective level of cultural competence working with clients experiencing the consequences of carceralism at an individual level. Additionally, I believed responses to this question would help counselors be better informed of the extent to which our discipline should consider adopting and executing an abolitionist politic on a systemic level in congruence with the action element of the MSJCC. It is imperative to note, however, that given the action-orientation and participatory nature of this research that the identified research question was modified based on the guidance from the formerly incarcerated women co-producing this research. The modified research question is the following:

> How do formerly incarcerated Black women describe and depict their experiences of incarceration and conceptualizations for abolition and mental health justice?

The considerations for this change were that while the data from the original question would still be made available through the research process, the modified question would allow more flexibility for contributors to discuss their experiences and visions at their discretion in a shorter period. This modification also reduced the burden on contributors to tell their stories chronologically or linearly. Guided by the principles of Relational Cultural Theory (RCT; Jordan, 2018), Black Feminist Theory (BFT; Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality

Theory (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989) as the interpretive frameworks for this study, I analyze data resulting from the modified research question using Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress, 2023; Rogers, 2011).

Interpretive Frameworks: RCT, BFT, and Intersectionality Theory in Action

Relational Cultural Theory, Black Feminist Theory, and Intersectionality Theory share several complementary and overlapping theoretical dimensions that aid in this work (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000; Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; Jordan, 2018). Foundationally, each of these three theories take a critical feminist approach and are thus positioned similarly regarding ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions. Specifically, each theory centers power and oppression as combining influences that form the site of reality construction and reality transformation. The experiences of women, specifically, offer edification for communities striving to take actionable steps toward equity and justice. This philosophical underpinning of Relational Cultural, Black Feminist, and Intersectionality theories makes them compelling for use in the explication of carceralism, particularly those carceral settings where Black women are involved, and may evidence an eventual abolitionist politic in counseling to end mass incarceration.

Relational Cultural Theory

Of the three theories, Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) is the broadest in terms of population. RCT was developed as a counternarrative to patriarchal conceptualizations of the developmental maturation process that emphasizes rugged individualism and simultaneously undermines and pathologizes relational intelligence traditionally associated with women (Jordan, 2018). Relational Cultural theorists propose as their defining premise that *growth-fostering relationships* are central to healthy development and well-being (Jordan, 2018). According to

RCT it is the disruption of or inaccessibility to these relationships in a culture of dominance and oppression that hinder functioning and induce the suffering that precipitates counseling (Jordan, 2018). Given its focus on the primacy of relationships and the assertion that all relationships (intrapersonal, interpersonal, therapeutic, and societal) are inextricably linked to culture and identity, Relational Cultural Theory is an efficacious framework to use for improving counselor and counselor educator competency related to mass incarceration through information gleaned from the lived experience of formerly incarcerated Black women.

Black Feminist Theory

Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000) has had significant influence on the current iteration of RCT (Jordan, 2018), creating an inextricable link between the two. RCT, like most early mainstream feminism, largely accounted for the experiences of White women initially. RCT's founding principles replicated and reinforced the very systems of dominance it purported to be eradicating in its model. Black Feminist Theory illuminated RCT's inattention or obliviousness toward the structured matrices of oppression that operate on women with compounding marginalized identities (Collins, 1990; Jordan 2018). Black Feminist Theory specifically recognizes the knowledge of U.S. Black women that is developed because of race, gender, and class oppressions. This intimate experience of oppression and its resulting knowledge catalyze the activism of Black women to dismantle white supremacist, patriarchal capitalism (Collins, 2000). Because of the inequities that exist in incarceration rates for Black people in the United States and the active role Black women traditionally play in activism and support for incarcerated peoples, Black Feminist Thought is a salient interpretive framework employed in this research.

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality Theory is a direct descendant of Black Feminist Theory. Conceptualized as the *matrix of domination* in Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 1990), Intersectionality Theory posits that simultaneous experiences of oppression at various axes of sociopolitical identity create distinct cultural experiences and access to knowledge (Crenshaw, 1989). Accounting for various forms of oppression inclusive of and beyond the specifications of gender, race, and class detailed in Black Feminist Theory, Intersectionality Theory provides an apt analytical tool to discuss women in carceral contexts. This tool helps ensure that in exploring the lives of formerly incarcerated Black women, I am attentive to identity statuses and implications such as those related to social oppression due to disability or conviction history.

Significance of the Study: Abolitionist Feminism in Counseling and Counselor Education

In their articulation of concepts such as condemned isolation, controlling images, and epistemic justice, Relational Cultural, Black Feminist, and Intersectionality Theories collectively offer a radical, critical framework for exploring the lives, concerns, and experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000; Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; Jordan, 2018). The aim of this research study is to effectively apply this integrative framework to an examination and critique of the carceral system, in general, and the adverse consequences of the carceral state on Black women's mental health, specifically. The significance of this study is evidenced by its novelty given the paucity of extant literature in counseling and counselor education relevant to mass incarceration (Burkholder, 2020). Additionally, this research offers a broader contribution to the literature relevant to abolitionist feminism in contrast to the carceral feminism displayed in the extant research of carceral studies (Davis et al., 2022; Whalley & Hackett, 2017). The participatory approach to this research is also significant in that it honors the

wisdom and agency of each contributor and thus offers an act of healing from carceralism itself, rather than reproducing it through hegemonic research methods. This research can influence the work of counselors, counselor educators, and policymakers to become more active in dismantling the prison-industrial-complex to realize an abolitionist future and construct new possibilities of justice.

Positionality and Research Assumptions

I am a cisgender Black American woman with lived experience of carceral violence enacted by police and the trauma associated with the incarceration of loved ones, though I have not been incarcerated myself. Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000) specifically recognizes the knowledge of U.S. Black women that is developed because of race, gender, and class oppressions. This intimate experience of oppression and its resulting wisdom provide the impetus for our social justice action (Collins, 2000). According to Intersectionality Theory (Collins, 2019), it is precisely the social location of minoritized communities, in this case Black women with experience of the carceral system, that legitimates our expertise and leadership in liberatory research and praxis (Collins, 2019). My intersectional sociopolitical location affords me an epistemic perspective conducive to exploration of this research topic. Combined with the participatory nature of the study in collaboration with formerly incarcerated Black women, my positionality in the research contributes to endarkenment, a luminescence generated by Black women on specific matters of subject expertise, and epistemic justice critical to carceral studies in counseling and other disciplines (Dillard, 2000). Because of my sociopolitical identities and experiences, I believe that liberation and justice necessitate an abolitionist politic in which the carceral state ceases to exist, even when it is purported to exist as an aim of feminism. I am a vocal advocate for the dissolution of the Prison-Industrial-Complex and prioritize abolition over

reform. Reform, from my perspective, is a simple reorientation of the hegemonic structures of carceralism undergirded by the assumption that there is a redemptive quality to carceral institutions (Davis, 2003). I believe these institutions to be an irredeemable source of destructive power and oppression. My political perspective and positionality are a vital asset to my analysis as indicated by principles Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress, 2023: Rogers, 2011) in addition to Black Feminist and Intersectionality Theories (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000; Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989). According to van Dijk (1993):

> [The work of critical discourse analysts] is admittedly and ultimately political. Their hope, if occasionally illusory, is change through critical understanding. Their perspective, if possible, that of those who suffer most from dominance and inequality. Their critical targets are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice. That is, one of the criteria of their work is solidarity with those who need it most. Their problems are 'real' problems, that is the serious problems that threaten the lives or well-being of many, and not primarily the sometimes petty disciplinary problems of describing discourse structures, let alone the problems of the powerful (including the 'problems' the powerful have with those who are less powerful, or with those who resist it). Their critique of discourse implies a political critique of those responsible for its perversion in the reproduction of dominance and inequality… In this sense, critical discourse scholars should also be social and political scientists, as well as social critics and activists. (p. 252-253)

The problem of interpersonal, institutional, and structural violence against Black women is real. Despite the attempts to obfuscate the participation of the Prison-Industrial-Complex in said

violence using carceral feminism and other discourse, I aim to illuminate it as a problem. This is my political and scientific endeavor.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation includes four chapters following this introductory chapter. Chapter two is a review of the extant literature in counseling and counselor education relevant to Black women's experiences of the carceral system. Chapter three provides a deeper exploration of the research methods including information relevant to the theoretical frameworks, research questions, contributors, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter four provides the results of the research, including the data collected. Chapter five consists of the data analysis, discussion, and conclusion in which I summarize the study and findings, articulate links to existing literature, and provide recommendations to counselors, counselor educators, and policymakers.

Definition of Terms

Abolition

As defined by Mariame Kaba "prison-industrial complex abolition is a political vision, a structural analysis of oppression, and a practical organizing strategy… [It] is a positive project that focuses, in part, on building a society where it is possible to address harm without relying on structural forms of oppression or the violent systems that increase it" (Kaba, 2021, p. 2).

Carceral/Carcerality/Carceralism

Carceralism refers to a system of sanctioned governmental violence enacted against civilians as an evolution of its antecedents: "conquest, settler colonialism, slavery, [and] Jim Crow" (Brown & Schept, 2017, p. 443). More than the institution of the Prison

Industrial Complex, its agents (police, judges, etc.), and the collection of oppressive policies and practices that enable it, carceralism is the ideological assumption that punitive interventions are a natural and effective response to societal challenges (Ben-Moshe, 2018; Brown & Schept, 2017; Davis, 2003).

Carceral Feminism

The reliance on the carceral system and utilization of carceral logics to secure liberation for women. Particular attention is devoted to imprisoning perpetrators of interpersonal and sexual violence (Whalley & Hackett, 2017).

Mental Health

The state and quality of one's psychological and emotional wellbeing.

Mental Health Justice

The pursuit of health system and societal transformation that acknowledges the critical importance of mental health and addresses systemic contributors to mental health challenges and inequities that impede optimal mental health.

Prison-Industrial-Complex

The corporatization of the penal system that involves multiple sectors of public and private institutions working together in the commodification of people for capital gain (Davis, 2003).

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

The purpose of the current study, as stated in chapter one, is to explore the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women and their perspectives on abolition and mental health justice. In the current chapter, the scholarly literature will be explored to situate the study appropriately. Due to the paucity of literature directly related to this topic, adjacent topics such as the mental health consequences of incarceration and post-custodial supervision, pathways to incarceration for Black women, and the local political landscape of women's imprisonment will be explored, as will the foundations of abolitionist praxis guiding this research project.

According to Davis (2003), the term prison industrial complex is meant to convey the extent to which the inherently and specifically racist criminalization of minoritized communities is a profit-making endeavor employed by capitalists with stakes in both the public and private sectors, "linking corporations, government, correctional communities, and media" (p.84). Davis (2003) further elucidates this term and the matrix of systems involved in its structure:

> Punishment no longer constitutes a marginal area of the larger economy. Corporations producing all kinds of goods – from buildings to electronic devices and hygiene products – and providing all kinds of services – from meals to therapy and healthcare – are now directly involved in the punishment business. That is to say, companies that one would assume are far removed from the work of state punishment have developed major stakes in the perpetuation of a prison system whose historical obsolescence is therefore that much more difficult to recognize. p. 88

In this articulation of the convoluted and perverse nature of the prison industrial complex, the mental health system is directly identified and implicated not only in the function of carceral

institutions, but in the maintenance of carceral logics that legitimate the prison industrial complex and render abolition an illusory concept. Although well-intended as a life-saving strategy, the link between the mental health field and carceral system exists in our role as mandatory reporters, as one example. Reporting allegations of abuse and neglect or even suicidal ideation as a compulsory act to state agencies that can enforce punishment is a mainstay in our daily work. Given the entrenchment of carceral logics supposed within the mental health system, it is imperative to dissect the relationship between carcerality and mental health as well as conceptualizations of abolition (Afuape & Oldham, 2022). Despite this imperative, little to nothing has been done in the counseling field on either front. Contradicting the aspirations of the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2015), this inactivity appears to be the willful avoidance of the counseling discipline to engage intimately in what van Dijk (1993) refers to as 'real' problems in contrast to those that are discipline centric. Consistent with the premises of Black Feminist (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000) and Intersectionality Theories (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989) that problematize the systemic invisibilization of Black women, counselors' and counselor educators' avoidance of engagement in research and discourse relevant to the carceral system neglects the vulnerability of Black women. Thus, Black women are further marginalized as evidenced by the few contributions made to the sparse literature available examining the adverse consequences of the carceral system on Black women's mental health. Additionally, there is a near total absence of literature available on how Black women's mental health experiences in carceral contexts might inform the abolition of the Prison-Industrial-Complex. As a salve to the wound of invisibility, Haymarket Books produced a book series, The Abolition Papers, written by prominent Black and Indigenous feminist abolitionist contemporaries. I read through the three currently available books in this series (Davis et al., 2022; Kaba, 2021; Maynard & Simpson, 2022) as a guide to

conceptualizing the needs and experiences of Black women ensnared by the carceral system. Prior to my review of this book series, I synthesized the other available literature, however limited, in terms of the relationship among carcerality and mental health, Black women's social determinants of incarceration, as well as other conceptualizations of abolition.

Carcerality and Mental Health

As described by Davis (2003) above, the Prison-Industrial-Complex extends far beyond the physical structure of the prison and even beyond incarceration, directly. One of the most prominent carceral institutions within the Prison-Industrial-Complex is noncustodial supervision including probation and parole (Phelps et al., 2022; Purser & Hamlin, 2022). Taken together, both incarceration and post-custodial supervision have detrimental consequences on the mental health of their targets (Afuape & Oldham, 2022; Hickson et al., 2022; Nestadt et al., 2023; Phelps et al., 2022; Pickering, 2014; Purser & Hamlin, 2022). The aspects of mental health that will be explored through this section of the literature review include allostatic load/weathering, the damage to parent-child relationships, and symptoms related to traumatic, depressive, and substance use disorders.

Effects of Incarceration on Mental Health

Hickson et al. (2022) found that higher incarceration rates are correlated with an increased reporting of poor mental health days within a given geographic community. This finding suggests that mass incarceration contributes to mental health challenges not only for incarcerated individuals (Addison et al., 2022; Bovell-Ammon et al., 2023; Hickson et al., 2022; Pettus, 2023; Ramezani et al., 2022; Steigerwald et al., 2022), but for the communities from which these individuals are ripped (Addison et al., 2022; Alang et al., 2022; Bovell-Ammon et al., 2023; Hickson et al., 2022; Jones and Santos-Lozada, 2023; Ramezani et al., 2022). Hickson

et al. (2022) support this assertion in their explication of mental health weathering and allostatic load stating:

> Previous research suggests that because of the effect of low socioeconomic status, chronic stress, and social isolation on health, the incarceration of a family member may contribute to a new type of weathering (Lee et al., 2014). The weathering hypothesis asserts that Black people are burdened by an early physiological deterioration because of the cumulative impact of repeated exposures to social or economic adversity and political marginalization. Allostatic load is a measurement that may be well-suited for evaluating weathering. Allostatic load is the physiological burden that is imposed specifically by stress (Duru et al., 2012). As such, mental health is important to explore within the context of incarceration, allostatic load, and weathering. (p. 2)

Countering the carceral logic that removing criminalized individuals from their free communities and institutionalizing them represents a social good benefitting the wellbeing of the remaining community, this contribution to the literature evidences incarceration as well as the proximity to carceralism as a social determinant of health (Addison et al., 2022; Alang et al., 2022; Bovell-Ammon et al., 2023; Clark et al., 2023; Hickson et al., 2022; Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018; Ramezani et al., 2022; Steigerwald et al., 2022). Alang et al. (2022) provide evidence for this assertion in their research findings that lived and vicarious experiences of police violence contribute to mental health challenges disproportionately for Black women at the mere anticipation of police interaction.

The concept of social determinants of health is defined by the assertion that sociopolitical identity and social location are correlated with health outcomes. This is evidenced in health disparities between those with social identities associated with power compared to those with

social identities associated with marginality (Addison et al., 2022; Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018). For people with minoritized social identities, these health disparities specific to presence and severity of mental health conditions extend through the life cycle from one's conception to their inevitably early mortality (Addison et. al, 2022; Bovell-Ammon et al., 2023). Steigerwald et al. (2022) support this assertion related to the life cycle through their research findings reporting higher rates of depression for older adult women with a history of incarceration compared to older adult women who have never been incarcerated. Clark et al. (2023) establish a similar trend in their research illuminating the long-term health consequences specific to Black transwomen with lived experience of sex-segregated incarceration based on challenges such as sexual and physical assault and access to gender-affirming care. Found in the qualitative data derived from the semi-structured interviews of 12 Black American and First Nations Australian transwomen, these long-term health consequences were detailed primarily as symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that emerged post-incarceration (Clark et al., 2023).

In their article providing a framing for the adverse health consequences resulting from incarceration, Nowotny and Kuptsevych Timmer (2018) outline issues such as "exposure to infectious diseases, stress, and violent victimization" (p. 2) as catalysts for these health consequences. Based on these exposures, Nowotny and Kuptsevych-Timmer (2018) advocate for the consideration of "mass incarceration as a social determinant of health specifically for Black men in the United States as well as their families, and members of their communities" (p. 3). Alang et al. (2022) find agreement with this point of advocacy, asserting that the experience of police itself is a social determinant of health as evidenced in their research study demonstrating the increased risk of depressive symptoms among Black women who anticipate police violence subsequent to personal or vicarious experience of incarceration. Although their advocacy focuses

exclusively on Black men and their community extensions, Nowotny and Kuptsevych-Timmer's (2018) call to include incarceration in the discourse on social determinants of health combined with Hickson et al.'s (2022) findings regarding the positive correlation between increased incarceration rates and increased community reports of mental health challenges offers compelling insight regarding the community harm that may be inflicted when Black women are incarcerated (Heimer et al., 2023).

Mental Health Consequences for Mothers, Children, and Families. Mitchell and Davis (2019) describe mass incarceration and the increasing rates of imprisonment for women as the context for their research. Illustrating the need to focus on mothers, specifically, the authors provide a statistic indicating that "approximately two-thirds of incarcerated women have minor children" (Mitchell & Davis, 2019, p. 421). Zhao et al. (2023), find that this group of mothers, representing most incarcerated women, are also significantly more likely than both free mothers and incarcerated women without children to present with mental health challenges. This insight is especially critical based on the alarming rates of mental health challenges reported amongst "nearly three-fourths of incarcerated women" overall (Zhao et al., 2023, p. 493). Given cis-heteronormative gender discrepancies in parental responsibility and child-rearing labor (Heimer et al., 2023), Mitchell and Davis (2019) articulate the need to explore the specific perceptions of women's reentry to community from confinement.

The urgency of this need is further bolstered by the fact that "more than 2.7 million U.S. children currently have a parent who is incarcerated" according to Maton et al. (2022, p. 19). Related to both statistical overrepresentation in incarceration rates and gendered parenting norms (Heimer et al., 2023; Steigerwald et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023), the researchers identify Black mothers with a recent incarceration history as the principal community of interest, citing the

complexity of their experiences of intersectional oppression (Mitchell & Davis, 2019). The authors describe their research's significance as being a response to the "call for more qualitative criminological research of formerly incarcerated mothers in their own words" (Mitchell & Davis, 2019, p. 422) as well as an illuminating project to make visible the experiences of Black women who are most vulnerable to imprisonment. Gleaning from the work of Hickson et al. (2022) and Nowotny and Kuptsevych-Timmer (2018), Mitchell and Davis (2019) evidence the incarceration of Black women as a social determinant of health that not only diminishes the quality of life and relatedly the mental health of those women incarcerated, but of the children and other community members related to these women. Family and fictive kin networks thus are deprived of a central figure in their lives who may be the primary person responsible for their material and emotional wellbeing (Heimer et al., 2023).

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, commonly referred to as ACES, solidifies this claim (Maton et al., 2022). ACES is a critically foundational study produced in partnership between the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente demonstrating the relationship between childhood adversity and comorbidities in adulthood resulting in early death (Felitti et al., 1998). Exposure to the incarceration of a parent or household member is one adversity identified in the study that is related to poorer health outcomes in adulthood, including poor mental health (Felitti et al., 1998). Considering the wide acceptance of ACES within mental health disciplines evidenced by its adoption into course curriculum and practice efforts such as those pertaining to trauma counseling, it is negligent to dismiss the dire consequences of incarceration on Black women, their children, and their communities. These consequences and their implications on intergenerational trauma are made even more apparent in consideration of

statistics indicating that Black girls are more likely to experience the incarceration of a loved one compared to their white peers (Alang et al., 2022).

Solitary Confinement. Whatever colloquialism used for it (Special Housing Unit; The SHU; The Hole), solitary confinement represents an urgent area of analysis within carceral institutions given the dire implications for mental health (Addison et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). A 'protection' discourse is routinely employed in carceral settings in discussions of solitary confinement related to cis and trans women (Clark et al., 2023). Despite the persistence of this discourse, formerly incarcerated cis and trans women report exacerbated consequences on mental health and safety during periods of isolation, including sexual assault perpetrated by prison staff (Clark et al., 2023). Addison et al. (2022) detail similar deleterious effects of solitary confinement on the general population of incarcerated people to include suicidal ideation and incidence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Effects of Post-custodial Supervision on Mental Health

Community reentry is rife with challenges, including those pertaining to mental health, for individuals returning home from incarceration. Among those challenges include the lack of preparation and transition planning that occurs while in custody, the return to environments where traumatic pathways to incarceration persist, and the scrutiny of post-custodial surveillance. This section explores those challenges specific to supervision through probation and parole.

Post-custodial supervision is perhaps the arm of the carceral system that most illuminates the collusion of therapeutic services, such as mental health counseling, in the Prison-Industrial-Complex described by Davis (2003). Purser and Hamlin (2022) support this assertion in their study examining the extent to which reentry programs mirror practices within the prison system,

representing a “haunting” of carceral logics in supposedly therapeutic, health-focused environments. The authors find that reentry programs replicate carceral structures and logics through physical spaces reflecting institutionalization, police presence and other forms of surveillance, and competition with other individuals experiencing economic and social precarity for a limited number of resources (Purser & Hamlin, 2022). According to Phelps et al. (2022), people on probation who were mandated to mental health and substance use treatment programs as a condition of freedom self-reported complex and seemingly contradictory information about their health.

Contributors indicated that though the receipt of these treatment services improved their overall health, the constant fear of being deemed noncompliant with treatment based on factors such as substance use relapse exacerbated their stress levels and sometimes resulted in the use of substances less likely to be captured in urinary analysis such as synthetic marijuana which is associated with more health risks than cannabis itself (Phelps et al., 2022). This contradiction of programs simultaneously improving and jeopardizing mental health may be a consequence of the contradictions inherent in post-custodial supervision which Purser and Hamlin (2022) describe as “a contradictory space that mediates between aid and punishment, inclusion and exclusion, freedom and surveillance” (p. 170). Individuals under the scrutiny of post-custodial supervision have an implicit understanding of this persistent tension between support and punishment as according to Phelps et al. (2022), “people understood that they had to put up with the coercion of the State in order to receive (temporary, often punishing) assistance with basic needs like food, housing, and healthcare” (p. 16).

To disentangle punishment from mental health and substance use treatment, it is imperative to proactively attend to social determinants of health that can ameliorate the living

standards which precipitate incarceration rather than impose treatment as a punitive measure carrying the risk of reincarceration (Davis, 2003; Hickson et al., 2022; Kaba, 2021; Nowotny & Kuptsevych-Timmer, 2018; Phelps et al., 2022). This endeavor necessitates the abolition of the Prison-Industrial-Complex, however, it is incumbent upon us to first understand the circumstances that result in Black women's incarceration, specifically. The next section explores these circumstances as the pathways to incarceration.

Black Women and the Social Determinants of Incarceration

Following Nowotny and Kuptsevych-Timmer's (2018) call to include incarceration in the discourse on social determinants of health, I find it necessary to explicate the social determinants of incarceration for Black women themselves. In other words, I aim to explore the precipitating social conditions that result in the specific charges most associated with the arrest and incarceration of women in general and Black women, specifically. This exploration is aligned with researchers' calls for a racialized and gendered analysis of social factors related to carceral involvement given the frequent prioritization of racially minoritized men (Heimer et al., 2023; Jones and Santos-Lozada, 2023). According to the following review of literature, these social conditions most often pertain to economic precarity, interpersonal violence, and systemic violence and oppression.

Economic Precarity

Prison abolitionists are ardent in their articulation of abolition as a praxis for community safety that prioritizes the essentials necessary for a healthy and enjoyable quality of life available to all people (Kaba, 2021). Economic precarity and the criminalized actions to secure monetary and other survival needs are a significant precipitating factor for women's incarceration (Heimer et al., 2023). Nestadt et al. (2023) identify sex trade as one criminalized survival action

responsible for the incarceration of women, the risk of which is compounded by sex work's association with illicit substance use. Clark et al. (2023) affirm the use of street economies such as sex work and drug sales as a primary pathway toward incarceration for transwomen, specifically, precipitated by exclusions from public and social goods. Similarly, Black cis and transwomen's exclusion from the benefits of a waning social safety net exacerbate the hardships resulting from their disparate experiences of pay inequity and underemployment and thus contribute to the nexus toward incarceration (Heimer et al., 2023).

