Everyone Survived but Nobody Survived

A Black Feminist Ethnography on Motherhood and Mass Incarceration

by

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ABSTRACT

Critiques of mass incarceration and its far-reaching effects have become a growing field of study in academia, drawing attention to the inequities and injustices created by prisons and the systems of white supremacy and patriarchy underlying the carceral logics of the prison. Prisons, as a form of social control, are not only to police and regulate individual bodies and spirits, but entire communities. While people of color are locked into systems of incarceration, their families (spouses, partners, parents, and children) are also caught up with the financial and emotional burdens of incarceration. This dissertation focuses on a population called Mainline Mamas: Black women with relationship to prisons—through visitation or incarceration—while engaging with family, children, partners, and other women. Drawing on autoethnography and interviews with seven women who have navigated prisons as visitors, and some as incarcerated persons, this dissertation, therefore, interrogates how Black women are forced into a relationship with prisons, through incarceration and/or visitation, define, practice, and experience mothering. These stories show how Mainline Mamas form communities as they navigate the entrenched hierarchies of the prison industrial complex. Mainline Mama, as a population, practice, and theory, is therefore a reimagining of possibility from the margins; a particular form of precarity that also searches for joy, family, and connection in the midst of a carceral state violence.

DEDICATION

For everyone who survived and everyone who couldn’t.

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CHAPTER 1

LIFELINES: MOTHERHOOD, BLACK FEMINISM, AND STORYTELLING

When I first started visiting prison, I kept to myself.

On my first visit to Calipatria State Penitentiary in California, I arrived at 6 am. At the last prison I visited, Susanville, in northern California, it was super remote—there was very little traffic, there would be maybe 3 or 4 cars there at 6 am to ensure you got there first. I figured Calipatria should be more of the same. It shouldn't be that bad. It was still dark when I pulled up to the line for the prison, expecting to be near the front, just like Susanville. In the middle of the desert, there's nothing really around the prison—it's almost an hour to the nearest town, nobody will want to be out here, especially this time of day. When I pull on to the street, I can already see the line of cars stretching back maybe 50 cars deep in the morning din. I pull up behind the last car and park, so I can step out and look down the line again to make sure I'm not making it up. Still 50 cars in front of me. I am number 115 to visit that day. They give you tickets to mark your spot in line, once you cross into the parking lot to enter the waiting room to go to visiting at Calipatria. I got there at 6 am just to be number 115. Everything I learned about visiting at Susanville would not work at Calipatria, I had a lot to learn and unlearn.

I put myself on alert to start being observant, picking up on conversations in the visitor's waiting room to listen to who's being called first or second, making mental notes. These were people I could talk to. "What time do you guys come up here?" I don't mind introducing myself to people. I know I'm gonna be back, meeting people meant that I could ask them when they show up, or if there's something special, they do.

At number 115 I have to wait. This is taking up all my visiting time, just waiting. They don't start calling numbers till 8 am, so I don't get to the visitation room until 10 am, and I know they're going to kick us out at 2 pm. After driving 3 hours from Los Angeles, waiting for 4 hours in the waiting room, I only have about 4 hours of visiting, before the 3-hour drive back home.

You have to tap into the underground knowledge—people don't trust people. You don't want people to know your business, and you aren't eager to share it with anybody. Once you meet people, even as they become close family or close friends, you still have to work to the point of becoming vulnerable and actually telling your story about why you're there. It's a lot to tell a stranger.

Once I get to the visiting yard on my first day in Calipatria, some of the people I saw going in first were in my yard. I point them out to my partner, to let him know to check and see if they were connected, or if he might know them. After that weekend, when my partner calls me, I find out that he talked to the partner of the other woman I saw, they are the same unit. Connected through our incarcerated partners, I met my first mentor as a Mainline Mama. She taught me how to show up to the line, how to talk to the guards, how to navigate the system on a practical level. I knew that prisons were about to be part of my life on a weekly basis, and she taught me how to move in this new chapter of my life. The lessons I learned at Calipatria I could take to any prison. The prison system incarcerates people for years at a time, but they do not often stay in the same prison facility during their entire sentence. Just as I had to move on from Susanville to Calipatria, I knew I might have to start visiting a new prison in a new place.

The lessons I learned and shared at Calipatria were so deep, I could take them, share, and connect with other women at new prisons. This is how the network works.

Once I start visiting prison, I get to know people, I see who visits regularly, I get to know them, and before I know it, we all stay at the same hotels when we come to visit. I come to realize I'm not by myself. The stigma of the type of woman who visits, and that's internalized too—feeling alone in the process, isolated in our own little bubble, like you're crazy for coming to visit every week. I see women all the time, but I feel isolated in my own little bubble. But I'm not alone. Some people told me that "I'm not like these other girls" that visit prison because I'm in school and have a good job. But you realize the prison industrial complex is ruthless and gets everyone. We cross every demographic. I met a doctor who did doctors without borders, an extraordinary woman. I met a woman who was a prosecutor. All different walks of life.

Stories of Black women are marginalized for failing to fit particular frames of Blackness or Womanhood. This is particularly true for women having to navigate the prison system as mothers. Black women's connections to our families and communities are strained, sometimes interrupted, but always negotiated in the midst of racism and mass incarceration that surround Black women in the United States. For this dissertation, I draw on my personal experiences as a Black woman and mother who spent twenty years raising children and visiting my incarcerated partner, co-parenting, navigating life in and outside the prison. My experience pushed me to study the experiences and perspectives of women like me and compare our stories and understandings of mothering practices in relationship to prisons. This dissertation is therefore about an inquiry into how Black

women who are forced into a relationship with prisons, through incarceration and/or visitation, define, practice, and experience mothering.