Educational Exclusion

The pushout of Black students from educational institutions into carceral institutions through excessive and exclusionary discipline practices is well-documented in the literature (Daneshzadeh & Washington, 2017; Kaba, 2021; Morris, 2016). Facilitated by racialized community and educational segregation, this school-to-prison nexus has an increasingly disparate impact on Black girls and young women (Morris, 2016). According to Morris (2016), schools not only perpetuate educational exclusion or pushout for Black girls and young women through disciplinary practices, but through the discourses that problematize and masculinize the dispositions of Black girls and young women who exhibit the courage to reject their subordination in educational settings and society at large. These discourses that are projected through tropes and stereotypes describing Black girls and young women as combative, angry, attitudinal, or 'fast' erode their educational opportunities and thus their possibility of economic prosperity using mainstream economies (Kendall, 2020; Morris, 2016). Interruption of these discourses and the resulting disciplinary actions that accompany them is vital to the disruption of Black girls' and young women's pathways toward incarceration as the investment in quality education is indicated as a major preventive factor of incarceration (Kaba, 2021; Morris 2016).

Mental Health Challenges and Substance Use

Perhaps one of the most incestuous aspects of the carceral-mental health relationship is the involvement police have in wellness checks and mental health response. According to Kaba (2021), this role in mental health first response functions as strategy to increase the legitimacy of policing and its pervasiveness in our everyday lives. The nefariousness of this act that seemingly works as a public good rests in the fact that the criminalization of mental illness and substance use contribute significantly to the incarceration of women (Besteman & Hylton, 2024; Clark et al., 2023; Heimer et al., 2023; Morris & Zisman-Ilani, 2022, Nestadt et al., 2023; Steigerwald et al., 2022).

In addition to mental health and substance use challenges being precipitating factors of incarceration (Clark et al., 2023; Bovell-Ammon et al., 2023; Pettus, 2023; Ramezani et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023), Steigerwald et al. (2022) report that "formerly incarcerated individuals are at a heightened risk of death from drug overdose and suicide in the two weeks after their release" (p. 2179). This increase in risk indicates that incarceration intensifies the imminence of death related to mental health and substance use challenges (Addison et al., 2022; Ramezani et al., 2022). Furthermore, regardless of recent incarceration, minoritized individuals who use substances experience police presence and the potential for police harassment as an impediment to resourcing life-saving harm reduction supplies which may also contribute to overdose mortality (Jones and Santos-Lozada, 2023). The cyclical nature of being exposed to a sociocultural environment that normalizes the victimization of cis and trans women, thus rendering substance use a viable and attractive coping mechanism, and then exposing them to the concentrated trauma and victimization inherent to incarceration (Fraire et al., 2023) as a consequence for substance use disarticulates the legitimacy of the carceral system as a mental

health or substance use intervention (Clark et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2023). Indeed, as articulated by Ramezani et al. (2022) “the collective goals of improving public health and decarceration efforts could be met by addressing behavioral health resource gaps and providing more accessible and affordable health and mental health services” (p. 9).

Interpersonal Violence

Critical literature examining the experiences of women with an incarceration history consistently link women’s incarceration with lived experiences of trauma and interpersonal violence, thus indicating trauma as a precipitating factor to the incarceration of women (Heimer et al., 2023; Pettus, 2023; Steigerwald et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). According to Pettus (2023), incarcerated women have higher ACEs scores than the general public and higher ACEs scores than incarcerated men, underscoring their disparate experiences of early-life trauma. Steigerwald et al. (2022) make similar assertions based on their report that PTSD symptoms are prevalent because of “exposure to interpersonal and other traumas both before and during incarceration, which may be particularly likely for incarcerated women, who report high rates of lifetime trauma, victimization during incarceration, and PTSD” (p. 2180). Heimer et al. (2023) affirm these claims for the overall population of incarcerated women and extend an intersectional lens in their report that Black, Indigenous, Latina, and other women of color have a disparate experience of physical and sexual victimization compared to white women, creating a link between their experiences of abuse with their disparate incarceration rates.

Abolitionists and other community members critical of a punitive response to trauma and harm have an “understanding that harm originates from situations dominated by stress, scarcity, and oppression” (Kaba, 2021, p. 59). Zhao et al. (2023) count foster care involvement among those situations for incarcerated women in addition to other environments where physical and

sexual abuse are rampant such as carceral institutions themselves. Kaba (2021) makes an apt comparison between the punitive function of the carceral system, including courts, and role of punisher taken by the abusers women encounter prior to incarceration. Given the correlation between women's victimization and incarceration histories as well as the violence endemic to prisons, scholars problematize the carceral system's escalating ensnarement of women through what they refer to as "the abuse-to-prison pipeline" (Kaba, 2021, p. 51).

This abuse-to-prison pipeline has intersectional implications with disparate impacts. According to Addison et al. (2022) people with mental health challenges are at a "significantly higher risk of victimization" (p. 1865) within the common culture of physical and sexual assault in carceral institutions. Zhao et al. (2023) support this assertion in their own work and specify prison staff as common perpetrators of sexual violence against women with mental health challenges. Even prior to incarceration, women commonly experience physical, sexual, and psychological victimization during police encounters (Alang et al., 2022; Jones & Santos-Lozada, 2023; Nestadt et al., 2023). In fact, Nestadt et al. (2023) document a significant correlation between intimate partner violence and "police-perpetrated sexual violence" (p. 9) and specify the increased risk for victimization among people of color. Jones and Santos-Lozada (2023) report targeted sexual exploitation and victimization of women in the sex trade by police, citing their vulnerability as members of an underground economy who are also challenged with issues of substance use and poverty. This perpetuation of police brutality through sexual assault and coercion is pervasive and coincides with the indifference police have toward reports of rape and other violence from women in the sex trade (Alang et al., 2022; Nestadt et al., 2023). This indifference, and sometimes punitive action, preserves rape culture and directly contradicts carceral feminist logics (Nestadt et al., 2023).

Applying an intersectional lens to reviewing interpersonal violence as a social determinant of incarceration for Black women, one would be remiss to exclude the specific conditions for trans women. Formerly incarcerated Black trans women routinely report experiences of childhood and intergenerational trauma (Clark et al., 2023). Engendered by racism, cisgenderism, and transmisogyny within and outside the contexts of carceral institutions, Black trans women count among their traumas "severe sexual and physical violence" (Clark et al., 2023, p. 36). Other forms of violence within prisons that trans women detail include forced alterations to their physical appearance such as haircuts, surveillance and punishment for "feminine" behavior, and denial of gender affirming commissary items (Clark et al., 2023). It is with this information that we must heed the words of scholars such as Kaba (2021) when they say that "our political strategies must recognize that racialized gender violence and state violence are not isolated or oppositional, but integral to each other" (p. 51).

Systemic Oppression

Of course, each of the aforementioned social determinants of incarceration are correlated and together form a system of oppression that compounds the adversities experienced by women who encounter the carceral system (Heimer et al., 2023; Jones and Santos-Lozada, 2023; Kaba, 2021). Steigerwald et al. (2022) assert that one form of systemic oppression specific to women is the higher likelihood that women "receive harsher disciplinary action than males" (p. 2179). Zhao et al. (2023) add additional nuance to this oppressive dynamic in their articulation of the disproportionate punitive measures taken against women with mental illnesses, specifically. Similarly, Clark et al. (2023) describe the disproportionate rates of incarceration for transwomen and the disparate impacts on Black transwomen as evolving from "the disproportionate

experiences of discrimination, violence, and victimization transwomen face across their lifespan" (p. 28).

The development and evolution of the U.S. carceral system itself is a descendent of the most formative system of oppression in the conception of the United States of America – chattel slavery (Alang et al., 2022; Kaba, 2021). These familial systems of oppression are inextricably linked to one another as they are linked to the development and maintenance of racial capitalism (Kaba, 2021; Maton et al., 2022). Racial capitalism constructs a hierarchical structure of labor to reify the U.S. caste system that is made real through the various tactics, including the essentialization of personhood standardized by Whiteness. Kaba (2021) aptly states that "you can't talk about criminalization in this country without understanding the history of Blackness and Black people in this country. Politicians have used us as the fuel to make things happen. We're always the canaries in the coal mine" (p. 73). It is the standards of Whiteness that determine which people have access to the ascription of humanity and conversely, who is demonized through criminalization. As an example, in his now infamous remarks about his murder of 18-year-old Mike Brown, then 28-year-old Darren Wilson, who was 6'4", 210 lbs., and outfitted with police uniform and associated weaponry at the time of the shooting, described himself in the encounter as "a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan" (*State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson*, 2014, p. 212). In such an attempt to legitimize his execution of an actual adolescent by infantilizing himself, Wilson's account is imbued with the culture of white supremacy (Okun, n.d.) and white fragility (Diangelo, 2011) predicated upon the subordination of Black people. Wilson's invocation of imagery depicting a Black subject with inordinate strength and an aggressive demeanor, required to be subdued at his discretion, is an account

demonstrative of the psyche of Whiteness and inherent anti-Black racism in the United States (Jirard, 2020; Kaba, 2021).

Whiteness refers to the cultural internalization of white superiority, inculcated through what Bonilla-Silva (2015) calls "racial domination projects (e.g., colonialism, slavery, labor migration, etc.)" (p. 1359). As a cultural phenomenon, the doctrine of white superiority, and conversely the inferiority of racially minoritized peoples, is conditioned into all members of a society, including marginalized people themselves (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Diangelo, 2011; Okun, n.d.). Beyond the evident interpersonal implications of racism that refer to the discrimination and antagonism directed at racially minoritized communities, systemic racism requires institutions to function within the same pathological context for Whiteness to prevail. Given its pervasiveness, white dominance in any system, including the carceral system, necessarily produces adverse consequences for communities of color. The development and preservation of the psyche of oppression and the systems it fortifies are particularly contingent on infrahuman projections and dominance of Black communities (Jirard, 2020).

Infrahumanization. According to Castano and Giner-Sorolla (2006), infrahumanization is a more implicit iteration of dehumanization akin to unconscious bias. More conceptually pointed than simple heuristics or implicit bias, however, infrahumanization is posited as a tactic of psychological self-preservation employed by in-groups as a means of avoiding the cognitive and affective dissonance that may result from witnessing or inflicting harm on out-group members despite an espoused commitment or self-concept rooted in morality (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Vaes et al., 2010). The primary method of operationalizing infrahumanization is for the in-group to engage in a reductionist conceptualization of the out-group's emotional dynamism (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Vaes et al., 2010). In other words, the in-group

solely ascribes primary emotions such as anger and fear to the out-group, making them indistinguishable from other animals, while ranking themselves higher on the ordinal scale of humanity based on their self-ascription of secondary emotions, such as hope and pride (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Vaes et al., 2010). According to Kaba (2021), it is the "'innately inferior' bodies that can be debased, punished, and killed without consequence. The twist is that Black people have always been considered dangerous along with our disposability" (p. 32).

In the case of law enforcement and other stakeholders in the Prison Industrial Complex, police, judges, and other staff constitute the in-group, as operatives of the carceral state, and are thus assigned institutional power with the authority to wield it over civilians. Marginalized communities, including but not limited to, Black, transgender, and impoverished communities, represent the quintessential out-groups targeted by, and at the mercy of, this pathological psyche, as they do in every institution founded upon white supremacy and cis-hetero Patriarchy. Contrary to a popular refrain from police apologists decrying the abuse of authority from "a few bad apples," infrahumanization belies the notion of individualism (Kaba, 2021). A central tenet of white fragility (Diangelo, 2011), this microaggressive defense strategy is often weaponized in claims that violence enacted toward marginalized communities represents isolated occurrences. In their pivotal study, Castano and Giner-Sorolla (2006) found:

> experimental evidence that infrahumanization of a target can be a consequence of in-group violence against that target as well as a cause. The pattern that emerged from our studies (Experiment 1 and 3) also suggests that infrahumanization is not intensified merely by perceiving the suffering of another group; instead, the attribution of responsibility for the suffering to one's own group is necessary. (p. 816).

The discursive and over-reliant emphasis on individualism not only exemplifies the obfuscation of systemic oppression essential to its maintenance, but it is evidently erroneous concerning intergroup violence (Brown & Schept, 2017; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Diangelo, 2011). This phenomenon becomes painfully apparent when considering the derisive responses of policing and Prison Industrial Complex advocates who chide calls for police accountability, demonstrate selective collectivism in adornment of 'thin-blue-line' paraphernalia, and terrorize marginalized communities as self-appointed agents of the system. The implication, then, is that the identity of policing and the Prison Industrial Complex in the United States is dependent upon the criminalization and related dehumanization and domination of society's most marginalized (Kaba, 2021).

As previously detailed, Black women are too often excluded from conversations on systemic oppression which is evidently a consequence of intersectional oppression (Kaba, 2021). Infrahumanization is no doubt at play in this dynamic of invisibilization. This exclusion is in dire need of remedy given the various forms of systemic violence that prey upon Black women and are responsible for the persistent disparities that attempt to extinguish us daily.

Oregon's Carceral Landscape for Women

The subject of this research, and thus the literature review, is applicable to the crisis of mass incarceration of women across the United States and other parts of the globe. It is useful, however, to explore Oregon's specific carceral landscape for women because it is the context for all contributors involved in this work. The following information provides helpful context about the structure of incarceration for women in Oregon, ballot measures turned statutes that have influenced women's incarceration in the state, and reports of lived experience within the women's prison.

Coffee Creek Correctional Facility – Oregon's Only Women's Prison

Coffee Creek Correctional Facility is the sole women's prison in Oregon. Located in Wilsonville, OR, approximately 15 miles South of Portland, OR, Coffee Creek is strategically located in the most densely populated area of the state (Women's Justice Institute & Center for Effective Public Policy, 2023). According to the Women's Justice Institute and Center for Effective Public Policy (2023), "there are a total of 9,250 justice-involved women in the Oregon prison and community supervision system, of which approximately 898 are in Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, 5,629 are on probation, 115 are on parole and 2,608 are on post-prison supervision" (p. 185). Within the number of women incarcerated at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, both Native American women and Black women are overrepresented compared to their population size within the state. Native American women make up "5% of the Coffee Creek prison population" despite representing only 1% of Oregon's total population while Black women make up "8% of the Coffee Creek prison population" despite representing only 2% of Oregon's total population (Women's Justice Institute & Center for Effective Public Policy, 2023, p. 187). According to the Women's Justice Institute and Center for Effective Public Policy (2023), "Oregon defines criminal offenses in three Offense Groups: Person, Property and Statutory, (which includes drug crimes). The top offenses among the population of incarcerated women included: Assault (175), Homicide (158), Robbery (89), Other (82), Drugs (69) and Vehicle Theft (51)" (pp. 191-192).

Oregon Ballot Measures

Two Oregon ballot measures-turned-statutes have significant implications for the incarceration of women in the state. Measure 11, passed by Oregon voters in 1994, establishes mandatory minimum sentences for a specific list of crimes (State of Oregon Legislative

Committee Services, 2004). Measure 110, passed by Oregon voters in 2020, decriminalized substance use across the state before being effectively repealed in 2024 through House Bill 4002.

Measure 11 – Mandatory Minimums. In 1994 Oregonians passed the controversial Ballot Measure 11, later codified into Oregon Statute, solidifying the current imposition of mandatory minimums for 21 offenses (State of Oregon Legislative Committee Services, 2004). These 21 offenses include: Assault, Compelling Prostitution, Kidnapping, Robbery, Using a Child in a Display of Sexually Explicit Conduct, Arson when the offense represented a threat of serious physical injury, Manslaughter, Rape, Sexual Abuse, Sodomy, Unlawful Sexual Penetration, Conspiracy to Commit Murder/Attempted Murder, and Murder (State of Oregon Legislative Committee Services, 2004). Ballot Measure 11 arrived in concert with, what is colloquially known as, the national 1994 crime bill that employed similar "tough on crime" discourse and policy responsible for mass incarceration. Both the 1994 crime bill and Measure 11 have been rightfully criticized for their disparate impact on Black communities and other communities of color. Between 2013 and 2018, Black women, specifically, were indicted on Measure 11 offenses at a rate 3.5 times that of white women in Oregon (Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, 2021).

Measure 110 and its Repeal – House Bill 4002. In 2020 Oregonians made the unprecedented decision to decriminalize substance use in favor of supporting treatment and recovery. As a backlash to this forward movement to reduce punitive measures against substance use, fueled by opposition to public use among unhoused people, Oregon legislators proposed and passed House Bill 4002 in 2024 which recriminalizes substance use. Despite offering a deflection model as an optional alternative for police departments across the state, Oregonians are once again at risk of being ensnared by the carceral system for substance use (excluding

marijuana) as of September 1, 2024. As described earlier in this chapter, this decision is likely to have a disparate impact on minoritized women who experience substance use as a pathway to incarceration.

Whisper Networks and Bad Date Sheets – The Case of Tony Klein

A 2023 assessment of Coffee Creek Correctional Facility explored the experiences of currently incarcerated women, trans, and nonbinary people within the institution (Women's Justice Institute & Center for Effective Public Policy, 2023). This assessment, along with a related report from The Women's Justice Project (2024), details experiences of rampant racism, psychological, emotional, and physical abuse endured by incarcerated individuals at Coffee Creek from staff (Women's Justice Institute & Center for Effective Public Policy, 2023). One of the most notorious of these cases is that of former Coffee Creek nurse, Tony Klein. According to Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB, 2023), Klein was convicted of sexually assaulting 9 incarcerated women over his 7-year tenure with the institution. The conviction came from the U.S. Department of Justice in 2023 after "the Washington County District Attorney's Office declined to prosecute the case in 2018, following an investigation by Oregon State Police" (OPB, 2023, para. 27). This case of sexual assault by a health professional within Coffee Creek is consistent with previously described information about rape culture within correctional institutions and the impunity with which staff can perpetuate said culture. Incarcerated individuals at Coffee Creek report that these instances of abuse are widely known, among incarcerated people and staff alike, and that they operate the same 'whisper networks', or what is referred to as 'bad date sheets' in sex trade communities, that are used among women to warn one another about mutually acquainted abusers. Rather than report experiences of abuse to staff, which carries the risk of being confined in the Special Housing Unit and other punitive actions or

ostracism, women work to protect themselves as much as possible knowing that the state does not offer protection and is often complicit in the harm (The Women's Justice Project, 2024; Women's Justice Institute & Center for Effective Public Policy, 2023).

The Abolition Papers: Integrating the Theoretical Frameworks

Haymarket Books produced a four-part book series collectively referred to as The Abolition Papers. In order of publication dates (from 2021 to 2024), these titles include: *We Do This 'til We Free Us* by Mariame Kaba; *Abolition.Feminism.Now.* by Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie; *Rehearsals for Living* by Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson; and *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition* by Ruth Wilson Gilmore. I read the first three currently available titles in order of publication, as *Change Everything* is not yet in publication at the time of this dissertation. What follows is a review of the three available works and their core themes as related to carcerality, Black women, mental health justice, and, of course, abolition. Although previously described, I provide a more detailed overview of each of these titles as a vehicle to provide a more extensive description of Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 2018), Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality Theory (Collins, 2019). This decision is based on the ways in which the collective works of The Abolition Papers (Davis et al., 2022; Kaba, 2021; Maynard & Simpson, 2022) embody the core elements of the aforementioned theories and are canonical for the abolition feminist framing critical to this study.

We Do This 'til We Free Us

Mariame Kaba's (2021) *We Do This 'til We Free Us*, provides the foundational text for The Abolition Papers, ushering the reader through core principles of abolitionist theory and praxis in seven parts. First contextualizing abolition as a praxis of world-building and life-

making rather than one occupied primarily with ambitions of destruction and demolition, Kaba (2021) incites the reader to dream beyond our current sociopolitical context and absolve ourselves of the confinement of our psyches. But of course, to escape confinement, psychological or otherwise, takes practicality many would argue. Kaba (2021) leans into this persistent and intense desire for practical "how-to" applications of abolition with clear and direct strategies for decarceration and mitigating police interactions that offer potential as precursors to abolition. However, Kaba (2021) does not equate practicality with the antithesis of imagination, but instead utilizes it as a generative tool to inspire more imagination with the intent of prison obsolescence. These concepts of world-building and life-making are consistent with the concept of growth-fostering relationships, a key construct of Relational Cultural Theory (RCT; Jordan, 2018).

The necessity of growth-fostering relationships for healthy human development is the central construct upon which RCT thrives (Jordan, 2018). This construct suggests that relationships characterized by *mutuality* and *authenticity* enable all people in the relationship to grow in a manner that is meaningful to the individuals and the system of relationships the individuals participate in (Jordan, 2018). Mutuality entails both mutual empathy and mutual empowerment of all people in the relationship, in which each person is empowered to represent their needs and desires to the other(s) and expect that their feelings and experience will be met with genuine care and responsiveness; thus, each person changes (grows) in response to the others (Jordan, 2018). According to Jordan (2018), growth-fostering relationships can be identified by "the five good things" (p. 30) including zest (or energy), clarity (increased understanding of self, others, and relationship), sense of worth, productivity (action), and

increased desire for connection. These five elements are essential to the type of world-building Kaba (2021) describes and the imagination required to begin dreaming those worlds.

In the second part of the book, Kaba (2021) continues to facilitate a psychic shift for the reader by explicitly exploring the criminalization of Black women who are victimized through interpersonal violence, specifically physical and sexual violence. Throughout this section, Kaba (2021) explicates the history of anti-Black sexism or misogynoir that simultaneously legitimates the acts of violence inflicted on Black women and punishes us for attempts at survival, for our defiance of heteropatriarchy. What Kaba (2021) terms "the abuse-to-prison-pipeline" (p. 51), is the horrendous consequence of a system and society that has always dehumanized Black women and assumed that we are both incapable of mind-body sovereignty and prone to dysfunction to the extent that we are responsible for the harms done to us and in need of patriarchal and state control.

Kaba's (2021) explication of the criminalization of Black women even during victimization is reflective of a central organizing principle of both Black Feminist Theory and Intersectionality Theory related to Black women's experience of the matrix-of-domination (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000; Collins, 2019). According to Collins (2000), Black Feminist Theory centers the experiences of Black women in the United States predicated on the notion that Black women in the U.S. have a uniquely complex relationship with oppression and resulting resistance strategies. Traversing the paradox of inhabiting a nation reliant on the myth of "freedom for all" and the legacy of chattel slavery, U.S Black women possess a criticality that may evade others who do not have to contend with the blatant gaslighting of the dominant structure in multiple dimensions (Collins, 2000; Collins, 2019). It is this positionality within the U.S. context that undergirds the assumption that there is inclusive mutuality between theory and

practice in Black Feminist Theory. Because oppression is constantly exerted on U.S. Black women as a function of the settler state, Black women do not solely use our intellect to understand oppression, but to simultaneously devise methods to subvert it as the primary objective (Collins, 2000; Collins, 2019).

The historiography provided by Kaba (2021) is consistent with the assumptions of Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000) and Intersectionality Theory (Collins, 2019). The historiography also belies the notion of a carceral system that is protective of women from the tyranny of domestic and interpersonal violence, a talking point often used to justify the existence of prisons. In the exploration of the stories of women who have been victimized through both interpersonal and state sanctioned violence, Kaba (2021) dislodges the idea that prisons mean protection for women from harm. Simultaneously, Kaba (2021) ensures that we don't perpetuate dehumanizing logics through 'perfect victim' narratives by resisting flat rearticulations of the lives of the women explored such as their involvement in survival sex work.

Following the detail of how the carceral system retraumatizes victims and survivors of interpersonal violence, Kaba (2021) outlines why the carceral system is also ineffective for addressing the harms done by perpetrators of violence, including police, in part 3 of the book. The primary rationale for this position is that incarcerating perpetrators of violence takes an individualist approach to systemic societal ills. Individualism as a strategy to understand and intervene in social challenges is problematized in Relational Cultural (Jordan, 2018), Black Feminist (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality (Collins, 2019) theories.

In parts 4 and 5 of the book, Kaba (2021) returns to the notions of practice and practicality. In part 4, the focus is on reform, how it is different than abolition, and how it can be

wielded properly as a tool to support impending abolition in the interim. Kaba (2021) even provides an evaluative tool for whether an abolitionist should engage with a reformist idea.

> Evaluation:
> 1. Are the proposed reforms allocating more money to the police? If yes, then you should oppose them.
> 2. Are the proposed reforms advocating for more police and policing (under euphemistic terms like "community policing" run out of regular police districts)? If yes, then you should oppose them.
> 3. Are the proposed reforms primarily technology-focused? If yes, then you should oppose them.
> 4. Are the proposed reforms focused on individual dialogues with individual cops? And will these "dialogues" be funded with tax dollars? If yes, then you should oppose them. (p. 70)

Part 5 of the book delves deeper into practice by sharing contemporary exemplars of abolitionist praxis in communities like those of Chicago related to reparations, participatory defense campaigns, and other abolitionist organizing endeavors. These exemplars are reflective of the premise of coalition building foundational to Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000) and Intersectionality Theory (2019). Parts 6 and 7 of the book reaffirm abolitionist principles with an emphasis on articulating abolitionist aims. Kaba (2021) accomplishes this reaffirmation, in part, through articulations of distinctions between accountability and healing, punishment and consequences, restorative justice and transformative justice, and activism and organizing. These concepts are in direct alignment with concepts from Relational Cultural Theory such as relational repair and relational courage in which relationships are restored through various means, including accountability (Jordan, 2018). This restoration is meant to mitigate the circumstances of persistent disconnection and isolation which impede the development of growth-fostering relationships necessary for healthy individuals and communities.

Abolition. Feminism. Now.

Abolition. Feminism. Now. by Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie (2022) advances Kaba's (2021) work relevant to women and the carceral system. Further elucidating the misconceptions that aggrandize the carceral system as a bastion for women's protection, Davis et al. (2022) make explicit the mutual interests of feminism and prison abolition. More pointedly, Davis et al. (2022) outline the genealogy of abolition as undergirded by Black feminists and Black feminist principles. Provided the inclusion of feminist praxis since the inception of abolition organizing, Davis et al. (2022) advocate for the inclusion of the abolitionist imagination within feminist movements as an imperative for forward movement, especially those intended to end the culture of abuse targeting communities of women, trans, and nonbinary people. A combatant to carceral feminism, Davis et al. (2022) offer a framework for what they call 'abolition feminism', the tenets of which work alongside Relational Cultural (Jordan, 2018), Black Feminist (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000), and Intersectionality (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989) theories to frame this research study and will be discussed in the conceptual framework section of chapter 3.

Rehearsals for Living

Rehearsal for Living by Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2022) makes an offering of the authors' reflections in connection to one another as they confront a myriad of crises in Canada to include COVID-19, police brutality and militarization, and other outcomes of colonialism and racism. Maynard and Simpson (2022), identifying as Black and Native, respectively, make concrete the interconnected pursuits of freedom for Black and Indigenous communities as well as the need to have an international abolitionist praxis that transcends emphasis on the United States of America. This practice is consistent with the

tradition of Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000) that acknowledges the theoretical and political power of Black women across nations and the need to build coalitions with other minoritized communities across contexts and across borders.

Conceptualizing Abolition in Counseling and Counselor Education

The Abolitionist Papers offered critical illumination to me in the pursuit of this research as conceptualizing prison abolition is uncharted territory for counseling and counselor education as a discipline. As an emergent field of study, there is currently no substantive literature exploring counseling/counseling education conceptualizations of prison abolition, the extent to which counselors/counselor-educators perpetuate carceral logics, or the imperative to train counselors/counselor-educators in anti-carceral perspectives as an extension of social justice praxis (Afuape & Oldham, 2022). In fact, Burkholder et al. (2020) described a paucity of research in exploring the extent to which counselor education attends to competencies in working with incarcerated peoples and their families, let alone the extent to which members of the discipline are involved in orienting themselves toward an abolitionist conscience. Maton et al. (2022) solidify this deficit in understanding and capacity for action in their assertion that counselors, though they are among a group of professionals assumed responsible for the support for children with incarcerated loved ones, are not equipped with the training and skill to provide such support. Considering both the dearth in scholarship aimed at educating practitioners about the consequences of mass incarceration and the institutional inactivity in contributing to activist efforts aimed at upending the prison industrial complex (Afuape & Oldham, 2022), the task to engage an abolitionist politic seems daunting. Despite this disadvantage, there is a variety of conceptual literature within other disciplines which offers compelling evidence for the exploration of this research.

To decrease the chasm between the silence about carcerality in counseling contexts and moving toward an abolitionist future in the field, I review literature in other disciplines where scholars have begun to address the concept of abolition in their respective fields. What follows is a thematic synthesis of what I've learned thus far about the possibilities of exploring abolition in counselor education using visual methods. My general observations of the literature illuminate the lack of empirical research on abolition across disciplines and the necessity of using art to move toward abolitionism. The most salient themes from the literature itself, which are consistent with The Abolition Papers, include imperatives from critical theory to deconstruct power inequities (Hill, 2013; Jones & melo 2021; Kaba, 2021); developing sites of abolitionist imagination (Davis, 2003; Garcia & Santiago de Roock, 2021; Hill, 2013; Jones & melo, 2021; Kaba, 2021; Raygoza, Norris, & León, 2021; Sutcliffe, 2015); resisting oversimplified solutions (Chadwick, 2019; Davis, 2003; Hill, 2013; Kaba, 2021); and leveraging disciplinary ties to carceralism and taking accountability for those ties (Daneshzadeh & Washington, 2017; Garcia & Santiago de Roock, 2021; Jones & melo, 2021; Kaba, 2021; Raygoza, Norris, & León, 2021;).

Paucity of Empirical Research

There is a dearth of empirical research across disciplines on prison abolition. Much of the scholarship that exists is conceptual and/or published in books rather than peer-reviewed research journals, which is viewed as a deficit by the traditionally white supremacist standards of academia. Thus, the limited access to research complicates the pursuit of abolition based on the values of both the academy and professional associations which emphasize positivist epistemologies to substantiate research validity. Although abolitionists acknowledge the real and perceived limitations of extant scholarship, they offer a critical assessment of the function of belittling their works. According to Sutcliffe (2015), whose mostly white middle-class writing

students rejected the work of abolitionists like Angela Davis by discrediting it as too subjective, "objectivity legitimizes apathy as a means of depowering rage and stabilizing would be revolution" (p. 2). From this lens, having minimal "objective" empirical research is less a commentary on the importance and validity of abolitionist scholarship, and more an indictment of the structures of traditional publication that subdue nonconforming, abolitionist writers' perspectives lest they incite revolution. Rather than relying on these positivist traditions, counseling education can look toward art and expression, elements that already exist in our discipline, to engage the principles of abolition.

Art Activism

According to Loveless (2019), "the arts offer modes of sensuous, aesthetic attunement, and work as a conduit to focus attention, elicit public discourse, and shape cultural imaginaries" (p. 16). Given the heavy cognitive and affective load induced by conversations of prison abolition, utilizing various art forms can support contributors and researchers with the task of conceptualizing or imagining a post-carceral future. Literature (Hill, 2013; Sutcliffe, 2015), photography (Fleetwood, 2015), poetry and hip-hop (Daneshzadeh & Washington, 2017), and narrative and anecdote (Fleetwood, 2015; Jones & melo, 2021) are all examples of artistic mediums that offer utility in examining carceral realities and abolitionist futures. This art empowers contributors to tell vulnerable stories in ways most comfortable to them (Daneshzadeh & Washington, 2017) and evokes feelings in audiences that may otherwise be disconnected or apathetic (Sutcliffe, 2015). Simultaneously, the creativity of contributors and researchers can inspire them to envision possibilities that seem unattainable or that they have been conditioned to disregard by white supremacist hegemony (Sutcliffe, 2015). This vision is the foundation for developing an abolitionist politic. Critical theory has made a few small inroads in counseling, but

the field has the responsibility to continue to improve its ability to follow through with action that deconstructs our complicity in oppressive dynamics.

Imperatives from Critical Theory to Deconstruct Dominance and Power

In his article, *A World Without Prisons: Teaching Confinement Literature and the Promise of Prison Abolition*, Hill (2013) asserts the following:

> To create a world where abolition is both possible and prudent, we must begin to challenge our individual and collective conceptions of fairness, justice, punishment, and power. We must also reconsider the role of our most coveted and taken-for-granted social institutions, such as courts, law enforcement, and even the government itself. (p. 19)

Critical inquiry and structural rearrangement are foundational to Hill's (2013) proposal to move toward abolitionist thinking. Jones and melo (2021) take a similar approach as they identify Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) and abolition as the foundational theories undergirding their research to build a framework for envisioning abolitionist perspectives in computer science education. The researchers justify the use of their theoretical framework given its ontological and epistemological insights that allow the researchers to complicate attempts to attract more Black people to computer science education by juxtaposing the field's inattention to its contribution of surveillance technologies that aid in the disparate rates of incarceration and mortality for Black people (Jones and melo, 2021). From this lens, Jones and melo (2021) describe multiple findings consistent with critical theory to support the movement toward an abolitionist framework in computer science education including: dismantling hierarchies in computer science education and elsewhere; disrupting the hierarchy of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education over other forms of knowledge; prioritizing relationship over rugged individualism; and actively subverting systems of oppression including predictive policing and

what Kaba (2021) refers to as “preventative captivity” (p.32). Counseling education has an opportunity to create a similar movement dismantling our own relationship to carceralism. The insights from formerly incarcerated Black women can support this movement.

Developing Sites of Abolitionist Imagination

One of the most salient themes throughout abolitionist literature and central actions proposed to subvert systems of oppression, namely the prison-industrial-complex and the industries complicit in its maintenance, is the creation of possibilities through a renewed societal imagination (Kaba, 2021). Because there is no infallible, concrete framework for prison abolition, authors of abolitionist literature frequently document the need to embrace creativity and imagination as sites for new reality construction rather than relying on the status quo that assumes that prisons and policing are inevitable, or even instrumental, aspects of society (Davis, 2003; Hill, 2013; Jones & melo, 2021; Kaba, 2021; Raygoza, Norris, & León, 2021). Through a methodology exploring a fictional narrative, Jones and melo (2021) engage in counter-storytelling in a manner that affords the researchers the opportunity to be imaginative. The researchers take this creative opportunity by constructing two contrasting speculatives that allow them to explore both the consequences of the status quo and the possibilities of what they define as an abolitionist future in computer science education (Jones & melo, 2021). Should we remain resistant or apathetic to these speculatives and imaginaries, Garcia and Santiago de Roock (2021) warn us that “the future has already been colonized” (p. 191). This research takes heed to this warning on behalf of counselor education through exploration of formerly incarcerated Black women’s visions for abolition and mental health justice.

Resisting Oversimplified Solutions

Because abolitionist scholars and researchers value imagination as an integral component of their work given the ubiquity of carceralism, a constant refrain from those who object to an abolitionist agenda is that it is overly idealistic (Kaba, 2021). Abolitionist scholars reject this criticism and ardently convey the complexity inherent in justice work (Davis, 2003; Hill, 2013). In fact, Kaba (2021) states matter-of-factly that the experience and perpetuation of harm is inevitable as a condition of our humanity and that abolition is not so naïve as to attempt utopian outcomes. Chadwick (2019) addresses a similar sentiment about consensual allyship in her assertion that "consensual allyship is not a comfortable place with a promise of an easy fix or simple redress and reconciliation. Comfort in disquiet is required to find a different way forward" (p. 112). Ironically, the complexity abolitionists carefully articulate in their work to address incarceration as a public health crisis with implications related to justice in housing, economic security, mental and other healthcare is relatively absent in the "law and order" or even reformer perspectives that conceptualize carceral systems as the sole or primary response to societal challenges (Davis, 2003; Sutcliffe, 2015). Counselors and counselor educators can find our thread in this complex system and do more to actively address the mental health related challenges that contribute to criminalization.

Disciplinary Ties to Carceralism: Leverage and Accountability

Making explicit connection to seemingly covert or abstract relationships between carceralism and academic disciplines that may not be linked intuitively to the prison industrial complex is another salient point made in abolitionist literature. Scholars problematize the role of disciplines such as computer science education (Jones & melo, 2021), teacher education (Raygoza, Norris, & León, 2021), and civics and literacy education (Garcia & Santiago de

Roock, 2021) in maintaining the carceral continuum through mechanisms like racialized surveillance. Daneshzadeh and Washington (2017) address this point specifically regarding school counselors and the way they "contribute to the removal of large numbers of [minoritized] students through the school-to-prison pipeline" (p. 6). This perspective creates as counternarrative to the superficial notion of a school-to-prison nexus as one that is produced actively by school officials through the pushout of students of color. By first taking accountability for these structures supporting the maintenance of oppression, scholars insist that we can leverage our disciplines to subvert those oppressive structures and help realize an abolitionist future (Daneshzadeh & Washington, 2017). Kaba (2021) explicitly states that education is instrumental in the abolitionist pursuit given its utility in making communities aware of what is possible beyond the status quo of policing.

Despite having minimal experiential research, abolitionist literature illuminates the revolutionary theory and praxis educators claim to value, particularly in the current zeitgeist where social justice ideologies are currency, used legitimately and illegitimately. Commonly viewed as unrealistic or too abstract, the concepts of abolition are reified in the literature as commitment to critical interpretation, constructing new realities through imagination, resisting oversimplification of our complex humanity, and leveraging our educational disciplines to restructure our notions of justice. Implications from this review suggest that we continue to conceptualize and theorize abolition into reality from our own vantage points and fields of study. The literature also suggests that visual and other artistic methods may be a meaningful way to approach research on abolition. I view my research of using cellphilming to explore how formerly incarcerated Black women depict their mental health experiences and envision an abolitionist society as a responsive next step to improving counselors' awareness of the perils of

mass incarceration. This research may also serve as a catalyst for an abolitionist politic in the discipline.

On the Path to Freedom: Strategies for Abolition

Despite the popular connotations of abolition that simply emphasize the extinction of carceral systems, including policing, abolition is about building a healthy society where those systems are obsolete (Kaba, 2021). In alignment with Relational Cultural Theory, this society problematizes conceptualizations of maturation as rooted in rugged individualism and autonomy and instead measures the health and functionality of society by the extent to which we can collaborate in meaningful ways, especially when it is difficult to do so (Jordan, 2018; Kaba, 2021). According to Kaba (2021), "you cannot have safety without strong, empathic relationships with others" (p. 98). Kaba (2021) recommends the following ten strategies to move our communities out of reliance on the carceral system:

1. Organizing for dramatic decreases of police budgets and redirecting those funds to other social goods (defunding the police).
2. Ending cash bail.
3. Overturning police bills of rights.
4. Abolishing police unions.
5. Crowding out the police in our communities.
6. Disarming the police.
7. Creating abolitionist messages that penetrate the public consciousness to disrupt the idea that cops = safety.
8. Building community-based interventions that address harms without relying on police.
9. Evaluating any reforms based on these criteria.
10. Thinking through the end of the police and imagining alternatives. (p. 13)

Additionally, Kaba (2021) advocates for the prioritization of collective or community care over self-care, an essential element to this research and its methodology.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides the review of extant literature pertaining to the incarceration of women to demonstrate the necessity of engaging the topic within counseling and counselor education. Divided into five major sections, the literature review begins with information about the effects of incarceration and postcustodial supervision on mental health. The second section further explores the consequences of incarceration specific to Black women and outlines the social determinants that act as pathways to incarceration for Black women. The third portion of this chapter captures a localized view of women's incarceration within the context of the U.S. state where the research occurred. The fourth section of the literature review describes The Abolition Papers series from Haymarket books that support the overall framework of the research project. The final portion of the literature review explores literature across disciplines where the concept of abolition is broached to describe how abolition could be conceptualized in counseling and counselor education, including in this research project. The next chapter of the dissertation will cover how I apply some of these concepts in the current research. This next chapter will include information about the research approach, research question, contributors/co-producers, data collection and analysis, and a self-care protocol.

CHAPTER 3: Method

The purpose of this action-oriented, participatory visual narrative inquiry (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2018) was to explore the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women relevant to mental health. My aim was to detail how those experiences support a vision for an abolitionist future and the adoption of an abolitionist politic in counseling and counselor education. This chapter will illuminate the overall methodology, protocols, and procedures that were used to support the research purpose. In the sections to follow, I will provide detailed information pertaining to the research approach, research questions, contributors, instruments, data collection procedures, and process for data analysis.

Research Approach: Participatory Visual Narrative Inquiry/Cellphilming

The research purpose and objectives of this study are strongly aligned with an action research approach in the form of participatory visual narrative inquiry. Specifically, the visual methodology that I used is participatory video or cellphilming, with an optional element of photo elicitation (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2018). Participatory video is a research paradigm that implicitly generates the political action of community members using video planning, production, and screening (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2018). The ethos of participatory video methodology is its emphasis on potential solutions to sociopolitical issues that may be derived from the video content and embedded stories (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2018). Cellphilms are a specific type of participatory video (Macentee, et al., 2016).

Coined by Dockney and Tomaselli (2009) and further explicated by Macentee, et al. (2016), cellphilms provide an accessible method for engaging community in action research where the contributors can be in the power position of filming social issues from their own vantage points with cellphones, both while the researcher is present as well as upon their exit. A

form of community-based action research (Macentee, et al., 2016), the accessibility of this methodology lies in the ubiquity of cellphones. Cellphones with audiovisual capability are omnipresent in daily modern life making it likely that contributors not only have immediate access to the device but can operate video functions with relative sophistication (Macentee, et al., 2016). This accessibility mitigates the power differential between the researcher and contributors during research production given that it minimizes the assumption of or reliance on researcher expertise that may be implied in the use of more specialized technology (Macentee, et al., 2016; Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2018). Additionally, cellphilming is an agentic process in that it empowers community members to continue their activism using cellphilms once the researcher has completed data collection, as contributors have continued access to the means of research production (Macentee, et al., 2016; Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2018). This, according to Loveless (2019), offers a "mode of rendering research public" (p. 24). These aspects of cellphilming are congruent with the ontological and epistemological philosophies of Relational Cultural, Black Feminist, and Intersectionality Theories which centralize social justice through the contextualization of power and oppression (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000; Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; Jordan, 2018). Cellphilm production offers an opportunity for Black women to center themselves, direct an audience toward their own worldviews, and expose truths, realities, and dreams known most intimately to Black women which have been suppressed by prevailing hegemonic ideologies or controlling images (Collins, 2000; Jordan, 2018). Gunn et al. (2022) find that this and other forms of storytelling are an evocative, agentic, and therapeutic method for conducting research with Black women who have experience of incarceration given the emphasis on the contributors' personal narratives with no clinical or legal consequences.

The accessible and agentic quality of cellphilm production also makes it compelling for use as a methodological approach in research aimed toward an abolitionist effort. In fact, cellphone videos have already become a central feature of public journalism used to capture racist injustices enacted on behalf of the carceral system (Bylander, 2015; Macentee, et al., 2016). Countless instances of police brutality resulting in the extrajudicial murder of Black people have been memorialized through the public's use of cellphone footage that was subsequently disseminated through mass media (Bylander, 2015). This exposure of police brutality to global audiences has contributed to strides in undermining carceral logics that attempt to legitimate the system as necessary and effective. Despite their utility in illuminating the irredeemable qualities of the carceral system, however, dissemination of cellphone videos containing police brutality have been problematized in popular culture given their contribution to vicarious trauma of the communities exposed to the content of the videos. Provided its emphasis on abolition, the proposed research study extends an opportunity to reorient our use of the cellphone in the context of carceralism toward liberation and future-building beyond mere documentation of an oppressive reality.

As presented in chapter one of this study, abolition is defined by its focus "on building a society where it is possible to address harm without relying on structural forms of oppression or the violent systems that increase it" (Kaba, 2021, p. 2). Brown and Schept (2017) further elucidate this concept in their articulation of abolition as:

> About understanding more fully – across time and space – that we cannot talk about the "root conditions" of crime, violence, and precarity unless we are talking about health (Loyd, 2014), education (Meiners, 2007), economy (Aviram, 2015; Schept, 2015; Wacquant, 2009), and other forms of racial and social justice at the local and national

> level, with an understanding that these discussions and modes of organizing have been ongoing historically outside of and unrecognized by criminology. Following Davis (2003) and Gilmore (2007), we must resist the urge to envision abolition as an alternative metaphorical and material edifice that can fill the footprint of the prison (Davis, 2003). Rather, seen as a set of relationships, abolition and abolitionist reforms focus on building up health, education, housing, jobs, and alternative approaches to harm as they also dismantle the prison. In this manner, abolition is predicated upon the nature and possibility of freedom and emancipated forms of life. (p. 446)

The concepts of *building* and envisioning new *possibilities* are critical to each of these articulations of abolitionism. From this perspective, abolition can be viewed as an afrofuturist endeavor marked by the possibility for Black people historically preyed upon by the carceral system to "create new possibilities for the future" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxi). This emphasis is well-placed within the context of this research and its use of cellphilm methodology as an afrofuturist technology evidenced by the opportunities for communities to engage in a speculative visualization of their lives absent carceral violence, rather than focusing the cellphilm solely on the documentation of tyranny.

Research Question

In the building project to end carceral violence, I took heed to the words of Kaba (2021) and Brown and Schept (2017) to consider health as a requisite for abolition and liberation. I suggest a relation to mental health specifically in the speculative vision for abolition. The original research question guiding this project was the following:

> How do formerly incarcerated Black women describe and depict their mental health experiences before, during, and after incarceration?

The aim of this question was to create a visualization of an abolitionist future generated by Black women with lived experience of the carceral system using the expressions of their respective mental health journeys as a catalyst. I wanted to understand how formerly incarcerated Black women have experienced mental health while subjected to the carceral system, if and how they had found support during their most memorable mental health challenges, and how their mental health challenges may have been correlated with incarceration experience. Throughout engagement with my co-producers, however, the research question evolved into:

> How do formerly incarcerated Black women describe and depict their experiences of incarceration and conceptualizations for abolition and mental health justice?

This question created space for information to be included that may have been discovered in the original research question without confining the contributors to share their stories in a prescriptive manner. Additionally, the revised question created flexibility in allowing for multiple approaches to the question and increased agency for contributors in sharing vulnerable details of their stories with discretion. This flexibility was particularly crucial as the timeline for this research was shortened at the suggestion of contributors, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

My intention of exploring this research and research question was to incite counselors and counselor educators toward an abolitionist politic upon the realization that the issues of mass incarceration and its deleterious effects are an urgent matter for our profession. I believe we are culpable in the harm the carceral state inflicts on people and any resulting mental health consequences. The data derived from this research question can support future steps in counselors and counselor educators conscientiously and assertively absolving ourselves of carceral logics and abolishing the carceral system.

Methods

Participants/Contributors/Co-Producers

The recruitment criteria for this study required contributors to be Black women, ages 18 and older, who have direct, lived experience with incarceration. As previously articulated, Black women have an epistemic wisdom relevant to liberation that uniquely qualified them to inform this research (Collins, 2000). Limiting the study to include Black women with previous experiences of incarceration contributed to the element of epistemic justice critical both to the interpretive framework of the research study as well as the cellphilm methodology (Collins, 2000; Macentee et al., 2016). Three women contributed to the study.

Purposive selection of contributors was conducted using the snowball sampling strategy. Initially, I contacted a Black woman who is the former manager of a culturally specific transitional housing program designed for formerly incarcerated Black women. This woman includes her own incarceration history in her public identity. Although I originally planned to contact her via her LinkedIn or Instagram social media profiles, I was introduced to her serendipitously through a community event and invited her to participate in a subsequent email along with any other women she might identify. Similarly, I participate in a workgroup regarding gender responsive practices in corrections with Black women who include their incarceration history in their public identity and extended an invitation to them as well. In addition to these individual contacts, I contacted gatekeepers of four community-based organizations known to me that work directly with women who are identified as justice-involved meaning that they are incarcerated, have been incarcerated, or are otherwise subject to some version of court monitoring or supervision such as probation or jail diversion. I requested that these organizations

connect me with any women in their programs who may meet the inclusion criteria of the study. Individual and organizational recruitment templates are included in the appendices.

When I reached out to the woman who has a public activist persona related to her lived experience of incarceration, she initially agreed to participate in the study. However, upon receipt of the informed consent detailing the proposed parameters for this research, she did not respond to additional outreach. Similarly, two other women that I met individually (one while we both toured Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and another I saw speak about her incarceration history at a conference in Portland) initially expressed interest before declining due to the time-intensiveness of the research. Two of the four organizations, both specializing in support of incarcerated women and women transitioning home from incarceration, responded to my email inquiry after having the opportunity to interact with me in other settings. I had the opportunity to visit one organization in person as they began a pilot for a new program and made a personal introduction to the Founder/President, who responded to my email indicating that she would share the recruitment opportunity with women in her organization's programs. During another event held via Zoom, the Director of the other program recognized me and then responded to my email indicating that she would share the recruitment opportunity with women in her program as well. Unfortunately, I did not receive a direct connection to any potential contributors from either of these organizations. The other two organizations I attempted to connect with never responded to my inquiry.

Finding one disappointment after another with my original recruitment strategy, I requested support during an affinity group meeting I regularly attend comprised of Black and African American mental health providers in Portland, OR. Immediately, the president of a reentry program specific to Black communities, LT, invited me to attend one of his in-person

program meetings to share my research opportunity with the Black reentry community directly. On the Thursday following his Tuesday invitation, LT allowed me to introduce myself twice during a two-and-a-half-hour community meeting, to ensure everyone knew me, and gave me the opportunity to be present during the duration of the meeting to listen to the stories shared by the community. By the end of the meeting, all five women present expressed interest in participation and provided me their contact information.

One of those women, Vee, happened to be the woman I heard speak about her experience at a conference who declined to participate via email due to the time-intensiveness of the study. I assured Vee that because this is a form of participatory action research, she and the other contributors could amend the study to be in alignment with their needs and perspectives. The amendments made by the contributors are described in the next section of this chapter. Finally, at the direction of contributors, the total compensation available for participation remained at the original total of $150. However, rather than spreading the $150 solely across 6 Sista Circles, each part of the study was compensated as follows: $25 for the semi-structured interview, $50 per Sista Circle, and $25 for the completion of an individual cellphilm to be included in a composite cellphilm.

The final contributors of this study included three Black women, Vee, Tee, and Tracy, all of whom are members of the reentry program run by LT. Vee is a Black 45-year-old, heterosexual ciswoman. Tee is a 61-year-old biracial, cis lesbian. Tracy is a Black 52-year-old, heterosexual ciswoman. A table providing an overview of contributor demographics is provided, below.

Contributor Pseudonym	Racial Identity	Gender Identity	Age	Sexual/Affectional Orientation	Relationship Status	Parental Status
Vee	Black	Cisgender Woman	45	Heterosexual	Engaged	Has 4 children and a grandchild
Tee	Biracial/ Black	Cisgender Woman	61	Lesbian	Partnered	Has 1 daughter and grandson
Tracy	Black	Cisgender Woman	52	Heterosexual	Single	Has 1 daughter and 2 grandchildren

Table 1.1

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

For this participatory visual narrative inquiry, I intended to use five primary instruments: (1) semi-structured individual interviews, (2) Sista Circles, (3) photoelicitations, (4) reflexivity journals, and (5) cellphilms. Following the recruitment of the three contributors through outreach at the reentry program, initial semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with each co-producer. During these one-on-one meetings, contributors were more thoroughly introduced to the concept of Sista Circles (Johnson, 2015) mentioned during recruitment, which were expected to constitute the primary modality for engagement following the initial interview. While six bi-weekly occurrences of Sista Circles were originally scheduled, contributors amended the research protocol to include only two Sista Circles. During these Sista Circles, contributors were originally going to be asked to share found photos that reflected their mental health experience in relation to a period before, during, or after incarceration according to the original research question. Additionally, contributors and researcher were to be asked to journal their reflections using a chosen method, including the possibility of cellphilming, in between each Sista Circle. After deciding to change the research question and to reduce the number of Sista Circles from 6 to 2, photoelicitation was made an optional aspect of creating individual

reflections and cellphilms after each Sista Circle. The individual cellphilms were screened among a group of Black women in my personal circle of friends and colleagues who identify as abolitionists and/or proponents of mental health justice. Finally, I compiled all the data, including that from the screening, and produced a composite cellphilm. Because the methods are written in a reflective manner to demonstrate the changing nature of the research project through engagement with the co-producers, the table below provides and overview of the methods as they were planned and as they occurred.

Method	**Planned**	**Actual**	**Participating Contributors**
Semi-Structured Individual Interview	One per person; Up to 120 minutes each	One per person; 30-120 minutes	All 3 contributors: Vee, Tee, and Tracy
Sista Circles	Six bi-weekly at researchers home for 2-3 hours per Sista Circle	Two total Sista Circles for 1 hour each via Zoom	2 contributors: Vee and Tee
Photoelicitation	Expected to coincide with Sista Circles 2-5 as a compulsory exercise	Offered as an optional activity in Sista Circles, Reflexivity Journals, and/or Cellphilms	1 contributor: Vee provided photos with a written reflexivity journal and used photos to illustrate her individual cellphilm

Reflexivity Journals	Expected to occur between each Sista Circle as a compulsory exercise using *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* (Davis et al., 2022) as a catalyst	Contributors chose to share reflections through cellphilms and included perspectives from reading *We Do This 'til We Free Us* (Kaba, 2021)	2 contributors: Vee and Tee used their individual cellphilms as reflexivity video journals
Individual Cellphilm	No pre-determined plan	Contributors created individual cellphilms based on the prompt: "What do you think life could be like for you and the people you love if prisons no longer existed?"	2 contributors: Vee and Tee
Composite Cellphilm	No pre-determined plan	At the direction of contributors, I created a composite cellphilm reflecting the most salient content from the collective data,	Information from all 3 contributors was included: Vee, Tee, and Tracy.

		including individual cellphilms.	

Table 2.1

Semi-structured Individual Interviews

The first instrument I used was a single initial semi-structured individual interview with each co-producer following recruitment. Prior to the start of each interview, I provided an informed consent form which provided context for the cellphilming methodology guiding the study. This context included information that contributors could be identifiable through photos and videos should they choose to contribute to the research, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board. After individuals consented to participate in the study, a semi-structured interview protocol was employed. In these interviews I learned more about each co-producer's race, gender, age, and incarceration history. In each of these one-on-one interactions I also learned additional information related to each woman's incarceration history such as time since last incident of incarceration and current probation or parole status. This information provided deeper insight into each of the contributor's carceral contexts, though this information did not have bearing on inclusionary or exclusionary outcomes for research participation. The interview protocol included various questions intended to elicit additional information related to the overarching research question including:

a. How do you define 'mental health'?
b. How would you describe your mental health prior to being incarcerated?
c. How would you describe your mental health during incarceration?
d. How was your mental health immediately after incarceration?
e. How is your mental health currently?

f. What kinds of things do you do/have you done to support your mental health (i.e. yoga, prayer, meditation, medication, etc.)?
g. What was your experience with mental health professionals/counselors at any point during your mental health journey?
h. What influence did mental health professionals/counselors have on your mental health journey?
i. Who else influenced/supported your mental health journey?
j. What might your mental health be like if prisons didn't exist?
k. What do you imagine your life would be like if prisons no longer existed in the future?
l. What do you think mental health professionals/counselors could do to make that future possible?

Contributors had the option to conduct these interviews either in person, over the phone, or via the video conferencing platform Zoom. One co-producer started their interview in-person and later completed it over the phone. The other two contributors elected to complete their interviews via Zoom. With co-producer consent, verbal and written, both Zoom interviews were audio and video recorded to support notation not only of the contributors' words, but their expressions and other nonverbal cues. The in-person-turned-phone interview was recorded with audio only. Interviews lasted between 30-120 minutes. Finally, during this initial interview each co-producer and I talked through the concept of Sista Circles (Johnson, 2015) as the primary activity for the remainder of the research study.

Sista Circles

Born from the traditions of Black Feminist Thought, Womanism, and Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (Dillard, 2000), Sista Circles offer a culturally specific alternative to focus groups or group interviews for Black women (Dunmeyer et al., 2022; Johnson, 2015). Contrary to the expectations of focus groups and group interviews traditional to white hegemonic research practices, Sista Circles are tailored to and outlined by the cultural expressions and relational dynamics distinct to the socialization practices of Black women (Dunmeyer et al., 2022; Johnson, 2015). According to Johnson (2015) who coined Sista Circle Methodology, the three distinguishing features of Sista Circles are related to "communication dynamics, the centrality of empowerment, and researcher as co-producer" (p.46).

Commonly in Sista Circles, contributors are invited into a personal setting where they may share a meal together and engage in "kitchen table talk" honoring their chosen form of speech, including African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and associated colloquialisms (Johnson, 2015). Cultivating this space eliminates the pressure and psychic burden that is created when Black women are compelled to codeswitch to conform with respectability politics. Offering a space to engage in kitchen table talk is a form of the empowerment central to Sista Circles.

In addition to having the freedom to speak as themselves, Sista Circles empower Black women to support one another and use one another as resources, validating their inherent value and wisdom as purveyors of knowledge (Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2000; Johnson, 2015). Empowerment is also made central with the inclusion of the researcher as a co-producer within Sista Circles. To mitigate some of the issues of a power differential inherent in white hegemonic research standards, the researcher is expected to engage in the practice of mutuality by sharing

her own perspectives and experiences rather than operating as an external facilitator of the group (Johnson, 2015).

Each of these distinguishing features of Sista Circles are consistent with the tenets of Black Feminist, Intersectional, and Relational Cultural Theories and are compelling for research with formerly incarcerated Black women who likely have encountered harm related to respectability politics, epistemic injustice, and domineering hierarchical structures. Sista Circles offer both a reprieve from and an opportunity to heal those harms. This is an enactment of the intentionality required to be in the type of relationship or collective that Kaba (2021) describes as what "helps to not only imagine new worlds, but to imagine ourselves differently" (p.4).

Prior to amendment from the research contributors, the plan was for there to be six bi-weekly Sista Circles conducted over the course of the research study, representing the most significant research method, secondary only to cellphilming. Each Sista Circle was expected to last 2-3 hours and be conducted in-person in the researcher's home, pending the acceptance of an invitation sent to contributors, to facilitate an environment both conducive to Sista Circles and accountable to confidentiality. I presented the following Sista Circle structure to contributors for their feedback, prior to beginning. In the initial Sista Circle I planned to bring the contributors together to build our relationship as a research community and co-develop a plan for the cellphilm, presenting this proposal as a potential foundation for the research. Sista Circles #2, #3, #4, and #5 were to be guided by a subset of the questions used in the individual semi-structured interviews along with the text "Abolition. Feminism. Now." by scholar-activists Angela Davis, Gina Dent, Erica Meiners, and Beth Richie (2022) which I planned to purchase and provide to all contributors. The questions from the individual interviews related to history of incarceration, which are a direct reflection of the original primary research question, were to include an

element of photoelicitation. In this protocol, contributors were to respond to the prompts using a found image from their personal histories as a catalyst for their narratives. These prompts included:

> Using a photo reflective of each period, how would you describe your mental health experiences before, during, and after incarceration? What types of mental health supports did you receive during these experiences?

Additionally, each Sista Circle was organized by theme. The theme for Sista Circle #1 was "building our community." The theme for Sista Circle #2 was "introducing the prison-industrial-complex and mental health pre-incarceration." Sista Circle #2 was to be guided by representations of the contributors before incarceration, the mental health supports they received, and the introductory chapter of "Abolition. Feminism. Now." (Davis et al., 2022). The theme for Sista Circle #3 was "abolition and mental health during incarceration." Sista Circle #3 was to be guided by representations of contributors during incarceration, the mental health supports they received, and the first chapter of "Abolition. Feminism. Now." (Davis et al., 2022). The theme for Sista Circle #4 was "feminism and mental health post-incarceration." Sista Circle #4 was to be guided by representations of contributors after incarceration, the mental health supports they received post-incarceration and are currently receiving, and the second chapter of "Abolition. Feminism. Now." (Davis et al., 2022). The theme for Sista Circle #5 was "abolition and afrofuturism." Sista Circle #5 was to be guided by representations contributors have of themselves in an abolitionist future, speculations of their mental health and mental health supports in a society post prison-industrial complex, and the third chapter of "Abolition. Feminism. Now." (Davis et al., 2022). The sixth and final Sista Circle was to be guided by the epilogue of "Abolition. Feminism. Now." (Davis et al., 2022) and was expected to provide an

opportunity for contributors to reflect on their experiences and learnings throughout the research experience, plan for the screening of the composite cellphilm, and strategize how it could be used in terms of advocacy for incarcerated women and prison abolition.

With the alteration of the research question and guidance to shorten the research period from contributors, the protocol for Sista Circles shifted tremendously. Along with condensing the Sista Circles from six to two, Sista Circles were held via Zoom to accommodate contributors' tight schedules. Each Sista Circle lasted for approximately 1 hour. Sista Circle #1 combined several components from original Sista Circle protocols 1-4 and carried two themes, which were "introducing the Sista Circle" and "introducing prison abolition, feminism, and mental health." As previously explained, the photoelicitation element was eliminated from the Sista Circle protocol and included as optional in the reflection and cellphilming processes. Additionally, we eliminated reading *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* and instead watched and debriefed an interview of Angela Davis explaining abolition and its feminist imperatives. Sista Circle #2, the theme of which was "reflection and planning our cellphilm," provided additional reflexive opportunity and was most closely designed after the proposal for Sista Circle #5. After reflecting on the first Sista Circle, their own lived experience, and abolition feminism, the contributors watched and discussed a short series about creating cellphilms to begin the next phase of the research to be discussed later in this chapter. Vee and Tee participated in both Sista Circles. Tracy did not participate in either Sista Circle.

Photoelicitation

According to Banks (2001), found images "are encountered within a material context, and as a consequence, can be said to have biographies (Appadurai, 1986) in the sense that they have previous entanglements with the lives of people, which may prove important to their

current roles in society" (p. 69). Given this biographical content, found images can be a rich information source themselves as well as a catalyst to evoke detailed memories and narratives from individuals who engage with the images (Banks, 2001). This evocative process is the foundation for the photoelicitation method and was well-suited for this research project as I aimed to explore the life-histories and mental health journeys of formerly incarcerated Black women. The photos, originally expected to be shared during the Sista Circles, were to be included as instruments in the data collection with the consent of the contributors as well as any individuals captured in the photos alongside them. Due to the amendments made in the research design, photoelicitation did not occur during the Sista Circles and was instead made an optional component of reflexive journaling and cellphilming. Only 1 contributor, Vee, engaged this method by sharing photos along with a written reflection and utilizing photos to illustrate her individual cellphilm.

Reflexivity Journals

Throughout the research process I intended for reflexivity and reflection to be an integral part of the journey, both for me and for contributors. Reflexivity represents the critical idea within qualitative research that the researcher has a responsibility to examine the extent to which their worldview is shaping the study and any findings thereof (May & Perry, 2017). Beyond simply providing a statement of positionality, reflexivity requires the researcher to rigorously interrogate the lens they've derived from their position and how they account for any distortions in the lens. According to May and Perry (2017), "reflexivity is not just the ability to think about our actions – that is called reflection- but an examination of the foundations of frameworks of thought themselves" (p. 3). Although reflexivity is typically reserved solely for application by the researcher given their epistemic power and reflection being accessible to both contributors

and researchers, I believed that the contributors in this study would engage in reflexive practice, beyond simple reflection, while conceptualizing abolition. During my proposal for this research study, one of my committee members wondered if and how I would make space in the research for contributors who cannot imagine a functional society without police and prisons. After initially struggling with this query, I came to believe that the space for this type of questioning and struggling would be best done through reflexive practice. Contributors had the opportunity to examine their worldviews and their "frameworks of thought" (May & Perry, 2017, p. 3) that dictate their conceptualizations of abolition through journaling. After each Sista Circle, contributors and I journaled our thoughts about our research experiences, learnings, and grapples.

Additionally, because the text *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* was eliminated from the Sista Circle process, I purchased copies of We Do This 'til We Free Us by Mariame Kaba for each of us to read. I chose Kaba's text as a replacement because, as described in chapter 2, it carries the core themes of abolition feminism but proved to be a more accessible text for this research. The primary accessibility features included narrative-style writing and mini-chapters that could be read non-sequentially and independently of the rest of the text. This gave the contributors the opportunity to read two relatively short chapters and then include their reflections in their journals and cellphilms. The two chapters selected were "A Jailbreak of the Imagination: Seeing Prisons for What They Are and Demanding Transformation" and "Moving Past Punishment." These chapters discuss the central themes of abolition and their application to Black women. Including reflections from this work in their perspectives on abolition overall was intended to increase the opportunity for reflexive thought among the contributors.

Physical journals were purchased and provided to each co-producer as an option to be used for a variety of creative journaling methods from diary entry, poetry, and drawing. In addition to these journals, contributors had the option to video journal through cellphilm, capturing short videos of themselves speaking or otherwise visually representing their thoughts. I used both methods in my own reflexive practice to be included as a method of determining the influence of my own worldview on the data analysis. Contributors decided whether their journal entries would be used as an instrument of data collection. Only one contributor, Vee, shared a single entry from a written reflexivity journal along with photos. Both Vee and Tee, however, engaged in reflexive video journaling as an aspect of their individual cellphilms.

Cellphilms

Contributors had the option of using cellphilms (Macentee et al., 2022) as a medium for their reflexivity practice. These cellphilms were expected to be short videos of 5 minutes or less capturing the contributors through video diary or filming another visual representation of their thoughts. In addition to these optional cellphilms, contributors were asked to create cellphilms that are representative of their visions for an abolitionist future once Sista Circles were completed and once they had read both chapters from *We Do This 'til We Free Us*. As outlined by Macentee et al. (2022), cellphilm production includes the following steps: (1) brainstorming in response to a given prompt, (2) reviewing the ethics of visual research, (3) creating storyboards, (4) participating in an optional training on sound and film techniques with iPhone, (5) filming, and (6) screening. Steps 1-4 were addressed in Sista Circle #2.

Brainstorming with a Prompt. Contributors had the opportunity to brainstorm how they wanted to approach their cellphilming process in response to a prompt. This brainstorming process was guided by the following prompt: "What do you think life could be like for you and

the people you love if prisons no longer existed?" Responding to this prompt through cellphilming provided an opportunity for contributors to engage audiences in a process of critical consciousness that they may have arrived at during Sista Circles and the reading of We Do This 'til We Free Us by Kaba (2021).

Ethics of Visual Research. Contributors had the option of identifying themselves directly within their cellphilms or filming other aspects of life that might answer the prompt. Contributors were asked to avoid filming others unless they receive written consent and to avoid filming children altogether. If contributors wanted to include other adults in their cellphilms but were unable to secure written consent, information and support was provided for alternatives such as employing other contributors and/or the researcher as characters in scripted dramatizations.

Storyboarding. A storyboard supports contributors in planning for the arc of their story told through cellphilm. According to Macentee et al. (2022), "a grid of six boxes (2x3) provides adequate structure to plan and sequence storytelling. The grid emphasizes linear narrative and suggests the cellphilm start with a title, identify and explain an issue, and end with an emphasis on a 'take home message' and credits" (pp. 1425-1426). Contributors were given the option of creating an independent cellphilm or collaborating on a cellphilm and thus partnering in the storyboarding process.

iPhone Sound and Film Techniques. There was an optional opportunity for contributors to learn some advanced techniques for improving sound and video quality using iPhone for cellphilms prior to filming. iPhone was used in this training of techniques solely because that is the type of phone I own myself and am most familiar with. The techniques offered would have likely been applicable for android phone users as well.

Filming. Contributors were asked to film one cellphilm per individual or group if they chose to collaborate. Each cellphilm was requested to be 5 minutes or less. Contributors had the option of using their own cellphones for their cellphilms or they could elect to use the researcher's cellphone. Contributors were encouraged to use what Macentee et al. (2022) describe as a "No-Editing-Required approach which involves filming scenes in a chronological order and using the pause function in the phone's video application when transitioning between scenes" (p. 1427). As researcher, I took responsibility for any post-filming editing that needed to occur in developing a composite cellphilm using content from each of the individual cellphilms. Contributors were consulted in this process in the event they had editorial preferences for how clips were merged, the inclusion of music, and other aesthetic decisions.

Screening. I planned for contributors to employ what Mitchell et al. (2018) describe as a "speak back" method in which the contributors and I would engage critically with the cellphilms we produced to ensure that they did justice to the narratives we wanted to present and did not reproduce oppressive ideologies or distorted images. Initially, I planned for us to screen our individual cellphilms with one another using the speak back method prior to editing each one into the composite cellphilm. However, due to the contributors' request to decrease their time commitment with the research, this step was eliminated. After this omitted step, we planned to have a screening of the composite cellphilm using the same speak back method with an audience of other Black women in our lives who may have some perspective on incarceration and abolition. This step was completed, however the Black women who participated were from my own network.

The goal of screening the individual and composite cellphilms for this curated group was to be accountable to our kinship of Black women, both 'mothering' through the delivery of

wisdom and daughtering in the sense that we are implored to remember that “we are always somebody’s daughter, sister, niece, cousin, or spiritual descendant” (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 138). How we interpret the world matters to our sisters and our quests for freedom are directly tied to their destiny as well as our own. This audience of Black women had the opportunity to speak back to our individual and composite cellphilms to help construct how we employ the composite cellphilm with other communities. Following this public screening, contributors will be consulted on and make decisions about future audiences for subsequent screenings which may include mental health clinicians, policymakers, and other community members and professionals.

Data Analysis

I used Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress, 2023) to analyze the data using NVIVO software. According to Kaba (2021), “ideological formations often operate invisibly to delineate and define what is acceptable discourse” (p. 13). Given this assertion, along with the central visual elements of this research, Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis seemed to be an effective tool to uncover both discourses that contribute to carceral logics and could supplant those logics with abolitionist ideology. Kress (2023) identifies multimodal discourse analysis as an opportunity “to elaborate tools that can provide insight into the relation of the meanings of a community and its semiotic manifestations” (p. 141). Semiotic manifestations in this context refer to sign systems or any information that can represent a ‘sign’ (Aiello, 2020). Multimodal discourse analysis takes a holistic approach to meaning-making and semiotic analysis by accounting for “the many and materially diverse textual ‘threads’ including gesture, speech, image (still or moving), writing, and music (on a website or in a film)” (Kress, 2023, p. 140).

I analyzed the data beginning with an open coding process that moved to identify any of the seven building tasks of critical discourse to include: (a) significance, (b) practices, (c) identities, (d) relationships, (e) politics, (f) connections, and (g) sign systems and knowledge (Gee, 2011). Although the seven building tasks attributed to Gee's (2011) work in Discourse Analysis do not typically attend to the elements of critical multimodality and are instead focused primarily on written and verbal speech, I found the application of this tool useful for clear and organized processing of the data through its explicit analytical questions. I used this process in analysis of the textual elements of the data as well as the visuals that were provided through Vee's shared photos and both Vee and Tee's individual cellphilms. Rogers (2011) affirms this approach as credible stating:

> In reality, it is quite usual to see a 'hybrid' approach to critical discourse analysis, where the theories and analytic tools brought to bear on the problem cross various traditions and approaches. I believe this hybridity is a strength of the field because the creative union of theories and methods generates new insights for understanding educational problems and produces new research questions. (p. xvii)

Upon completion of the open-coding process, I ascertained more information about how contributors constructed a future free of carceral oppression and then created more detailed codes based on those themes that emerged with more explicit detail of the visual semiotics to illuminate what Kress (2023) refers to as the 'coherence' among the data. Interviews, photos, Sista Circles, reflexive journals, and the composite cellphilm itself were used in data analysis. In its entirety, my method of data analysis included the following steps:

1. I first reviewed each of the recorded interviews and interview transcripts in full.

2. In seven subsequent reviews of each of the recorded interviews and accompanying transcripts, I independently highlighted significant statements that were reflective of one of Gee's (2011) seven building tasks: (1) significance, (2) practices/activities, (3) identities, (4) relationships, (5) politics/social goods, (6) connections, and (7) sign systems and knowledge.
    a. Significance review: In this review of the interviews/transcripts I highlighted information that seemed to answer the question of this building task according to Gee (2011). This question is "How is this piece of data (the story, the image, the animation, etc.) being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?" (Gee, 2011, p.17)
    b. Practices/Activities review: In this review of the interviews/transcripts I highlighted information that seemed to answer the question of this building task according to Gee (2011). This question is "What practice (activity) or practices (activities) is this piece of data (the story, the image, the animation, etc.) being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as going on)?" (Gee, 2011, p.18)
    c. Identities review: In this review of the interviews/transcripts I highlighted information that seemed to answer the question of this building task according to Gee (2011). This question is "What identity or identities is this piece of data (the story, the image, the animation, etc.) being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as operative)? What identity or identities is this piece of data attributing to others and how does this help the speaker or writer enact their own identity?" (Gee, 2011, p. 18)

d. Relationships review: In this review of the interviews/transcripts I highlighted information that seemed to answer the question of this building task according to Gee (2011). This question is “What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of data (the story, the image, the animation, etc.) seeking to enact with others (present or not)?” (Gee, 2011, p. 19)
e. Politics (the distribution of social goods) review: In this review of the interviews/transcripts I highlighted information that seemed to answer the question of this building task according to Gee (2011). This question is “What perspective on social goods is this piece of data communicating (i.e., what is being communicated as to what is taken to be “normal,” “right,” “good,” “correct,” “proper,” “appropriate,” “valuable,” “the ways things are,” “the way things ought to be,” “high status or low status,” “like me or not like me,” and so forth)? ” (Gee, 2011, p. 19)
f. Connections review: In this review of the interviews/transcripts I highlighted information that seemed to answer the question of this building task according to Gee (2011). This question is “How does this piece of data (the story, the image, the animation, etc.) connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?” (Gee, 2011, p. 19)
g. Sign Systems and Knowledge review: In this review of the interviews/transcripts I highlighted information that seemed to answer the question of this building task according to Gee (2011). This question is “How does this piece of data privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems (e.g., Spanish vs. English, technical language vs. everyday language, words vs.

images, words vs. equations, etc.) or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief (e.g., science vs. the Humanities, science vs. "common sense," biology vs. "creation science")?" (Gee, 2011, p. 20)

3. During each of the building-task reviews described above, I grouped excerpts and images that represented each specific building task into collections. For example, all excerpts and images that seemed to be enacting a sort of "identity" from any of the three contributors were grouped together in a single tab in NVIVO.
4. After all pieces of data were grouped into one or more of the seven building task collections, I reviewed the data included in each of the collections to identify specific themes among the items in each building task. I then created a subcode named after each identity, politic, sign system, etc. For example, the identity of mother was prevalent throughout the data and thus became a subcode in the identities collection.
5. I then explored each subcode within each collection to answer each of Gee's (2011) building task questions more directly, describing the discourses that were being enacted on each topic. For example, discourse surrounding being a 'good' mother by making up for lost time during incarceration was enacted through contributor data.
6. The next step in my process was to host a data analysis Sista Circle including three of my personal friends and colleagues who identify as Black women with advanced knowledge of abolition and/or mental health justice.
    a. This group of women and I spent three hours together at my home reviewing the recorded data from Sista Circles completed with contributors, as well as the contributors' individual cellphilms.

   b. Upon reviewing the data, my friends and colleagues shared their first impressions on the discourses they heard being created through the data without insight about my analysis. I then shared my analysis with the group, and we discussed and compared our interpretations. Any discourses emerging from this Sista Circle were included in my NVIVO data if they had not already been identified.

7. The final step in the data analysis process was to reduce the data, as 115 discourse codes were created through the process listed above.
   a. First, the discourses within each building task that were discussed by at least two of the three contributors were prioritized.
   b. Next, the discourses within each building task were ranked based on the number of times they were referenced, indicating salience.
   c. Finally, discourses in each building task were cross-referenced with the other building tasks to identify any overlap. A discourse integrating several building tasks also indicated salience of the discourse.
8. This complete data analysis process resulted in a total of 10 salient discourses presented in the findings.

Crystallization

Throughout this research project, I engaged with the contributors, the data, and the perspectives of my friends and colleagues who assisted in data analysis via Sista Circle as a method of creating depth of perspective across multiple sources. This style of engagement, consistent with Black Feminist epistemologies (Collins, 2019), demonstrates the integrity of the

study and rejects the need for hegemonic assessments of credibility and trustworthiness. Integrity through these means is framed as crystallization. According to Ellingson (2011),

> Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. (p.4)

From this perspective, I use crystallization in the various forms of analysis detailed above, the use of textual and visual elements to represent the research, my use of positionality throughout the text and cellphilming process, and socially constructed meanings presented in the findings chapter. In alignment with this practice, I conclude this chapter with information about the implementation of my self-care protocol given my relationship to the research subject.

My Self-Care Protocol

My love for Black people is what's responsible for the warrior and the healer that co-reside within me. Carceralism and the violence it begets stir up a storm inside me and sometimes cause my dual identities to emerge. As I went on the journey of exploring the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women, I was encouraged by my committee to prepare for the storm that was sure to erupt in my soul. As directed by another Black woman in the spirit of love and care for my wellbeing in this process, I designed a self-care protocol adapted from what Evans-Winters (2019) outlines as rituals for "decoding the covenant in daughtering methodology". The protocol is as follows:

1. Read, listen to, or watch a piece of "data" (or slice of culture). Reflect on this piece of data for 15-30 minutes in the shower or while painting.

2. Either early morning as the sun rises or before the sun sets in the evening, take a two mile walk or run. Give yourself a chance to exhale and stomp the pavement to release energy while inviting new breath and clarity.
3. Find a quiet spot alone with a fresh glass of water and journal.
4. Go to bed intentionally, don't just fall asleep. Right before bed, thank your benevolent ancestors for their wisdom and support. Pray to them for guidance.
5. Wake up intentionally, two hours before any obligations. Before rising, take 20 minutes to thank your ancestors for their guidance and reflect on any musings from your dreams.
6. Practice 15-30 minutes of early morning restorative or yin yoga. Reflect on your intentions for the day.
7. Eat a nourishing and healthy breakfast with your favorite cup of tea.
8. After breakfast, set aside 20 minutes to write something related to your data. Contemplate interpretations of data and best methods for representing such data that would be meaningful and respectful to all implicated by the data.
9. Clean the air with sage. Remember to open the doors and windows.
10. Burn a candle and listen to soothing R&B while you work. Be sure to have a glass of water. Or tea. Or wine. (Adapted from Evans-Winters, 2019, pp. 136-137)

In addition to this set of self-care practices or rituals, I maintained contact with my own mental health counselor for support. I also had a strong community of family and friends who talked and loved me through any rough spots.

CHAPTER 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences, including mental health experiences, of formerly incarcerated Black women to demonstrate the urgency of ending carceralism and the responsibility of counselors and counselor educators to adopt an abolitionist politic. To this end, I centered Black women with experiential wisdom relevant to the carceral system and asked them to visually narrate their own lived experiences, mental health journeys, and visions for a world without carceralism. The research question that grounded the study was:

> How do formerly incarcerated Black women describe and depict their experiences of incarceration and conceptualizations for abolition and mental health justice?

In response to this research question, 3 contributors engaged in the research process that included semi-structured individual interviews, Sista Circles, reflexivity exercises, optional photoelicitation, and cellphilming. These methods were analyzed using Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The data was initially coded as representing one or more of Gee's (2011) seven building tasks. Subsequently, the coded data was analyzed for themes within each of the building tasks. This process resulted in a total of 115 themes across the seven building tasks. The most salient among these themes across contributors and data sources, a subset of 28, are presented below. The full codebook is available in the appendices.

Given the visual quality of this research, it is appropriate to privilege the visual aesthetics of the findings rather than rely solely on textual descriptions of the results. With this approach my intention is to not only maintain fidelity to the cellphilming methodology, but to amplify the perspectives of the contributors allowing their contributions to speak for themselves. What follows is a series of still images from the composite cellphilm, representing ten of the most prominent themes from the analysis process. Due to the public availability of this dissertation

and the sensitivity of the cellphilm content, however, the visual aspects of the findings have been augmented in this document and represented as sketches. The themes include those pertaining to intimate partner violence, sexual assault, self-protection and hypervigilance, substance use disorder, systemic racism, lived experience of incarceration, healthy relationships, therapy and healing, faith and Christianity, and motherhood. The still images from the composite cellphilm presented in this chapter were complemented by relevant quotes from the interviews, Sista Circles, and individual cellphilms in addition to their pertinent themes. Although the themes and discourses are presented as discrete for the purposes of communicating the results, all the themes are interconnected and share numerous overlapping features.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) was a salient theme throughout the data indicated by inclusion in each of the three contributors' narratives. This theme appeared in the Connections, Identities, Politics, Practices, and Relationships building tasks. The discourses that emerged from

this theme included the pervasiveness of IPV in the lives of incarcerated women, which marks their pathways through the carceral system, and the need to understand the psyche and motivations of perpetrators of IPV. Each of these discourses are discussed in further detail, below. Any relevant connections to the literature reviewed in previous chapters and Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Relational Cultural Theories which served as the guide for this research are discussed as well.

Intimate Partner and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence are Pervasive and are Pathway to Women's Incarceration

Vee: "No one has ever, ever thought about healing. I believe each and every individual that has been incarcerated has had one of the, one of these problems. Trauma, drug abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and mental health. If you ask ten women, I can honestly tell you nine of them will say they've been, had one of these problems."

Tracy: "Because I was on drugs, and my drug addiction leading me to stealin' clothes, boosting. And then I had like a pimp boyfriend, and he'd take me out and boost. And so, I went to jail for boosting, for stealin', robbery, and ID theft."

Throughout their narratives in various modes to include their individual interviews, Sista Circles, and cellphilms, contributors consistently created and reiterated discourses related to the cycles of abuse, trauma, and harm. In the context of IPV, one way this discourse surfaced was through the perspective that intimate partner and other forms of interpersonal violence are ubiquitous in the lives of incarcerated women and are a significant contributing factor to their pathways to the carceral system. Vee makes use of her lived experience and subject matter expertise through her assertion that 90% of incarcerated women have experienced a form of interpersonal violence and/or a mental health challenge. This assertion speaks directly to the

ubiquity of interpersonal violence for incarcerated women. The context with which Vee makes this assertion, in which she is establishing a correlation between the punitive response of incarceration to women's behavior and women's trauma history, indicates the discourse that not only is trauma ubiquitous, but it has some responsibility for the mass incarceration of women.

Tracy's personal narrative of her pathway to incarceration represents this discourse more explicitly. In Tracy's story, her boyfriend, who profited from her exploitation through means of sex and theft, provided the catalyst for her incarceration. The exploitation and coercion from an intimate partner were the primary contributors to and pathway toward incarceration for Tracy. Although not captured exhaustively in this section of the findings, all three contributors disclosed a history of intimate partner violence that was discussed as a significant chain in the link of events that led to their incarceration. This finding is consistent with the literature which indicates that lived experience of interpersonal violence and trauma are a precipitating factor to the incarceration of women (Heimer et al., 2023; Pettus, 2023; Steigerwald et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023).

There is a Need to Understand the Psyche of and Create Interventions for Perpetrators of IPV

Tee: "Now, what I do think of is some of these crimes that like my niece, for instance, that just got killed. What do I think should happen to that man? I think that somebody needs to find out this is not his first murder. And so why is is is is it psychologically is it mentally? Is it something about women just something happened to him in his childhood? What is going on with with people that commit crimes more than once and the same crime, whether it's rape, whether it's murder, whether it's uh…child dealing with the child, you know, sex with a child or killing little kids. What is it? What is it that, it's different when you have those type of crimes opposed to a bank robber, a bank robber, somebody that robs is trying to get fast, quick money.

They probably feel like they're down on their luck. They probably have a rap sheet long enough to where nobody in the community will give them a chance. So, this is what they feel, that this is the only thing that they can do. This is the only thing that they know how to do."

Consistent with the emphasis placed on cycles of abuse, trauma, and harm throughout the data and in the theme of intimate partner violence, there is a discourse presented in the data about the need to understand the psyches and abuse histories of perpetrators of IPV. In various conversations, Tee and Vee both articulate the belief that perpetrators of IPV are likely to have been victimized through some form of interpersonal violence and trauma in their own lives. While Vee acknowledges this aspect of the cycle of violence, Tee extends the discourse beyond acknowledgement by discussing psychological and other investments to understanding acts of violence and abuse to better intervene. Strikingly, Tee demonstrates the ability to carry this discourse in light of her niece's recent murder through interpersonal violence. In this example, Tee employs the very ethos of abolitionist praxis using a lens that prioritizes humanity as much as possible when all other conventional wisdom about pain and grief would make retribution a justifiable frame.

Sexual Assault

Sexual assault was another significant theme throughout the data indicated by inclusion in each of the three contributors' narratives. This theme appeared in the Connections, Identities, Politics, Practices, Relationships, and Significance building tasks. The discourses that emerged from this theme included the pervasiveness of sexual assault and childhood molestation throughout free society and in carceral contexts, the cycle of sexual violence leading to more sexual violence, the irredeemableness of perpetrators of sexual assault, and the extent to which prisons are a conduit of sanctioned sexual violence. Each of these discourses are discussed in further detail, below. Any relevant connections to the literature reviewed in previous chapters and Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Relational Cultural Theories are discussed as well.

Sexual Assault and Childhood Molestation are Intergenerational Wounds Which Lead to and are Exacerbated by Incarceration

Vee: “Right. I'm glad you touched on that Tee, molestation. That's another reason why I don't like the system. Another reason why I don't like the system, you take these children from their mother because you think stuff is, is you, because you done locked their mother up. I was molested and raped from the time I was 3 to the time I was 14, so by the time I was 14, damn it I was damaged. So, whoever tried to love me by then, it's too late! It's my way now. I gotta protect myself. So I'mma act out. So then when my kids went, when I went to prison, I said I did not want to do that site school again. But I was tryna survive. The only difference I did, I didn't use hardcore drugs, but I still kind of repeated the cycle because I broke the law. But my kids went to foster care, but they were with family, and I had a family member mistreating my kids and me and that family member are not, still do not talk to this day. It's my blood sister. We came from the same womb. And it's just like, how could you do that? Because you came from not having a mother. However, my kids were in the system. They were lost. And it's a repeat cycle. It's like society set you up for Section 8, welfare [inaudible], DHS [Department of Human Services], jail. How do we break that? How do we stop that? That's my motivation, and my goal. How do I stop that?”

A continuation of the discourse on cycles of abuse and harm, sexual assault and childhood molestation are conceptualized as intergenerational trauma by Vee and Tee through their dialogue in the Sista Circles. Vee explicitly implicates the carceral system in this intergenerational cycle citing the removal of mothers from their children during incarceration as one of the primary mechanisms for sexual assault and childhood molestation to occur. Beyond simply addressing prisons, Vee explicates the intersection between multiple carceral-adjacent

systems to include strict subsidized housing and other social safety net programs, as well as child protective services. Although not detailed in this portion of the results section, Vee's indictment of the carceral system is in affirmation of Tee's story about the domino effect of sexual assault and childhood molestation that occurred in her life and the life of her siblings during her own mother's incarceration. These experiences and perspectives voiced by the contributors are consistent with the literature that describes out-of-home placements in foster as a risk factor for sexual assault and childhood molestation (Zhao et al., 2023).

Sexual Violence Begets Sexual Violence: Context Should Be Considered in Interventions of Sexual Assault

Vee: "So Tiffany was struggling with her own demons of having a sexual abuse charge. Therefore, I believe deep down inside, by just reading this, Tiffany was abused as well. So therefore, she was fighting and struggling with things on her in the inside and she wasn't able to deal with them."

Tee: "Well, first off about the is it Catcher or Crasher? The ladies uh... Rusher! Rusher! Okay. Um, my thing about that is it was, it was a crime because he was underage. But I don't think incarceration would, uh, is is appropriate. I think that maybe some type of community service or maybe some classes. And like the book says, why are these people getting in trouble? Why did she choose to do something like that? Sex trafficking for money. Was she forced or was she trying to make a living for herself? And sometimes I just believe that our choices, we may make the wrong choices but find out why we're making the wrong choices. There's something always behind it, it's not just because that's who we are and that's what we do. I believe that maybe community service or, and classes, sex trafficking class, prostitution classes, things like

that would have helped her more than stripping her of her of who she really was, demoralizing her. And I think it was cruel and unusual punishment. And yes, it drove her to kill herself."

Like the discourse presented above about the need to understand the psyches and abuse histories of perpetrators of IPV given the likelihood that they were at one time the victim of interpersonal violence, the contributors offer a discourse about sexual violence as the perpetuation of a cycle of sexual violence. The catalyst for this discourse for both Vee and Tee was the story of Tiffany Rusher described in We Do This 'til We Free Us (Kaba, 2021). In this true story, Tiffany, who was in the sex trade, was incarcerated after committing a sex act with a minor upon being solicited by the minor's adult male family member. Despite not having knowledge of the minor's age, Tiffany was incarcerated once the child's mother was made aware of the encounter. Tiffany died by suicide while in solitary confinement during a mental health crisis. The adult man who solicited Tiffany for sex with his child relative was not charged in the case (Kaba, 2021).

Tee and Vee both exercise a level of empathy with Tiffany's life and death. Using her own intuition and epistemic wisdom, Vee explicitly states that Tiffany confronting the reality of having a charge of sexual assault is reason to believe that she was the victim of sexual assault herself. Tee carries the second half of the discourse through in her emphasis that there should be an extension of effort to learn about the circumstances that led to Tiffany's engagement in the underground sex economy in the first place. According to Tee, behavioral interventions such as classes and community service would have been preferred methods of accountability for Tiffany rather than the punitive acts of incarceration and solitary confinement. In this regard, there is a limitation on empathy with an underlying discourse about personal responsibility and the imperative of morality in decision-making through the emphasis of correcting the "wrong

choices." Still, the prevailing discourse about sexual assault being a part of a cycle and, in some cases, requiring interventions other than incarceration, is movement toward abolitionist discourse.

Perpetrators of Sexual Assault are Irredeemable and Require Incarceration

Vee: "What would prison, what would the world look like if we didn't have prisons and jails? Well, here it is. There are pros and cons of that. If we eliminate prisons altogether, the world will be full of crime. Now, don't get me wrong. I am against prison. But then I am kind of for prison because some crimes need to be…punished. I hope I'm not being biased when I say this, but I believe if someone does sexual abuse, rape, molestation. I, me personally, don't believe they can be redeemed, and those people should be put away."

A stark contrast to the empathy extended to Tiffany in the previous discourse, Vee asserts that perpetrators of sexual assault are irredeemable and require incarceration while directly confronting the question of an abolitionist future. In her vision, Vee sees a "world full of crime" and apparently a world full of sex crimes, specifically. This pivot affirms the limits to empathy regarding moral failings described above and calls into question if Vee would even agree with Tee's sentiments that Tiffany should not have been incarcerated. Perhaps, however, this justification for the utility of prisons in sexual assault cases is indeed the result of Vee's lived experience as a survivor of sexual assault or what she frames as "bias." Seemingly, this perceived contradiction among discourses would negate the research objective to envision an abolitionist future. On the contrary, the abolitionist discipline, specifically abolition feminist theory and praxis, honors contradictions as a natural byproduct of the struggle toward a future that we have yet live (Davis et al., 2022). According to abolitionists, not only is it expected that we bump against these contradictions given the permanency embedded in carceral logics, but it

is expected that we confront these contradictions when no other viable options are made available to us in our attempts to heal and hold others accountable for the cruelties done to us personally (Kaba, 2021).

Prisons are a Conduit of Sanctioned Sexual Assault

Tee: “If prison is where they're going to be and where they're going to stay, then put them there. They get their meals, they get to do chores around the prison and that's it, that's all. Those guards and the wardens and etc... There's there's there's just let the prison be ran the way it should be. But then we get into the guards and the wardens like having sex with the prisoners, you know? So, okay, there's a crime there. Nobody's putting them in jail, you know? So, I don't know. I could talk about this all day.”

Tee illuminates another contradiction involving sexual assault, this time implicating the prison system as a conduit of sanctioned sexual assault rather than a mechanism of protection against sexual violence. Initially undergirded by more of a reformist politic than an abolitionist one, Tee details the dysfunction of prisons evidenced by the sexual assault of incarcerated women by prison staff. Although not detailed in this portion of the findings, Vee affirms that sexual assault is a common occurrence in carceral contexts. This finding is consistent with the literature presented which establishes the existence of a culture of physical and sexual assault in prisons (Addison et al., 2022; Kaba, 2021; Zhao et al., 2023) and among police (Alang et al., 2022; Jones & Santos-Lozada, 2023; Nestadt et al., 2023). Additionally, this is consistent with Oregon’s specific carceral context evidenced by the sexual assaults perpetrated by Tony Klein (OPB, 2023; The Women’s Justice Project, 2024; Women’s Justice Institute & Center for Effective Public Policy, 2023).

Self-Protection and Hypervigilance

Self-protection and hypervigilance were presented as a conjoined theme through the narratives of Tee and Vee. This theme appeared in each of the seven building tasks: Connections, Identities, Politics, Practices, Relationships, Sign Systems & Knowledge, and Significance. The discourses that were elucidated through this theme were that self-protection and self-preservation should be excluded from punitive action and that staying vigilant and being ready to protect yourself in prison is a necessary skill. Both discourses are discussed in further detail, below. Any relevant connections to the literature reviewed in previous chapters and Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Relational Cultural Theories are discussed as well.

Self-Protection and Preservation are Contextual Factors That Should Eliminate Prison as Punishment

Vee: **“**Murderers. Mmm, I'm kind of biased on that because it’s an if and if, if you're just out blatantly killing people, then, yeah, you never know, but if you're protecting yourself, I don't

think you should have to go to prison. So again, let's try to fix the problem instead of let's put them all in prison. Honestly, I do believe that some people can be fixed and there are crimes that…can be done with treatment like theft, fighting, menacing, drugs. There's all treatment for these things. There's all programs that we can help people heal from instead of just locking them away."

Tee: "You know, the… do I think, I think each crime should be dealt individually. I think that more serious crimes like heinous murders for no reason. And the reason why I say no reason is because people will kill out here for nothing, just because. But there's also people that I've watched documentaries where they ended up killing someone. And the one girl that comes to mind is the girl that was forced to prostitute. I can't think of her name, but she was. Oh, Cyntoia Brown. That's it. Yeah. And, you know, do I feel that I feel that, this is what I feel. I feel that anybody that takes a life, it's wrong. But there's also reasons why. And I feel if accident happened. Well, see, I'm getting into a lot right there because when I think of accidents, I think of like vehicular homicides. You know, those are accidents. Some of them are careless. And do I feel that kids need to be, yes, I feel that kids or adults need to be punished, but I just believe that it's it it's a way it all has to be individually diagnosed."

As they pondered their visions for an abolitionist future, both Vee and Tee were confronted with a moral quandary, similar to that of their perspectives on sexual assault, when they thought about the act of murder. Without provocation, both Vee and Tee identified murder as a pertinent subject for consideration and identified their schema or rule for managing murder through incarceration, followed by their exceptions to said rule based on self-defense. Again, Vee alludes to her own lived and vicarious experiences of where self-protection was necessary in her comments about being "biased" in her perspective that murder as self-defense should not be

punishable by incarceration. Tee creates a direct link between sexual victimization and justifiable murder by citing Cyntoia Brown's experience, a case in which Cyntoia was a minor engaged in the underground sex economy and was convicted of murder after killing a John who had abused her and threatened her life. Contrasting Vee's perspective, however, Tee does support punishment for murder even when it is justified. Tee does still seem to be tenuous, however, about whether prison is the 'right' form of punishment.

You Have to Know How to Protect Yourself and Stay Vigilant in Jail and Prison to Avoid Victimization by Staff and Other Incarcerated People

Vee: "Since I've been home, I watch the news, and I watched 5 officers and nurses that I've known, because I spent a lot of time in prison, that I got to know that I would see on a daily basis, be arrested, and would never think like, 'dang that officer was messing with that person?' But again, when you're doing rape and stuff like that, you go after people that are weak. Or you feel are weak or not gonna say nothin, and it's like, Yeah, and you don't have no voice to hear, because whatever officer tells you to do, you have to do that. You have to do. You're an inmate to them. You have no voice. I knew a lot of the women it happened to. But no, I didn't. Thinking about me is, I've already had sexual abuse growing up and been raped, and stuff like that, so me as a woman, I don't put myself in situations where I don't feel I can get out of. So, I'm not gonna be off with an officer in a in a, without another inmate, you know I'm just. I'm just would try to avoid those kind of situations."

Tee: "So I'm out there at Inverness. But. I don't get along well with people that talk to me crazy. And this is the thing. I didn't have the skills to turn the other cheek at the time because remember, out on the streets off and on for five and a half years. So, anybody can get it, you know. And then I got into it with the guards. So, the guards take me down to Justice Center and

they put me in the hole. And that was the best thing that they did for me really, is because I was in a single cell. I was by myself. I didn't have to deal with anybody but the guards until, you know, there were a few altercations in there. But I. I stayed in a single cell for about three months. I did about three months and 20 days, almost four months in there."

Consistent with the earlier theme that illuminates carceral settings as vectors of physical and sexual assault, all three contributors described the need to stay vigilant and protect oneself from victimization by staff and other incarcerated people while in jail or prison. Vee repeats underlying rhetoric around personal responsibility in her admonition against women who do not have the foresight to avoid the imminence of sexual assault in a given situation, emphasizing that her own experiences of sexual assault have made her more vigilant. Focused primarily on physical altercations, Tee too details how her previous experiences of abuse and exploitation taught her to protect herself through fighting. The pressure to maintain hypervigilance to keep herself protected was so extensive that Tee found solace in being held "in the hole" for nearly four months because it provided a reprieve from fighting, apart from altercations that persisted with guards. Although not detailed in this section of the findings, Tracy also discusses self-preservation strategies. Contrasting Tee's perspective on solitary confinement, Tracy described protecting herself by masking mental health challenges to avoid "suicide watch," another form solitary confinement. These perspectives about the violent climate of carceral institutions are supported by the literature (Addison et al., 2022; Kaba, 2021; Zhao et al., 2023).

Substance Use Disorder

Substance Use Disorder was another significant theme, primarily in the narratives of Tee and Tracy, though it appeared in Vee's narrative relative to her mother. This theme appeared in the Connections, Identities, Politics, Practices, Relationships, and Significance building tasks. The discourses emerged from this theme were that traumatic events and life stressors are precipitating factors of substance use resulting in criminalization and that substance use and incarceration are transmittable as intergenerational trauma. Both discourses are discussed in further detail, below. Any relevant connections to the literature reviewed in previous chapters and Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Relational Cultural Theories are discussed as well.

Traumatic Events and Life Stressors are Precipitating Factors of Substance Use Resulting in Criminalization

Vee: "Exactly, it's it's so sad. And so that's where the criminality part comes in our mental health, the drug addiction, because we're we're so stressed out."

Tee: “I don't know. It's kind of like damned if you do, damned if you don't. You know it's like when you try, you know, ‘cause I've slipped through the cracks like I told you, Brittany, for so long of selling dope. And then then, when I first got into recovery, I got clean, and then I learned how to, I DJed and I did, I did…you know. I had transferable skills where I hustled in the streets, I I hustled a different way. And so, at at some point, you know, when I don't see my way out, when I don't see me rising above, you know I I get that stinking thinking. Now I don't, because the last time I sold drugs. When I had a long, substantial amount of clean time, I relapsed, and I didn't think I was making it back. And then that's where my jails and institutions had came into play as far as me, starting to go, get in the system and them starting to know my cars. And at first, they didn't know who I was because I had never been caught, you know.”

Tracy: “And well, really, because I was in like, in drug psychosis. Yeah. So I was just in psychosis, didn't sleep and eat. And then with the mental health, you know. So, that's all it is. I really can't describe it.”

All three contributors depicted the substance use that results from traumatic events and life stressors as a pathway to incarceration. Making the explicit connection to mental health challenges, the contributors matter-of-factly discuss the criminalization of substance use, though none of them take the step to problematize this criminalization. Like previously discussed discourses, this discourse may be undergirded by rhetoric that prison or jail time is a natural consequence of substance use. Although the decriminalization of substance use is not quite explored, the perspective that substance use is employed as a coping mechanism for women, thus constituting a pathway for women’s criminalization is supported by the literature (Besteman & Hylton, 2024; Clark et al., 2023; Heimer et al., 2023; Morris & Zisman-Ilani, 2022, Nestadt et al., 2023; Steigerwald et al., 2022).

Substance Use and Incarceration are Related and Transmittable as Intergenerational Trauma

Tee: “And at the time of my younger age, thinking that fast money ‘oh, I made it,’ but not looking at what if I get caught? What's going to happen to my daughter? And when I did, eventually I got into drugs, *using* them on my own. And when I got into them, then it was like, what happened to the family that I was taking care of around me? Everybody else fell. You know, I was the pillar of, you know, the matriarch of my family and the people that I was, connected to me when I relapsed, all those people around me fell in some type of way or other. Some of them were incarcerated. They they did different things to to cause them to go to prison. Some ended up on drugs. You know, it was just various. Most of them ended up on drugs. And so now I've had a program that was able to give me a more intense supervision program while out of jail. And I think things like that need to happen more. I'm not saying everybody is going to be able to engage in services like that.”

Both Tee and Vee discuss having mothers who experienced substance use disorder and incarceration, representing a form of intergenerational trauma. Although Vee does not identify as having a substance use disorder herself, Tee provides an example of how substance use and incarceration are interrelated and transmittable as intergenerational trauma. In her narrative, not only did Tee detail how her mother’s substance use and incarceration triggered traumatic events for Tee and her siblings, but Tee disclosed how her own substance use and incarceration triggered traumatic events for her family when she became the matriarch. Tee’s illustration of this inheritance of trauma, substance use, and incarceration elucidates the discourse that these challenges are connected to one another and connected through lineage.

Systemic Racism

Systemic racism was the fifth major theme throughout the data, primarily through the narratives of Tee and Vee. This theme appeared in the Connections, Identities, Politics, Practices, Relationships, and Significance building tasks. The discourses that emerged from this theme included those pertaining to racist sentencing, racial capitalism and the criminalization of Black women, the racist war on drugs, the dehumanization of Black women through the carceral system, and the origins of the carceral system from chattel slavery. Each of these discourses are discussed in further detail, below. Any relevant connections to the literature reviewed in previous chapters and Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Relational Cultural Theories are discussed as well.

Black People Receive Longer Prison Sentences and Harsher Punishment Than White People

Vee: “Yea because, honestly like, I know committed a crime. I know I needed to go to jail. Did I need to go to jail for 8 years for shoplifting that y'all done made a mandatory law to measure 11? Hell freaking no. But did I commit a crime and break the law? Yes, I did. However,

because I was a Black woman, I got that mandatory minimum sentence because I watched my friend, who's a white woman, have the same judge, the same DA as me did armed robbery, and got less time than me, used a weapon, was really robbing places and got less time than me. The system number one in Oregon - everywhere - is set up for the Black man and the Black women. So now, once you took me out of the system, I I was not. I was not working at that time, but I was going to school. I did have a place. I was a primary caregiver. Had you found something else for me like gave me extended probation, or maybe some jail time, and then, with something hanging over my head so I wouldn't lose my kids to the system, even though I gained them back. Some people don't gain their kids back and then some some women are not as strong, and if you lose your kids, you've lost everything. I can look at my mother right now, and she's still addicted to drugs because she hasn't came back from that. She never got her kids back. Some people are not that strong. So, the system just keeps going and going and going, but that can be stopped. Jail does not fix the problem. Some women don't have enough education to get a job. Some women have mental health, they can't work, but they have children. Like it's more to puttin' a person in jail, especially a woman."

Each of the discourses pertaining to systemic racism are so intimately related, and somewhat self-explanatory, that it is difficult to discuss them separately. There are some nuances, however, that offer intriguing insights from the co-producer perspectives. In the discourse that systemic racism functions through carceral sentencing, with Black people receiving longer and harsher punishment than white people, Vee detailed again the intergenerational legacy of incarceration. Through citing her mother's own incarceration and loss of children, as well as other systemic factors such as mental health or ability status, educational status, and class status, Vee extends her intersectional analysis through this discourse of

problematizing the carceral system. Despite this problematization, however, another contradiction is present in the persistence of the discourse that Vee herself did indeed "need" to be incarcerated, though perhaps for a shorter period.

Racial Capitalism Creates Circumstances for the Criminalization of Black Women

Vee: "I'm just thinking like when you said better housing and stuff. I remember I used to say, 'hey, I can't wait 'til I don't get 'til I make enough money where I don't get food stamps or childcare, the system don't do nothin'.' Okay, I'm blessed that I do make that now. Now I don't qualify for nothing. They think I'm middle class. To me when I look at my paycheck, I ain't middle class like help me out. I got two jobs. I gotta get two jobs a week. But in society's idea is, okay, I don't, I I don't qualify for nothin. However, it's like, I feel the Black woman...we can never get ahead. Even when we do get Section 8, you have to lie to the system. Say, you're in a good relation, a good, healthy relationship, and you have your child's father with you. Not in the past, I didn't have a healthy relationship. Today I do. But, say I had the partner I have right now, and I qualified for housing, but my partner can't be on my housing with me. So, therefore, that Black woman is now sneaking this man into her house. And now you done. You done messed up, you done you, you done messed up now because you're sneaking. You're breaking the law because you got the government, the white man over here helping you pay your rent but you or your partner don't make enough. But this he can't be in the house; it takes him back to slavery then. Okay, now, you done kicked me off of Section 8. I gotta pay full rent. So now my job that I have, for instance, I don't make enough money, because that's why, you know, I was on Section 8. So now I'm gonna go commit a crime, because I need to make ends meet to handle the household over here. It's like they set you up. They give you this little bit of rope to hang yourself and to me it's like slavery, because when we were enslaved, the Black man could not be

in our household. Mister had- master had to be there. It was like, take the Black man out the household or, tear the household down, make the Black woman struggle. This gots to stop."

A continuation of the intersectional analysis applied in the previous discourse; Vee expounds upon the extent to which racial Capitalism creates the circumstances for the criminalization of Black women through the criminalization of poverty. Through this discourse, Vee asserts that upward mobility, though potentially desirable in theory, is farcical in reality due to systemic constraints that paralyze Black women into working class status. One method of ensuring this paralysis, according to Vee, is to punish actions that would not ordinarily be criminalized such as cohabiting with a romantic partner while receiving housing assistance. Of course, this form of criminalization reflects the racist, sexist trope of Black woman as "welfare queens" who abuses the social safety net for individual prosperity. This discourse is supported throughout abolitionist literature (Kaba, 2021; Davis et al., 2022).

The Criminalization of Black People is Facilitated by the Predatory War on Drugs

Tee: "And they still, yes, and they still do that. They did that when they, when they dropped the crack in in in in South Central, and all that. They in Compton. They did that because they knew it would take. And it's designed to, you know. At first, I didn't believe it, but it is designed. That's just like they said that if my dad had a got caught with my mother, she was uh 16. Well, she was a 16-year-old white woman, and he was 30. They would have hung him. You know, and the thing is is that my dad did all my childhood life, I'm talking about until I was 30-something, in in prison, OSP, for selling marijuana…And now they have, they have these dispensaries on every corner like 7/11. And and and it's like part of me wants to invest in his, in in what he saw. People used to think he was just high and tripping, but he saw this coming to fruition, and the thing is is that the other part of me don't, because I'm a crack addict. I'm in

recovery, I don't want to you know, straddle that fence again, you know. And then the people are gonna say, ‘oh, Tee selling up again,’ you know. And it's like it's hard, but it's set up to take the men out of the household, so the women won't have. They will need the white man. They will need the system to help them with the food stamps with the Section 8 and all that. And and you're right. It's like the first time I got, I got this job and I, the first time I got, I had to turn in my income earnings and everything to Section 8. The people told me I was gonna pay a thousand and 70 something dollars for rent and I pulled the car over. I said ‘what?!’ and I called the man. I said, ‘is this a mistake?’ He said ‘Tee, did you say you get this? And you got that?’ I said ‘yes.’ I said, ‘but where is the Section 8 at?’ and and ‘well this is your portion.’ And I was like, well, damn! I might as well stayed on social security, and not did nothing. But I can't live off of that money either, because then I want to sell dope.”

Tee continues the earlier discourse on racial Capitalism and extends it to capture the war on drugs as a tactic in the criminalization of Black people. Detailing the legacy of drug criminalization targeting Black people from the crack epidemic of the 1980s, Tee indicts the government for its responsibility in the concentration of crack use in Black segregated communities. There does, however, seem to be an underlying discourse or notion of personal responsibility or moral deficit applied to Black people in Tee’s narrative given her sentiment that the government knew that crack “would take” in Black communities. It is unclear, however, what Tee intended by this comment. Tee goes on to problematize the criminalization of Black people facilitated by the war on drugs in her discussion of the confinement of Black people for marijuana possession with little atonement in the current climate where marijuana is legally accessible.

Black Women are Dehumanized by the Carceral System

Vee: “The system sees Black women as useless most of the time when they're in prison. Nothing. Less than. And we have no value. We're not even human. We're dangerous. We're scums of the Earth in their eyes. It's really sad as being a former woman of incarceration and seeing that you don't have a voice with that.”

Connected to each of the other discourses on racism, a prevalent discourse that specifies the dehumanization of Black women within the carceral system is presented by Vee. Vee shares a scathing perspective on the perception and treatment of Black women within carceral contexts. Speaking from her lived experience, Vee continues to employ an intersectional and Black Feminist analysis through this discourse.

The Carceral System is a Descendant of Chattel Slavery

Tee: “The question was why and what could we what could we do or what, what would that look like as far as if we didn't incarcerates people? I believe that incarceration is a form of slavery. It started out a form of slavery. Control over the Black, brown, Indigenous people. And I believe that that was a way for them to have the upper hand on us. There are many things that I can think of where crime was done with Caucasian people and they never even did any, you know, it was like who was going to judge them? Who was going to say, ‘okay, you did this crime and and now you're going to be in prison because because of your crimes’, you know, nobody was there to force that. It was always the white man's upper hand. And I don't believe it was fair.”

Throughout the other discourses pertaining to systemic racism, chattel slavery is referenced numerous times by Tee and Vee. Tee, however, adds depth by articulating the discourse that the carceral system is not only related to chattel slavery, but it is its institutional

descendant. This discourse is supported in its articulation throughout abolitionist literature (Kaba, 2021; Davis et al., 2022).

Lived Experience of Incarceration

Lived experience of incarceration was the sixth central theme throughout the data. This theme appeared in each of the 7 building tasks: Connections, Identities, Politics, Practices, Relationships, and Significance, which is expected given the emphasis on lived experience in the research question and study design. Two specific discourses that were presented related to the lived experience of incarceration were particularly germane. These discourses were that living in jail is traumatic and isolating and that it requires incarcerated people to advocate respectably for basic dignities. Each of these discourses are discussed in further detail, below. Any relevant connections to the literature reviewed in previous chapters and Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Relational Cultural Theories are discussed as well.

Living in Jail is Traumatic and Isolating

Tee: “And now it's like I'm too old, shoot. I'm 60, I'll be 61. It's like I'm too old to go up in there, and the way that those kids acted when I was up in there that last time, it's like I'll be done... I got put in, what do you call it? Lockdown. Because I didn't know I couldn't get up in their face, you know, and and they was like [last name redacted] do this cell in, and I was like, and then I got to talking crazy to the the guards. But the thing is, it's real sad, because I remember they took me to court, and I was shackled. I was in the white jumpsuit. I was shackled around my waist and around my feet and my daught... when I came in there, my daughter, said, ‘Mom, what did you do?!’ You know? And here I always thought people that were shackled like that were murderers or crazy people. And I'm like now I see that I was judging people, because here I am, and I didn't do nothin' but talk back to the guard. You know, and it's like it's the way they treat you. I had guards in there that would come and stand by my door. 'So, what's your story?' You know and talk to me and get to know me. But then I had that little Asian guard in there that she didn't give a damn she didn't care if I was disabled that I got out of the shower 5 min later, or what I was. She didn't care. Yup. She kept writing me up and writing me up, and before I told 'em, I don't even want to come out of here until it's time for me to get released, because it's like a setup.”

Tracy: “I was depressed in there. Stay depressed. And I ate, ate, ate. I started getting eating addiction. I just ate everything. I was [inaudible], but I almost weighed 300 pounds when I came out. So that's what I did in my depression.”

Throughout their narratives, all three of the contributors recount their painful experiences of incarceration as traumatic and isolating. In this section of the findings, Tracy and Tee specifically share their own experiences. Tee provides additional insight to her experience of

humiliation and dehumanization while in solitary confinement, giving greater context to earlier discourse that “the hole” offered an element of protection for her despite its inherent trauma. With the information that Tracy also has lived experience of solitary confinement and the effort it takes to avoid solitary confinement, it seems relevant to her experience of depression while incarcerated as well.

Living in Prison Requires Respectable Advocacy for Basic Dignities

Vee: “So I had a guard. I just went to speak at Coffee Creek in November right before I got off Parole. I'm getting ready to go and speak again in May, but I had these guards, and everybody didn't like these 2 guards. They they both Mexican, Hispanic. But me, I made a guard get to know me and know who I'm I'm not. I'm not here to play games. I'm here to do my time and get my education, and let you know that my taxpayers' money is not wasted. However, the guard said, when I got done with my speech, and he spoke to A. A. P. It was AAP I went to speak to that Ms. [last name redacted] taught me so much. Because I will make them respect us as women and as as Black people. You're going to listen to me. You going to give me the same hair products you give these white people up in here. I made sure I made all that change before, because even though I might not go to jail again, there's going to be a hundred more Black people that went to jail. I was appalled when I went to prison, and there was no hair products for Black people that's doing life and time and stuff. But our hair is falling out. But these white people got all this stuff. You gone treat us the same! He did that 'cause he was over the hair program that I was in, he said ‘she made me have a different outlook on things and she respected authority, but she stood her ground.’ Basically, what I heard him say out of that is he heard what I was saying because I spoke up for my my people and I said it with authority, but I said it respectfully. And it's been a lot of changes since I've been gone. There's hair product. They they,

I mean, they still ain't treating us all like we should be. But you know, I mean, yeah, it's it's crazy."

Tee: "When I did those little few few months in Justice Center they had, I asked for a NA book, a recovery book, blue book and when I finally got one, I wrote the basic literature down that we that we read every day in the meeting. Well, when they did the cell search because they they went floor to floor, and they did a search and they took all all my stuff out of there. They left that piece of tablet there, and that's what I sat and read every day at noon, after I ate lunch to get myself programmed in the way of thinking that I really wanted my recovery back, because at first I was, you know, every time I got out I just went back to the same thing, and did the same. When I mentioned we didn't have any Narcotics Anonymous books there, well, I think he was sheriff or something at that time, he got those books put in the justice center for me, because I had mentioned that the you know, in in order for people to recover. You got to give them something. I did Bible study, too, but you gotta give them something that they can identify with. Because, if not just like you said the hair product. All that kind of stuff, you know. You gotta give them, what's what's good for one is good for all you know. I feel I don't care what color you are, you know, like, but at least treat us fair."

While discussing ways in which they catalyzed change in their carceral setting during incarceration, Vee and Tee construct a discourse around the advocacy of incarcerated people. Vee explicitly asserts a discourse that this advocacy requires respectability of the incarcerated person. In this discourse, basic necessities such as culturally appropriate hair and other healthcare products hinge on one's ability to present the need in a palatable manner that does not threaten hierarchy. From this perspective, the incarcerated advocate must also assure those in

power that they are not leaches “wasting tax-payer dollars.” Similarly, Tee constructs this discourse in her advocacy for substance use recovery materials within carceral contexts.

Healthy Relationships

The seventh prominent theme present in all three co-producer narratives was healthy relationships, both those that exist in reality and those that need to be cultivated from theory to reality. This theme appeared in each of the 7 building tasks: Connections, Identities, Politics, Practices, Relationships, and Significance. The discourses that were presented include that relational repair is a path toward justice, mentorship is a way to keep people out of trouble, authentic spaces and real talk can mitigate harm, relationships need accountability over punishment, and isolation from healthy relationships creates destruction. Each of these discourses are discussed in further detail, below. Any relevant connections to the literature reviewed in previous chapters and Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Relational Cultural Theories are discussed as well.

Relational Repair is a Path Toward Justice

Vee: “I believe in restructive justice, focus on repairing the relationships, trying to fix them, the harm that's been done instead of giving harmful punishment. To me, that works best, especially when it comes to younger people. Our minds, their minds are still developing. So, when we put them in prisons and jail cells and just throw away because they've committed a crime, instead of trying to reconstruct their young mind, we're not even giving them a chance.”

Vee evokes a discourse around relational repair as a path toward healing in her discussion of restorative justice. Consistent with other discourses explored throughout the findings, there is a limitation on who can receive support over punishment. To some extent, Vee prioritizes youth in this discourse given their inherent ability to assume a growth mindset. Although abolitionist literature does not negate the ability of adults to grow and heal through relationship, it does support Vee’s assertion that restorative and transformative justice practices are useful methods for generating alternatives to incarceration.

Engaged Mentorship Can Dissuade People from Getting in Trouble

Tee: “I think if people take more time to, to help those that get in trouble maybe for the first time to, kind of counsel them and find out, okay, what made you go this route? You know, like me, for instance, as far as my incarceration was just a small, small time in the county jail. But what, what was I thinking and what was I doing to, to get myself involved in in that lifestyle? And it first comes from my childhood being what I consider poor, on welfare and my mother in addiction and a prostitute, my dad in the penitentiary and, for most of my childhood life, and on drugs and uh. So, it's coming from, I could have made the choice to go a different route to maybe go to school to learn to never be like I was brought up or like my parents, but I didn't have much of a role models. And so, I chose to go down the road of selling drugs. And

when I did do that, it gave me enough money to take care of my family and have things that I think we will never have."

Complementing the discourse on restorative justice, Tee enacts a discourse related to the power of mentorship to intervene in social challenges that result in incarceration. Using her own experience and recapitulating the intergenerational trauma associated with her mother's substance use and incarceration, Tee identified her own need for role models throughout her childhood development. Focused less on the challenges of the carceral system, Tee takes an upstream approach to keeping communities in healthy relationship through mentorship.

Creating Authentic Relationships and Spaces for Real Talk with Kids Can Mitigate Harm

Tee: "You know, I think if we open it up to discussion, to teach, why, like the classrooms teach about sex. Well, they used to. Sex education, math, reading, writing, arithmetic, gym, and and then they had sex education, things like that. Home-ec. The teach us how to cook. I think that in in there there needs to be some real talk about what incarceration looks like. What happens if you make these choices? What happens if you try drugs? And not just marijuana or alcohol, let's go deeper than that because they need to find out more. Be taught more about addiction, sex trafficking, incarceration, what it looks like, mental health. You know, and so I think if all these things are placed in where kids can learn and get an idea about what life is really about, not just, oh, you go to school, you graduate and you get your diploma. Things happen in between there. We have kids, we have kids committing suicide, you know? And why? You know, is that because they didn't have anybody at home to listen to them? Were they being bullied? Were they trying to change their sex gender? And nobody, you know, approved of that. You know, the world has opened up. And do I feel it's right, all things are right? No, but I feel that while it's happening, we need to open up and we need to discuss it."

Like the discourse presented on mentorship, Tee also creates a discourse on developing authentic relationships with children characterized by real talk. Related and yet distinct from the discourse on mentorship, this discourse encourages individuals, communities, and institutions like schools to take responsibility for educating children on subjects that may be considered taboo for minors. Tee asserts that this cultural shift can mitigate or even eliminate the risk of harm to children through substance use, sex trafficking, and suicide.

Relationships Should Be Characterized by Transformative Accountability Rather Than Punitive Transaction

Tee: “Yeah, you know, the families, even in incarceration, when people are incarcerated, I think there's a family that's getting separated. So, you take this family member or family members and put them in a cage and say you did wrong, and so now you're going to sit here. Well, that's the same thing. Of like I was taught when I did childcare. You take a kid and you put them in timeout. Two minutes later, they don't even remember why they're there. So, it's like you have to let them out to let them learn that you know what they did wrong. If you're just putting people in jail and I see it so much that people are in there for so long. I know that they can get their GEDs or their diplomas. They can learn how to cut hair. They can learn how to do all kinds of classes and stuff. But if, that's fine and dandy, that gives them something to do while they're in there. But what was the real reason why they got put in there? And did you deal with that? You know, I know that people go up for the parole board and they're trying to convince these people that they're a changed person because they got all these little things, these little ducks in a row that they did while they were in there. And yeah, if I'm tired of being in a cage, of course I'm going to straighten up and at least show you that I've changed in my mind. Have I changed? You know? Is anybody checked in to see if if Tee is really ready to maybe go to work or learn how to

get a job, learn how to do a resume, learn how to do some vocational training so I can get employed, you know, because I've been out here in the streets, I've been on drugs, I've been selling dope. And so, I don't know how to do nothing but hustle."

The discourse presented here that relationships should be characterized by accountability rather than punishment is like the discourse around repairing harm through restorative justice. The difference in this discourse, however, is that there is an apparent need for individual transformation beyond repair within a relationship where harm occurred. Accountability, from this lens, looks like demonstrating a readiness to assume personal responsibility and support the functions of mainstream economies.

Isolation from Healthy Relationships Creates Destruction

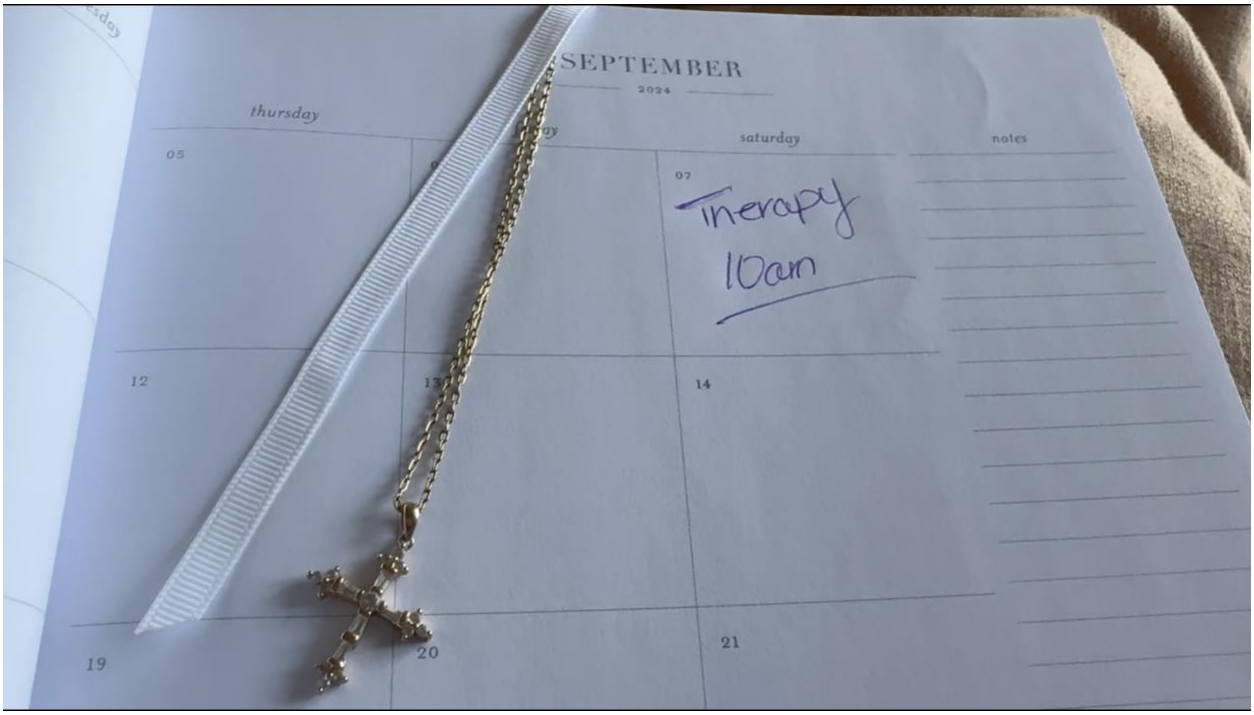
Tee: "I know that a lot of times I've seen people getting meds and in in jail and some of them, some of the girls would say, 'oh, yes, she's getting this and she's getting that,' you know, 'she's crazy, she's this.' But my thing is, is that what, I noticed that when we were out and able to communicate on the floor with each other, people were more happier. But when you were locked down, then that's when all hell broke loose. You know, they were screaming, they were yelling, they were crying, they were beating on the doors, trying to hurt themselves, you know, things like that. And it's kind of like Covid when Covid happened, everything shut down. Nobody can go around nobody. And so, it was like I couldn't understand why people were saying, you know, 'my PTSD doesn't allow me to deal with this'. People in recovery were relapsing. I was like, 'why would you relapse?' But some people aren't, aren't…it doesn't sit well with them to be to be cast out and put in a box. Um, I believe that we all need help."

Tracy: "Yes, because I can't talk to your family all the time. Don't have any money to talk to 'em. If you do have a problem or some. The people's not. Gonna listen to you. You don't just,

you know. You gotta be on a sheet of paper to go see the lady. You can't have a breakdown, because if you do, you just gonna go to the hole. They'll suicide watch me, naked."

Another discourse that emerged related to healthy relationships as that isolation creates destruction. Complementing the discourse of lived experience, this discourse illuminates Tee and Tracy's experiences of "lockdown" and solitary confinement yet again. Through this discourse, both Tracy and Tee discuss mental health and mental health challenges as implications for isolation from healthy relationships. From Tee's perspective using the Covid-19 pandemic as an example, this isolation and the resulting mental health challenges could be remediated through more opportunities for connection. This perspective is consistent with the tenets of Relational Cultural Theory. For Tracy, exposing a mental health challenge meant punishment through more isolation from community in addition to being isolated from loved ones at home. This perspective is also supported through literature that details the punitive and isolating action against mental health crises within carceral contexts (Addison et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023).

Therapy and Healing



Therapy and Healing was a salient conjoined theme throughout the data, which is expected given the emphasis on mental health justice in the research question. This theme appeared in the Identities, Politics, Practices, and Significance building tasks. The discourses that were presented in this theme included the mitigation power of therapeutic intervention against mass incarceration, the necessity of mental health services for the survival of Black people, and the need for therapeutic during incarceration. Each of these discourses are discussed in further detail, below. Any relevant connections to the literature reviewed in previous chapters and Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Relational Cultural Theories are discussed as well.

Therapeutic Intervention in Cycles of Trauma Can Mitigate Mass Incarceration

Vee: “To me justice reform is trying to figure out what we can do. Besides locking people up, especially women. Women are the primary caregivers of children. When you take a woman away from their child, you already you have now committed to putting your child in the

system, too. That's from experience for me and a lot of women that I was in prison with. A lot of women lost their kids to the system. I grew up in the system. My mom was in the system. So therefore, that left me to go to the system. So, it's just like a cycle. What else can you do besides locking women up. Okay, yes, we might break a law, but 9 times out of 10 a woman is breaking the law because there is trauma. There is addiction, there is domestic violence, there is more to it. So, we got to hit on the ground root of what is going on. How can we figure out what's going on with these things, to nurture these things instead of locking them up? Because if you can fix domestic violence, addiction, trauma, mental health, then you can fix incarceration. Incarceration doesn't fix the problem."

Vee: "Seeing prisons for what they are. After reading this passage and being a former prisoner, I can relate. This is very sad how they treated Tiffany. She needed mental health treatment, not solitary confinement…Once everything came to the forefront, Tiffany exploded. She was almost on her way out while she was in the mental health treatment at first. But when she exploded with the other girls, they sent her to solitary confinement. Had Tiffany been given the tools in life before to help her with mental health and trauma? Those two first things and foremost? She would have been better off. She would have been able to seek the help and treatment she needed."

Syncing previously explored discourses, Vee advances the discourse that therapeutic intervention in intergenerational cycles of abuse can mitigate mass incarceration. Integrating her epistemic wisdom from lived experience and gender analysis on the pathways to women's incarceration, Vee advocates for a more intentional exploration of the roots of trauma through therapeutic supports in lieu of incarceration. She strengthens her position through the

examination of Tiffany Rusher's story. Although she conceptualizes this as reform, this perspective is consistent with abolitionist literature (Kaba, 2021; Davis et al., 2022).

Acknowledging the Need for Mental Health Services is Necessary for Black People's Survival

Vee: "Honestly, it's very painful to see that. Especially most of these people are victims and they're trying to become survivors. How can you become a survivor if you haven't healed from being victimized? To me, it's always more to incarceration. No one wakes up and say, 'oh, I want to be incarcerated. I want to go to jail.' But you have so much pain and trauma, and you find other ways to deal and cope with it. This is why I always say we must go to the first forefront of the problem and work on that. Mental health. Black people as one try to cover up mental health. They don't like to think that we have mental health. They want to think it's the white man's problem and don't treat it and what's done in this house stays in this house. But if we treat the mental health first and foremost, I believe incarceration will be down a lot. Very much."

Vee: "We need to educate and heal, not destroy and destruct and derail. We need to build up our Black women, not tear down. Unprocessed trauma does not just disappear. It is stored in your body."

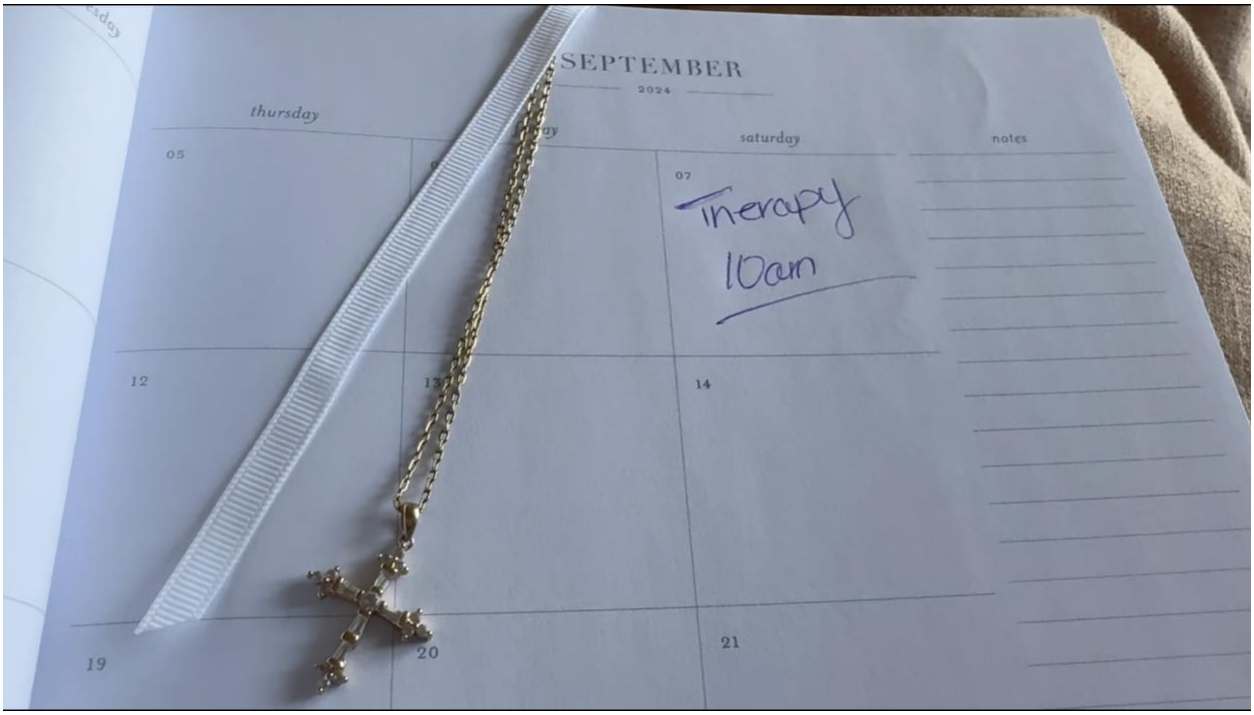
"How can you become a survivor if you haven't healed from being victimized?" Vee's question, poignant and provocative, speaks to the urgency of mental health service need for incarcerated people. In her questioning and reflection, Vee employs a racial analysis to deconstruct discourse perceived to be popular among Black communities about mental health challenges being exclusive to white people. In this deconstruction, Vee presents the discourse that Black people's investment in mental health supports is critical to our survival and reduced presence in carceral settings.

Therapeutic Intervention During Incarceration is Needed

Tee: “Nobody came to me and say, ‘Why are you in here? What's going on out there with Tee? What is Tee doing out there when you're not in here? What are you doing out there? How can we turn this around?’ If I didn't have the mind frame to…stop and think about where I was going. Yes, I was older and didn't want to be in jail with those young people because I felt like I was…I don't think I was better than, I think I felt that this wasn't the place for me. And if I didn't get it right, I was going to be back here with them. And so, and it didn't matter who was in there for what. We all were in the same same space. But I believe if there was a mentor or counselor that came to the doors and talked to the women more daily or maybe once a week, meet with them, get to know who they are and what they’re, what’s troubling them. They would be able to pan out what was mental health. What was childhood trauma. You know. What need to be, what person need to be directed for each individual to get them some help?”

A continuation of previous discourses, Tee describes the necessity for therapeutic resources inside of carceral institutions. This discourse maintains an individualistic and reformist perspective underlying several of the discourses presented throughout the findings. From one perspective, this discourse contradicts discourse put forth by other contributors that mental health services within carceral settings are not helpful and mostly about behavioral management. From another perspective, this discourse may be consistent with those insights as an indication that mental health services from providers not associated with the prison would offer a better support to incarcerated people.

Faith and Christianity



Faith and Christianity were combined as the ninth significant theme presented throughout the data. This theme appeared in all seven of the building tasks: Connections, Identities, Politics, Practices, Relationships, Sign Systems & Knowledge, and Significance building tasks. The discourses that were presented included morality as an insufficient deterrent from social challenges and that faith and Christianity are an important protective factor while enduring incarceration. Both discourses are discussed in further detail, below. Any relevant connections to the literature reviewed in previous chapters and Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Relational Cultural Theories are discussed as well.

Morality is an Insufficient Deterrent from Social Challenges

Tee: “But I think if we find out who the people are, what's really going on with them, whether it's mental or whether it's just lifestyle, upbringing. Sometimes you can get people that are, had the two-parent household and both parents work or are brought up in church, and

these…sometimes people make choices to go different ways. And I think it's all about the way we're taught. And another way the way we're disciplined in the home, because I believe that if we're taught right from wrong and 'you shouldn't do this' or 'God doesn't want you to do that,' or, you know, if you're brought up in a Christian home, then of course, when you look on the other side of the street, you're going to be curious about 'well, what's that? What are they doing?' You know, instead of that family or that parents, those parents teaching them about prostitution, drugs, prisons, incarceration, where that stuff will take you. It's not it's more than just saying 'don't do that' or 'that's a no-no.'

Somewhat a departure from previous discourses where morality is an undercurrent, the discourse presented here exposes moral high ground as an insufficient strategy to eliminate social challenges. Tee connects this new discourse to the discourse detailing the need for authentic relationships where taboo subjects can be discussed without reservation. Here, Tee problematizes the approach of Christians and other persons of faith to shame individuals' behavior through religious condemnation. From her perspective, not only is this approach an insufficient deterrent from pathways to incarceration, but it is ineffective given the propensity for the condemned to be more enticed to engage in the forbidden behavior.

Faith and Christianity are an Important Protective Factor While Enduring Incarceration

Tee: "And so there was no one that came to my door, because I stayed in lockdown because that was the best place for me. I couldn't deal with all the people I needed to be by myself. So, I can think, so I can pray, so I can read my word, so I can read my recovery book and retrain my thinking. Coming from the streets to all that hustle and bustle. Probably not sleeping, not eating, and all the chaos that goes along with it, to being able to sit still, think and pray about where I wanted to, what I wanted to do when I got out. The only person that came to that door to

help me was a lady that brought me Bible studies every two, every, I think it was twice a week or once a week. That was the only person that helped me!"

Tee: "Because I didn't have anybody. And if I didn't have the mind frame to sit up there, give myself, read the NA literature and have that meeting every day with myself and at night do my Bible study. I probably would have went back out to the streets and did what I, you know, and just took a chance. And I think that's what a lot of people do. They take a chance. 'Oh, I'll do this and get away with this until, you know, they take me to prison.'"

Although not all their perspectives are shared in this section of the findings, all three of the contributors identified faith, specifically Christianity, as an important protective factor for them while incarcerated. Engaging in Bible study, watching sermons where possible, and prayer were the primary means that contributors stayed connected with their faith. This discourse seems to support the notion that while faith can be weaponized as a tool for shame, it has tremendous utility as a tool to mitigate some of the excess trauma that one may experience during incarceration.

Motherhood

The tenth and final theme, motherhood, was a pronounced theme throughout the data for all three contributors. This theme appeared in all seven of the building tasks: Connections, Identities, Politics, Practices, Relationships, Sign Systems & Knowledge, and Significance building tasks. The discourses that were presented included those related to mothers' absence (re)creating cycles of trauma and abuse, the need for mothers to be candid with their children to interrupt intergenerational trauma, and motherhood requiring effort and the willingness/ability to grow. Each of these discourses are discussed in further detail, below. Any relevant connections to the literature reviewed in previous chapters and Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Relational Cultural Theories are discussed as well.

The Absence of a Mother (re)Creates the Cycle of Trauma and Abuse

Tee: "Right, because what I know is I might not have did a lot of time. I I might not have did any time in jail, really. But my mother was into drugs and prostitution, and she did some time

when they removed her and put her in jail. You're right, but she's Caucasian, but they still put her in jail, and yea, my sister and my brother went to a foster home. I stayed with Grandma, 'cause I was the oldest. Then they got shipped around, and in the in the process my brother got molested. You know, and he was in the home with a family member, but who she had lived with but it and and you're right Vee because my mom never did come back from that, either. She got my brother in his teenage years. But they had…he was, he was a, he was a little kid when she left. And they never did really get that strong bond, and and because of that he has a, he has a hard time allowing women to take taking a direction from women, even his wife."

Vee: "You don't heal by just putting someone in jail. To me, you're actually destroying and you're also creating a chain of events because most of these women have children and they're the forefront providers for these children. So, when you take away the parents, you're taking away the children. You're putting the parents in the system. You're putting the children in the system."

Many of the discourses emerging through the findings include some aspect regarding the cycle of trauma and abuse. This specific discourse cites the absence of mothers from their homes as a causal factor in the creation and reproduction of those cycles. Vee specifically conceptualizes the incarceration of mothers as "putting the kids in the system." Combined with other discourses around intimate partner, sexual, and other forms of interpersonal violence, this discourse makes apparent the need to prevent the incarceration of mothers to prevent accelerated community harm. This discourse is consistent with literature that emphasizes the community challenges present when mothers are incarcerated (Alang et al., 2022; Felitti et al., 1998; Heimer et al., 2023; Maton et al., 2022; Mitchell & Davis, 2019; Steigerwald et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2023).

Mothers and Other Caregivers Being Candid with Their Children Can Interrupt Intergenerational Trauma

Tee: “Had I been told, now I was told by my mother, who was a heroin addict and a prostitute and raised three kids on her own. When she first found out that I was smoking crack, she said, ‘you don't want to do that. That's worse than heroin.’ Well, had she had sat me down or maybe took me to some of her groups that she was going to to let me listen about what they teach and when they go to counseling for drug addiction. Maybe at 21 years old, 22 years old, I would have heard something that would have deterred me. By me growing up being a child on welfare, not having a father in the home and the mother doing what she had to do to make ends meet, I, I always thought about money. I even dropped out of high school because I thought, I'll go to work. I'm not getting paid in school, so I’ll go to work. Well, work didn't last. I ended up getting into a confrontation and got fired. So then here I am outside and all my friends are in school. I didn't have, my mother was in prison at that time. I didn't have anybody to tell me, ‘Hey, let's try to get you back in this, walk down this down this road one day at a time, a few few assignments at a time, and let's get you back to where you need to be.’ And I believe that had, when my mother was incarcerated, there should be counselors for those kids that are on the outside left with grandma and auntie and them, you know, to say, ‘hey, let's get them in some some counseling because somebody should- when my mother was in prison and I dropped out of school at 15, somebody should have been an adult and came to me and say, ‘hey, I'm not going to allow this to happen.’ You know? Unless I literally fought against the situation. I think there should be things in place to help the kids that are left at home.”

In addition to their presence at home rather than being incarcerated, Tee presents a discourse that mothers being candid with their children can interrupt intergenerational trauma.

This discourse is a continuation of discourses around developing authentic relationships characterized by real talk, providing counselors, and creating mentorship. In Tee's narrative, her own mother offering guidance and exposure to addiction treatment and recovery based on her experience of substance use disorder could have prevented Tee from developing her own substance use challenges to the extent she did.

Motherhood Requires Effort and Willingness/Ability to Grow

Tee: "And to, I say this to my daughter all the time about parenting. I'm not I don't know how to be the be-. I'm not, I might not have been the best parent, but I'm willing to learn how to be a more productive parent. While I was incarcerated, it kind of, I was 51 and it gave me a chance to sit there and to think about what I want to do, if I want to get out and go out to that back to to the to money or to dope and keep running the streets and either die out there or end up getting killed or end up back in jail for some time. Or do I want to change my thinking?"

As she reflects on her experience of her own mother, Tee also submits a reflection about being a mother to her daughter. Through this reflection, Tee surfaces a discourse about effort and the willingness/ability to grow that is required in motherhood. Of course, the environmental conditions to support and nurture that growth must also be available to mothers. Arguably, a cell is no such environment.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this action-oriented, participatory visual narrative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women relevant to mental health. My aim was to detail how those experiences support a vision for an abolitionist future and the adoption of an abolitionist politic in counseling and counselor education. The need for this research derived from the near absence of literature and practice within counseling and counselor education pertaining to mass incarceration and prison abolition. Additionally, the invisibilization of Black women within carceral contexts, despite their persistent activism against the Prison Industrial Complex, was the catalyst for the exclusive display of their stories and epistemic wisdom throughout this research process. The research question that illuminated these experiences was:

> How do formerly incarcerated Black women describe and depict their experiences of incarceration and conceptualizations for abolition and mental health justice?

To answer this question cellphilming methodology was used, placing in the power position of filming social issues from their own vantage points with cellphones. To facilitate the cellphilming process, the primary methods of the research included individual semi-structured interviews, Sista Circles, photoelicitation, reflexivity journals, and individual cellphilms.

Discussion of Findings

In response to the research question, above, several themes emerged throughout the data collection and analysis process with the three contributors included in the study. This process resulted in a total of 115 themes across the seven building tasks. First distilled into a subset of 28 through additional analysis, the themes were reduced to a final number of 10 based on the most prominent themes emerging from the individual and composite cellphilms, as well as the other methods outlined. These 10 themes included intimate partner violence, sexual assault, self-

protection and hypervigilance, substance use disorder, systemic racism, lived experience of incarceration, healthy relationships, therapy and healing, faith and Christianity, and motherhood. Within each of these core themes, several discourses were illuminated that provided insight into both contributors lived experiences, as well as their conceptualizations of abolition and mental health justice. Each of these discourses are outlined in the findings chapter of this dissertation with additional synthesized discussion.

Implications for Counselors and Counselor Educators

The implications of this study for mental health counselors and counselor educators are numerous. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) assert that culturally skilled counselors actively and accurately assess their own worldviews, as well as that of the communities they serve, acknowledging the sociopolitical context of identity development (Ratts, et al., 2015). Assessing one's worldview around the intense and delicate subjects presented throughout this research such as incarceration, intimate partner violence, sexual violence and childhood molestation, and substance use throughout the lifespan are imperatives to better support incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Black women. Beyond the mere acknowledgment of our cultural bound views, however, clinical mental health counselors should be expected to adopt explicit attitudes and beliefs that reflect support of equity and liberation for minoritized people in the United States and across the globe given existing health and social disparities, including those pertaining to incarceration rates and pathways for Black women.

To inform mental health counselors of these disparities and inequities, the onus is on counselor educators to include information about mass incarceration and the Prison Industrial Complex in their coursework. This coursework should be complete with data about racial and

other disparities in incarceration and policing, as well as specific information about how women come to be involved with the carceral system. This addition to counseling curricula would help counselors to expand their awareness of specific communities most vulnerable to criminalization. One such example includes developing awareness of the experiences of Black transwomen who are disproportionately relegated to sex work as a means of survival due to exploitation and economic deprivation resulting from exclusion in civil rights protections.

It is incumbent upon clinical mental health counselors to continue to develop knowledge of disparities and inequities as a matter of clinical praxis. For example, additional training on concepts such as the differentiation between sex workers and survivors of sex trafficking, as well as information on the assaults endured by sex workers committed by consumers, police officers, and the intersection of those perpetrators would help counselors to be more effective in their practice when broaching these subjects is necessary. Similarly, counselors would benefit from more in-depth training on the various traumas of incarceration, such as strip-searching procedures and transwomen being misgendered and housed with men. As clinical mental health counselors derive knowledge of these phenomena and thus conceptualize the carceral system as one that inflicts trauma on individuals and communities, they may become more effective at "dismantling the system in order to level the playing field for Black communities" ([ACA], 2020, para. 5).

One such way to dismantle systemic oppression for Black women, specifically, may include incorporating Sista Circle (Johnson, 2015) methodology into counseling research and clinical practices. Group counseling is already a foundational therapeutic modality of which counselors are required to demonstrate proficiency as mandated by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs Standards (CACREP; 2024). Sista Circles

served as a powerful method throughout this research, facilitating an environment truly conducive to connection and depth of engagement. Through this connection, not only was there richness in the data, but there was a feeling of healing and growth that reflected the research findings about the power of being in authentic relationships. Gunn (2022) refers to this as creating an ethic of care that is particularly suitable to the needs of formerly incarcerated Black women. Counselor educators engaged in research with Black women may choose to implement Sista Circles more regularly in place of hegemonic methods not designed for Black women. Practicing counselors may adopt the style of Sista Circles in clinical work with Black women to enhance the opportunity for shared healing in opposition to standardized group practices.

Given their prominent role in leading Black women to incarceration and the contributors' emphasis on providing supports outside of incarceration, it would also behoove counselors and counselor educators to discuss decriminalizing social mores like substance use and sex work. As a system, we must move beyond individual moral objections to these social phenomena and instead focus on supporting community members through harm reduction and engaging in 'real talk'. This deconstruction of criminality would help support the belief that there is an option other than prison for people who are attempting to survive in ways that are unimaginable for some of us.

In addition to the disparities pertaining to race, gender, and other sociopolitical identities, counselor educators should be incorporating more information about the disparities for people with mental health challenges who are ensnared in carceral contexts in their clinical mental health programs. With this information, counselors and counselor educators could invest more concerted energy into developing and disseminating practical knowledge of trauma-informed interventions for mental health and substance use crises without relying on police or other

proxies of the carceral state. Frequently in suicide prevention education, communities are instructed to call emergency response if an individual in crisis is at imminent risk of harm to self or others. To reduce the risk of harm to Black women in crisis, exacerbated by interactions with police, counselors can become more skillful at employing de-escalation techniques, ultimately acting as members and leaders of community crisis response teams and partnering with 988, the behavioral health emergency line. Armed with the knowledge of the mental health and trauma implications (Scott & Gosling, 2016) of the carceral system, clinical mental health counselors can follow the example of organizations already on the frontiers of transformative justice, such as CAHOOTS (Klingner, 2020). This systematic effort would require clinical mental health counselors to standardize their education of mental health conditions, including psychosis-related conditions. While mobile crisis units and crisis intervention teams exist across the country, clinical mental health counselors must be taught to conduct wellness checks and intervene in community settings as a matter of routine rather than specialization.

Another skill clinical mental health counselors have access to, though inconsistently applied, is broaching sociopolitical identity. Day-Vines, et al. (2007) defined broaching as "the counselor's ability to consider how sociopolitical factors such as race influence the client's counseling concerns" (p. 401). This consideration of sociopolitical factors entails that the counselor actively initiates conversations about the client's worldview and experiences of oppression as related to marginalization. Experience with the carceral system, including but not limited to, witnessing the murders of Black people by police via media, having a loved one incarcerated, and being subjected to 'stop-and-frisk' type racial profiling, are subjects that can reasonably be broached with an understanding of their pervasiveness. Beyond this individualized

response, however, clinical mental health counselors must take up the mantle of institutional action.

During my time as a clinical mental health counseling student pursuing my master's degree, I recall being coached to refer to social justice efforts as advocacy rather than activism to avoid the negative connotations associated with the term. This preference for more tepid terminology is consistent with the counseling profession's perpetuation of respectability politics that stall active progress and thus collude with other systems of oppression. Reckoning with our own oppressive history is necessary for clinical mental health counselors to emancipate ourselves from our delusions of equanimity, allowing us to be more active agents in our communities. Once we can affirm ourselves as activists in our professional capacities, we can support other activists against carceralism in real-time. Rather than solely providing services related to racial and other trauma in the context of a traditional counseling session, clinical mental health counselors can accompany other organizers at protests to establish services for protestors prior to, during, and after events in which they encounter police and/or white supremacist antagonists. We can expand our repertoire and facilitate circles of restorative and transformative justice that make way for alternatives to incarceration and, maybe one day, make way for abolition.

Future Research

Throughout this research process I attempted contribute to abolitionist discourse and center Black women's experiences in the process. Although the current research study was illuminating about formerly incarcerated Black women's experiences and visualization of abolition and mental health justice, there are three areas that I did not adequately explore that would generate more information. These topics include the experiences of Black trans women,

greater exploration of carceral feminism, and the criminalization of women through the oppression of reproductive rights.

Black trans women are routinely excluded or marginalized in literature and research studies pertaining to the Prison Industrial Complex, despite their overrepresentation in carceral settings. Considering the potential for Black trans women to either be placed in solitary confinement or grouped with men, there is an urgency to examine the experiences Black trans women have of the carceral system. Replicating this study to either include both cis and trans Black women or creating a study specifically prioritizing Black trans women would advance this research.

The perspective that the most "heinous" behaviors such as sexual violence, murder, and domestic violence require intervention through the Prison Industrial Complex is a foundational perspective of carceral feminism. This perspective was prominent throughout this research study as contributors frequently referenced carceral punishment as necessary in those cases, although contradictions to this point were present throughout the research as well. Given the complexity around this subject, it is important to explore carceral feminism more deeply.

Finally, the increased potential in the United States political climate for the criminalization of people who support women's reproductive choices, choose to have abortions, and/or suffer pregnancy loss defines a critical period for women and the prison industrial complex. Although this subject did not emerge in this research process, there is potential for this to be a generative subject in the pursuit of abolition and health justice. This research could emphasize the lived experiences of criminalized patients, physicians, or both.

In addition to these opportunities to explore experiences and perspectives from more formerly incarcerated Black women, advanced exploration of Sista Circles would be useful. In

this research process Sista Circles a poignant reflection of community care over self-care. Counselors using Sista Circles as a type of transformative justice practice akin to healing circles used in efforts of restoration could be a fruitful place to begin moving beyond incarceration.

Conclusion

The purpose of this action-oriented, participatory visual narrative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women relevant to mental health. Using cellphilm methodology and other methods such as Sista Circles, I intended to use the findings from the research to demonstrate the urgency of ending carceralism and the responsibility of counselors and counselor educators to adopt an abolitionist politic. To this end, I centered Black women with experiential wisdom relevant to the carceral system and asked them to visually narrate their own lived experiences, mental health journeys, and visions for a world without carceralism. The findings from the study are complex and suggest that while there is much work to do to help us see a healthy world without prisons, there are strategies available for counselors and counselor educators to help us rely on carceral institutions less heavily.

With the knowledge and information provided by contributors of this study, counselors and counselor educators are encouraged to act as the premier resource for community support and recovery. Competent clinical mental health counselors actively deconstruct their indoctrination by the carceral state, actively engage in knowledge acquisition about the social determinants of health and ‘criminality’ that create and sustain disparities in policing and imprisonment for Black women, and actively dismantle the carceral tradition of enacting harm for perceived or actual wrongdoing. Kaba (2011) says it well in her statement that “if politicians acknowledged that most criminalized harms are rooted in social and economic inequities, they would be expected to address those inequities, which most refuse to do” (p. 24). No longer can

counselors and counselor educators be complicit in these acts of willful ignorance by being passive bystanders in a revolution that expressly calls for our involvement and leadership.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Study: Celling Freedom: Formerly Incarcerated Black Women Visualizing Prison Abolition and Mental Health Justice
IRB Protocol 26341
Principal Investigator(s): Brittany M. Wake, bwake@ncsu.edu
Funding Source: None
NC State Faculty Point of Contact: Marc A. Grimmett, magrimme@ncsu.edu

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You are invited to take part in a research study. Here are some important things to know:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose not to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate and change your mind, you can stop participating at any time without penalty.
- The purpose of this research study is to explore the mental health experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women to demonstrate the urgency of ending carceralism and the responsibility counselors and counselor educators must adopt an abolitionist politic.
- You will be asked to describe your mental health experiences before, during, and after your incarceration, as well as your visions for an abolitionist future, using storytelling, personal photographs, and cellphone videos. The research commitment is expected to be 4 weeks.
- You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies may pose risks to those who participate.
- You may want to participate in this research because it is an opportunity to learn more about abolition, use your voice to expose the harms of incarceration, and engage in activism that may influence policies related to the incarceration of women. You may not want to participate in this research because you may be identified as someone with a history of incarceration and be exposed to the stigma and oppression associated with involvement in the carceral system.
- If you have questions about your participation in this research at any time, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office via email at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu or via phone at 1-919-515-8754

Please read the rest of this consent form for more specific details of this research. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of the study is to explore the mental health experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women to demonstrate the urgency of ending carceralism and the responsibility counselors and counselor educators have to adopt an abolitionist politic.

How many people will be in the study?

There will be approximately 2-6 participants in this study.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?

To be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study, identify as a Black woman, be age 18 or older, and have direct, lived experience of incarceration.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do all the following:

1. Participate in an individual interview with the researcher for 1-2 hours discussing your experience with incarceration and mental health supports.
2. Participate in (2) Sista Circles, a type of research group, with the other 1-5 participants and the research discussing your experience with incarceration and mental supports. Each Sista Circle is expected to last 1-2 hours.
3. Read a copy of the book "We Do This 'til We Free Us" (Kaba, 2021). A copy of the book will be provided at no cost to you.
4. Provide personal photographs that represent your experiences and mental health journey before, during, and after incarceration.
5. Film cellphone videos of your reflections after Sista Circles related to your mental health experiences, perspective on abolition, and visions for liberation.
6. Take part in a screening of the composite cellphilm to community members to increase awareness of the harms of incarceration and possibilities for an abolitionist future.
7. You will be provided a copy of your research data so that you can confirm the accuracy of the information collected. You can indicate if there's any information or identifiers you want us to delete or not share.

The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study is approximately 5-8 hours over the course of 4 weeks.

Recording in research

The research team would like to record you for research purposes if you agree. The recording will only occur while you are participating in research activities. Please initial next to the sentence(s) that you agree to:

_____ It's okay to photograph me.
_____ It's okay to record my computer screen.
_____ It's okay to audio record me.
_____ It's okay to video record me.
_____ It's okay to record audio and video of me.

We would like to use these recordings and/or your image for transcription and the creation of a composite cellphilm (cellphone video documentary/informational tool). We will keep these recordings/images indefinitely.

Benefits to participating in this research

The direct benefits to you as a result of your participation in this research include: the opportunity to discuss your incarceration and mental health experience with peers who may offer emotional support, learn about abolitionist feminism in a group setting along with a research

method (cellphilming) that you will be able to replicate after the study, and have direct access to the completed composite cellphilm to be used in activist work and policy change for incarcerated women.

Risks to participating in this research

The risks to you, because of participating in this research, include being identified as a person with incarceration history which may result in various experiences of interpersonal and institutional oppression. These risks are mitigated through the exclusion of charges associated with arrest and/or

conviction, unless you choose to include this information in the research data, and the structure of the research study to advocate for the support of formerly incarcerated people rather than with continued oppression.

Researcher obligations

Due to my professional role as a clinical mental health counselor, as well as Oregon and North Carolina reporting requirements, I have an obligation to report child neglect and abuse, elder neglect and abuse, or the neglect and abuse of other vulnerable adults such as those with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. This means that if I observe instances of, or you tell me about physical, sexual, or other violence or neglect directed toward children, elders, and other vulnerable adults, I am obligated to report that. The risks associated with reporting this information include investigations from Child Protective and/or Adult Protective Services.

What data will be collected about me and are there risks associated with that?

The data that are collected about you include your experiences of incarceration and mental health supports and challenges, documented in photographs, audio, and video. These data are directly identifiable. The risks to you because of collecting this information include being identified as someone who has been incarcerated. These risks will be mitigated through implementing data protections in accordance with NC State data protection standards.

The dataset will remain directly identifiable.

How will my identity and the data about me be stored and protected?

After all data is collected, the researchers will go through the data and remove all direct identifiers participants would not like to be included with the data and retain indirect identifiers with the data.

If there is information you want to be omitted from the data, we will go through your responses and the transcripts and do our best to remove or replace any information that can identify you directly. Examples of the information we will remove are names and charges associated with arrest or conviction. After we do this, it may still be possible for someone to recognize you from your responses.

Who can access my data and how will my data be shared and used in the future?

We would like to keep, use, and share your individually identifiable data with others for future unspecified research. To do this, we need your additional consent, which can be found after this

document. If you do not provide additional consent, then any data we store, use, and share with others for future research will not be identifiable.

How will the data about me be reported to the public and are there risks associated with that?

You will be easily recognized by the way we report the results from our study in publications, presentations, etc. This is because you will be telling your story directly using photographs and cellphone videos as a form of scholar-activism. As a result of how we share information about you, the possible risks to you or others you know include being identified as a person with incarceration history which may result in discriminatory or oppressive treatment.

Right to withdraw your participation

Your participation is voluntary. Even if you agree initially, consent is an ongoing process. You can stop participating at any time for any reason. To do so, tell the researcher you no longer wish to participate. You can also contact the student researcher, Brittany M. Wake, at bwake@ncsu.edu. Or you can contact the faculty advisor for this research, Marc A. Grimmett, at magrimme@ncsu.edu.

If you withdraw, we will stop any procedures or data collection that may be happening. We will also delete any data that's already been collected from you whenever possible. We will not be able to delete your data if we cannot identify which responses are yours or if the data has already been published.

Compensation

For your participation in this study, you will receive a $150 gift card for completion of the research in its entirety. Compensation is outlined as follows: $25 for the semi-structured interview, $50 per Sista Circle, and $25 for the completion of an individual cellphilm to be included in a composite cellphilm. If you withdraw from the study before it ends, you will not receive compensation.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the student researcher, Brittany M. Wake, at bwake@ncsu.edu. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Marc A. Grimmett, at magrimme@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State University IRB office at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out a confidential form online at https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/

Consent to participate

By signing this consent form, I am affirming that I have read the above information. All the questions that I had about this research have been answered. If I consent to participate, I understand that I can stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

☐ **Yes, I want to be in this research study.**

Name_____ **Today's Date** _____

☐ **No, I do not want to be in this research study.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Appendix B

Participant Broad Consent Form

Title of Study: Celling Freedom: Formerly Incarcerated Black Women Visualizing Prison Abolition and Mental Health Justice
IRB Protocol 26341
Principal Investigator(s): Brittany M. Wake, bwake@ncsu.edu
Funding Source: None
NC State Faculty Point of Contact: Marc A. Grimmett, magrimme@ncsu.edu

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In this study, we are collecting data that is considered identifiable and private. Your data are identifiable because they may contain your name, face, voice, and likeness. If requested, we may remove direct identifiers like your name, face, voice, and likeness, although we are unable to remove every piece of information that would allow your identity to be figured out.

We would like to keep, use, and share this identifiable, private data for future unspecified research. The specific research is currently unknown and could be unrelated to the purposes of the current study. This is why we need to ask you for additional consent, called "broad consent."

Please know that you do not have to provide broad consent in order to be in the original study. Your decision will not affect your participation or compensation in the current study. It is not a condition of your enrollment or employment at any institution. Providing broad consent is completely optional and there is no personal benefit for you. You may indirectly benefit as your data will be used for research that can support or improve many areas of life.

If you provide broad consent:
We will do the following with your identifiable, private data:

- Store and maintain your data (for an indefinite period of time)
- Use your data for future research purposes (for an indefinite period of time)
- Share your data with other researchers or entities for their research use. The other entities may include research, academic, and medical institutions, Drug and device companies, Biotechnology companies, and others

Your data will be used for medical, scientific, and other research. Although we will make every effort to inform you how your data will be used, you may not be told the purposes, results, or any other details of the specific research studies that will use your data. You will also not be asked for consent each time your data is used or shared. This means your data could be used for studies that you may not have consented to if you were asked.

Your data may also be used to create products or to deliver services. These products or services may be sold and/or make money for others. If this happens, there are no plans to tell you, pay you, or give any compensation to you or your family.

The main risks in providing broad consent are that in the future, you may not agree with how your data will be used, your identity could be figured out, and your data could be accessed by unintended parties. We will manage who can access your data and store it using regularly updated security plans. However, we will be unable to control what happens to the data after we share it with others.

If you don't provide broad consent or complete this form:
We will not store, use, or share the identifiable, private data collected from you beyond the purposes stated in the previous consent form that you agreed to and signed for the Celling Freedom: Formerly Incarcerated Black Women Visualizing Prison Abolition and Mental Health Justice study. If you do not complete this form, we will assume you are not providing broad consent.

If you want to withdraw your broad consent
Please contact the researcher, Brittany M. Wake, at bwake@ncsu.edu. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Marc A. Grimmett, at magrimme@ncsu.edu.

If you want to withdraw your broad consent and have your permission revoked for the use of your data for unspecified future research, we will delete your data from our records so that we can no longer use your data for future research. However, if your data have been shared with others for other research studies, we may not be able to affect how others use your data.

If you have questions:
Please ask the research team to explain anything in this form that you do not clearly understand. Please think about this broad consent, ask questions, and/or discuss it with family or friends before making the decision to say "Yes" or "No" to broad consent.

If you want to discuss your rights as a person who has agreed to, refused, or declined to respond to an offer of broad consent or believe that your rights were violated as a result of your agreeing to this broad consent, please contact the NC State IRB Director at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out a confidential form online at https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/.

Please select one option and provide your name and today's date

☐ **Yes, I would like to provide broad consent.** My identifiable, private information can be kept and used for future research studies. I acknowledge that I have read this form and any questions have been answered. I have been informed that I can withdraw my consent at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

☐ **No, I do *not* want to provide broad consent.** I do not give permission for my identifiable, private data to be kept or used for other research studies. I acknowledge that I have read this form and any questions have been answered. **I know I can still participate in this research if I say No.**

_____

Name

_____

Today's Date

Appendix C

Participant Social Media Recruitment Script

Good morning/afternoon/evening [co-producer name],

My name is Brittany Wake and I'm a doctoral student at North Carolina State University, although I currently live in Portland, OR. I am currently working on my dissertation which is focused on understanding the mental health experiences of Black women who have been incarcerated. The ultimate goal of this exploration is to hear formerly incarcerated Black women tell their stories in their own words, in their own voices and advocate for a world where incarceration and punishment would not be the answer to our life challenges.

I've seen and read some of the interviews that you've given as a formerly incarcerated Black woman and advocate. You have such a powerful voice; I would love the opportunity to collaborate with you in my research as well as with any other Black women in your network that you think might be interested.

Would you consider talking more with me about additional details to see if this might be something you'd be interested in? I am open to talking by phone, Zoom, or in-person depending on what works best for you.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Peace,

Brittany Wake

Appendix D

Organizational Email Recruitment Script

Good morning/afternoon/evening [organization staff name],

My name is Brittany Wake and I'm a doctoral student at North Carolina State University, although I currently live in Portland, OR. I am currently working on my dissertation which is focused on understanding the mental health experiences of Black women who have been incarcerated. The goal of this exploration is to hear formerly incarcerated Black women tell their stories in their own words, in their own voices and advocate for a world where incarceration and punishment would not be the answer to our life challenges.

[Organization name]'s program supporting formerly incarcerated Black women has an inspiring mission and vision to [include organizational mission and vision]. I believe this work aligns with my research goals and I would value the opportunity to speak more with you and potential contributors that you think might be interested in collaborating on this work.

Is it possible for us to schedule a meeting more to discuss potential options for collaboration and connection with the women you work with? I am open to meeting by phone, Zoom, or in-person depending on your preference.

Thank you so much for your consideration. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Peace,

Brittany Wake

Appendix E

Celling Freedom Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

2. How do you define ‘mental health’?
3. How would you describe your mental health prior to being incarcerated?
4. How would you describe your mental health during incarceration?
5. How was your mental health immediately after incarceration?
6. How is your mental health currently?
7. What kinds of things do you do/have you done to support your mental health (i.e. yoga, prayer, meditation, medication, etc.)?
8. What was your experience with mental health professionals/counselors at any point during your mental health journey?
9. What influence did mental health professionals/counselors have on your mental health journey?
10. Who else influenced/supported your mental health journey?
11. What might your mental health be like if prisons didn’t exist?
12. What do you imagine your life would be like if prisons no longer existed in the future?
13. What do you think mental health professionals/counselors could do to make that future possible?

Appendix F

Celling Freedom: Sista Circle #1 Protocol

Theme: Introducing the Sista Circle

1. Please introduce yourself with your name, pronouns, and any other information you most want us to know about you?
2. How do you feel about discussing prison history and mental health experiences with this group?
3. What do you need to make this a space where you can feel safe and comfortable?
4. What commitments do we need to make to form a sisterhood and stay in sisterhood?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Theme: Introducing Prison Abolition, Feminism, and Mental Health

1. What do you know about the prison-industrial-complex
2. What is your perspective on prison abolition?
3. What reactions/reflections do you have about the Democracy Now! video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ebWFnGWOaA) featuring Angela Davis's explanation of prison abolition? What is your perspective on prison abolition now?
4. What is your perspective on feminism in the context of the prison-industrial-complex and prison abolition? What do you think about discussing women specifically in conversations about the carceral system?
5. How do you define mental health?
6. What do you think prison abolition would mean for mental health? Women's mental health?

   Anything else you would like to share?

Appendix G

Celling Freedom: Sista Circle #2 Protocol

Theme: Reflection and Planning our Cellphilm

1. What reactions/reflections do you have about our last Sista Circle?
2. How do you connect what we've discussed to your own lived experience?
3. What would you most want to convey to other people about your lived experiences? (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBaRYFMoBd4&list=PL0t7A9ItFghOPkGEPhEvLUYb13kpIJc_F&index=1)
4. What stories would you like to tell in a cellphilm?
5. How do you want the cellphilm to be used (i.e. advocacy for incarcerated women and prison abolition)?
6. What else do we need to consider as we plan for our composite cellphilm?
7. Anything else you would like to share?

Appendix H

Celling Freedom Member Checking Email Template

Hello [Co-producer Name],

I hope this e-mail finds you well. I am contacting you to request that you review your interview transcript, the themes identified using your interview transcript, and the composite cellphilm. This process is referred to as "member checking" and will involve the following steps:

1. I will share your interview transcript and the composite cellphilm via my private North Carolina State University Google Drive folder.
2. You are asked to gain access to the document(s) using your personal computer and a secure network. Both of us will be the only ones to be able to access this private folder. I suggest completing this activity in a private location, on a private internet connection, and accessing this folder using a web browser that is in private/incognito mode.
3. You will read through the document(s) in the private folder and comment in the document if you agree, disagree, or would like to clarify or change the content in each document and how you would like to do so. I expect this will take about 1 hour of your time.
4. You will e-mail me to inform me that you have completed reading through your document(s) and commenting in them as appropriate. I am requesting that you do this within two weeks of this email. ***Please do not provide information or feedback in the email you send to us regarding your completion of the task.***
5. Once the verification process by you is completed, I will remove your access to the private NC State University Google Drive folder with your document(s) in it.

I expect that the member-checking activities will take about 1 hour of your time. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Brittany M. Wake
bwake@ncsu.edu

Appendix I

Celling Freedom Codebook

Codes

Name	Description	Sources	References
Building Task	One of Gee's 7 building tasks that contribute to the development of a world-building discourse	N/A	N/A
Connections	How does this data make one thing relevant or irrelevant to others?	3	41
Addiction and Generational Trauma	Substance Use Disorder and other addictions are the result of intergenerational trauma.	1	1
Age and Recovery	Engagement in recovery is connected to one's age and maturity	1	2
Christian Morality and Emotional Intelligence	Skills developed through emotional intelligence and emotional maturity are connected with Christian values.	1	1
Economic Status and Prison Survival	Access to money is connected with comfort in prison.	1	2
Economic Status and Substance Use	Access to money and class status are connected with substance use disorder.	1	3
Faith and Morality	Christianity is connected to morally and socially correct behavior.	1	1
Faith and Recovery	Christianity is connected to recovery from substance use disorder.	1	4
Family and Recovery	Familial relationships are connected to recovery from substance use disorder.	1	1
Grief and Substance Use	Grief and loss are connected to use of drugs.	1	1
Incarceration and Life Change	The ability to change one's life is connected to experience of incarceration.	1	4
Incarceration and Medical Issues	Incarceration is connected with challenges accessing quality medical care.	2	5
Mental Health Challenges and Punishment	Experiencing mental health challenges while incarcerated is associated with punishment.	1	1
Punishment and Gratitude or Growth	Experience of incarceration and related punitive action is associated with the opportunity to grow and gratitude	2	3

Name	Description	Sources	References
	for the growth.		
Racism, Oppression and the Carceral State	Incarceration and policing are associated with oppression, including racism.	2	7
Relational Challenges and Suicidal Ideation	Conflicts in relationship is associated with suicidal ideation.	1	1
Respectability and Treatment	Ability to behave in a 'respectable' manner is associated with one's quality of treatment while incarcerated.	1	1
Shame and Physical Altercation	Feelings of shame and other painful emotions is associated with engaging in physical altercations.	1	1
Substance Use and Criminality or Punishment	Using substances is connected with criminality and punishment.	2	3
Substance Use and Mental Health Challenges	The use of substances is connected with mental health challenges.	1	2
Toxic Relationships and Substance Use	Interpersonal violence and harm are associated with substance use.	1	4
Violation of Rights and Individual Knowledge	Individual knowledge and privilege to information is associated with the extent to which one might have their rights violated.	2	4
Identities	What identity is this data enacting for the speaker/writer/presenter?	3	37
Black	Being Black in Oregon	2	3
Breadwinner	Making money for one's family	1	1
Caught Up in the System	Getting stuck in the carceral system	1	1
Christian	Person of Christian Faith	2	5
Done Time	Person with Insider knowledge of the carceral system	2	5
Exploited and Hurt	A person navigating exploitation and harm	3	7
Having ADHD	Diagnosis of Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder	1	1
In Recovery	Person in recovery from substance use	1	4
Low Income	Person with limited financial resources	1	1
Mentor	Person who helps others	1	2

Name	Description	Sources	References
Parent - Grandparent	Mother, Grandmother, and Othermother Identities	3	11
Partner	Person with romantic connections	1	1
Person with Depression	Person identifying depression as a personal mental health challenge	1	1
Person with Experience of Psychosis	Person identifying psychosis as a personal mental health challenge	1	1
Person with Mental Health Challenges	Person who has experienced mental health challenges, broadly	1	1
Person with SUD	Person with a substance use disorder	2	7
Snitch	Person who tells on another resulting in criminalization	1	1
Strong and Independent	Person who does not need others to survive	1	5
Survivor	Person who has overcome difficult, painful circumstances	2	6
Politics	What is being communicated as being right or good?	3	38
Church and Faith	Church and faith are a public good	2	3
Cleanliness - Sobriety	Being 'clean and sober' is a public good	1	5
Gender Equality	The equal treatment between genders (specifically men and women) is a public good	1	1
Good parent or role model	Being a "good" parent or role model is a desirable role	2	4
Housing and public assistance	Receiving housing and other public assistance is a public good	1	1
Independence and Willpower	Being independent and having the ability to exercise willpower is a public good	1	3
Insider knowledge	Having insider knowledge or insight is a social good	3	6
Life Change	Being identified as someone who has changed their life for the better or 'turned things around' is a social good	1	5
Money - Wealth	Having money and/or being wealthy is a public good	2	3
Not telling - maintaining codes	Keeping street codes like not snitching is a social good	1	1
Protected and Respected	Being regarded as a respectable person and receiving protection from others is a social good	2	6

Name	Description	Sources	References
Quality Medical Care	Having access to quality medical care is a public good	2	6
Respectable behavior	Engaging in behavior associated with 'high class' status is a public good	3	9
Socializing	Having the ability to engage with others of your choice is a social good	3	5
Solidarity with and among Black People	Demonstrating solidarity with and among Black people is a social good	2	4
SUD Treatment	Substance Use Disorder Treatment is a public good	2	4
Tough on Crime	The concept of being 'tough on crime' is identified as a public good, even though sometimes to the detriment of the individual	1	2
Unconditional Love - Nonexploitation	Receiving unconditional love and not being exploited are social goods	1	1
Practices	What practices is this data enacting?	3	48
Being in an Abusive Relationship	What occurs in the process of experiencing intimate partner violence	3	4
Capitalism	The processes of using people labor (mainstream and underground economies) to build wealth	2	3
Doing Programming	What is involved when engaging various programs or supports while incarcerated	2	4
Engaging Street Economies	Practices of participating in various street economies	1	1
Boosting	Taking goods from commercial retailers without payment	1	1
Selling Drugs	The process of selling drugs in underground economies	1	4
Sex Work - Being Trafficked	Processes involved in sex work or being trafficked for sex labor	1	1
Experiencing Symptoms of Mental Health Challenges	Processes involved in experiencing the symptoms of a mental health challenge	2	3
Racing Thoughts	Cognitive practices associated with a mental health condition	1	1
Suicidal Ideation	The practice of considering suicide (thoughts, plans, and actions)	1	1
Faith and Christianity	Practices associated with being a Christian or person of faith	3	7

Name	Description	Sources	References
Fighting and Altercations	The practice of fighting for love, care, respect or some other social good	1	3
Generational Trauma	The practice of trauma being passed down through generational lines	2	6
Getting Used to the System	The process of acclimatization to incarceration and carceral practices	1	1
Gratitude	Practices of being thankful	2	2
Isolation	Practices associated with being in isolation	2	2
Parenting	The practice of being a mother or parent	2	8
Paying it Forward	Practices related to extending support to others that are where you have been	1	2
Receiving Mental Health Support	Practices associated with receiving mental health support	2	12
Self-Regulation and Emotional Intelligence	Practices related to emotional self-regulation	2	4
Snitching	Practices of telling on someone to authority	1	2
Substance Use Disorder	Practices related to having a substance use disorder	2	5
Coping with Pain	Using substances to cope with pain	1	3
Recovery	Actions associated with being in recovery	2	5
Return to Use	Return to substance use after a period of abstinence	1	4
Selling Drugs	The practice of selling drugs in underground economies	1	4
Surveillance	Practices of being watched or surveilled by actors of the carceral state	2	7
Surviving Sexual Abuse	Practices of surviving sexual assault and abuse	3	4
Systemic Racism	Practices associated with systemic racism	3	6
Violation of Rights	Practices of having one's rights violated or witnessing the violation of others	2	4
Relationship	What type of relationship is this data seeking to enact?	3	39
Adapter to the System	A survivor of the system through adaptation to it	1	1
Advocate and Respectable Person Against Injustice	An advocate against systemic injustice and a person to be admired.	1	5

Name	Description	Sources	References
Easy Prey of the System	The system preys on people like me and I'm thought to be an easy target	1	2
Expert	An expert on the lived experience of women's incarceration.	1	6
Faithful Servant to God	A servant to God	2	6
Fighter Against Insult	A fighter against insult/I protect myself against others	1	3
Inheritor of Intergenerational Trauma	Intergenerational trauma has been passed down to me from a family member	2	4
Mentee - Client	Relationship to someone else as a mentee or client	2	3
Mentor to Others	Relationship to others as a mentor	2	6
Person without Luxuries	Relationship to others with more means	1	1
Vulnerable Person to be Taken Advantage Of	Relationship of victimization by others	2	4
Sign Systems and Knowledge	How does this data "privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems?"	3	10
Isolation	Speaking as someone who has been isolated/left alone	1	1
Lived Experience	Speaking from lived experience/expert knowledge	3	8
Observation and Experience	Speaking as a witness to a specific experience	2	4
Significance	How is the data being used to make some things more significant or less significant?	3	29
Faith	Faith is being used as significant for overcoming hurdles	1	1
Intergenerational Trauma	Intergenerational trauma is made significant as a pathway to incarceration	1	1
Mandatory Minimums	Mandatory minimums are made significant in one's excessive incarceration	1	2
Mental Health Challenges	Mental health challenges are made significant in one's experience of incarceration	3	5
Older Age	Age is made significant in the decision to engage recovery	1	2

Name	Description	Sources	References
Quality of Physical Health Services	Quality of physical health services is made significant in terms of how one experiences incarceration	1	1
Quality of Relationships	Quality of relationships is made significant in experience of incarceration and other circumstances	2	15
Custody of Children	Pursuing custody of children is significant in decision making	1	3
Race and Racism	Race and racism are made significant in the circumstances involving incarceration and the experience of incarceration	2	2
Rape Culture and Victim Blaming	The situations a woman 'places herself in' is made significant in their experiences of rape and sexual assault	1	1
Socioeconomic Status	Socioeconomic status is made significant in how one is able to experience incarceration	1	1
Trauma of Prison	The traumatic experience of prison is made significant	1	1