Because this research stems from my personal experiences navigating mass incarceration while visiting my incarcerated partner over twenty years, I start with my story and interweave my personal narrative throughout the chapters as a way of understanding my positionality in relation to the carceral system. In the following section, I will explain the methodological frames of my work, defining what it means to start the work with my personal storytelling by situating the work in autoethnography framed by Black feminist epistemologies. Then, I move into an engagement with literature on prisons, particularly Black women, and mothers, to highlight the lack of engagement with the stories of Black women and mother from the perspective of Black mothers who have lived such an experience. These introductory remarks end with a summary of the dissertation as a guide.

Black Feminism and Autoethnography

I do not tell my story because it is an isolated event. Rather, I am centering on my experience because it challenges dominant narratives and controlling images of Black women. Situating myself within the story is a form of storytelling and counter-storytelling which follows the tradition of Black women and other women of color. For me, storytelling is a form of resistance and survival (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Williams, 1991). Methodologically, I tell my story as an autoethnography—a form of research and writing emphasizing personal narrative to engage the sociological imagination and

critique social norms. Norman K. Denzin defines autoethnography as turning the ethnographic gaze inwards on the self, while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography (1997, p. 223). These stories inform and help make sense of lives in a social cultural context through reflexive accounts (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 17). Robin Boylorn's autoethnography *Sweetwater*, for example, is an autoethnography describing her experiences growing up as a working-class Black woman in the rural South, using her experiences and perspectives to synthesize and explore concepts of social identity, organization, and Black feminism (2013). Denzin further explains that autoethnography is a political act: "As a performative practice [autoethnography] interrogates and criticizes those cultural narratives that make victims responsible for the cultural and interpersonal violence they experience" (Denzin, 2003, p. 273). In response to structural and systemic violence, autoethnography celebrates the struggles of oppressed peoples while providing social and structural critiques through narratives "directed back to the structures that shape and produce the violence in question" (Denzin, 2003, p. 273).

I extend this approach to tell my own story as a frame for discussing the ongoing and historical institutional violence against Black women in prisons while embracing mothering as a site of resistance—a social, cultural, and political standpoint that can combat institutional violence through care work within biological, social, and informal families. My story, and the stories of other Black women who share my experience, represent a praxis of mothering that I describe as the Mainline Mama: the experiences women form in relationship to prisons—through visitation or incarceration—while engaging with family, children, partners, and other women. Mainline Mama is a practical

and theoretical way of harnessing the experiences of Black women like me to describe our experiences with state violence, but also our connections and joys.[1] Rachel Alicia Griffin summarizes the importance of autoethnography to Black feminism and the experiences of Black women "as a means to voice is obligated to raise social consciousness regarding the everyday struggles common to Black womanhood; embrace self-definition as a means for Black women to be labeled, acknowledge, and remembered as they wish" (2012, p. 143). I use my personal experiences to frame and situate scholarship on race, class, gender, and institutional violence against Black women (Richie, 2012; Bridges, 2011; James J. , 2016).

By sharing my story and inserting myself into the narrative through autoethnography, I relate my personal experiences to larger Black feminist epistemologies, and thereby speaking back against oppressive structural conditions. Boylorn argues that autoethnography is important for Black women since "Black women researchers can offer information about Black women that others can't" (Boylorn, 2013, p. 3). The knowledge production and creation that I am doing for this dissertation is necessarily political and subjective, though mindful of potential biases, assumptions, and situational knowledge that need to be explained as I tell my story. Autoethnography provides a method to experiences, as a way of discussing structural and social inequalities

[1] In this work I focus on the experiences of Black women as Mainline Mamas, however the framing of the Mainline Mama can apply to other racialized persons. The key to being a Mainline Mama is the focus on care work while navigating the prison system, which, because this work is rooted in my personal experiences as a Mainline Mama, centers the experiences of Black women. Other writers and women of course have experienced time as a Mainline Mama and I want to make sure that they are not excluded from the conversation, even if their experiences are not the focus of this work.

by connecting the subjective experiences of an individual researcher to a larger body of empirical knowledge.

In writing about myself, I am expressing my own complexity and agency in my encounters with structural oppression and institutional violence. Complexity necessarily comes through context. Controlling, stereotypical images of Black women are reductive by nature (Collins, 2000); it is a means of dehumanization that ignores the choices, hopes, dreams, sacrifices, and decisions made by Black women that are necessary to survive and live in a society that is antiblack. I came to graduate school while working full time and providing for myself and my sons. Though graduate school can confer knowledge and some status symbols, like titles or institutional recognition, it has come with an abundance of sacrifices—institutional violence, debt, minimum income while a graduate student, and time spent away from family. By using what recognition, the academy confers upon me to speak back against the institutional violence I have experienced, I am, as bell hooks calls it, "talking back" to systems of oppression by using a "liberated voice" as defiant resistance to systems of power (hooks, 1989, p. 9). This liberated voice therefore comes from my experiences: as a Black woman, mother, student, raising children while navigating the prison system.

Black women's standpoints and lived experiences create unique theories of resistance that subvert traditional methods of dealing with the state, like voting or petitioning, since these options were not always available to Black women (Combahee River Collective, 1977). I argue that Black feminism, especially because it is centered on defining the self, can intervene in these historical frameworks of stereotype and

institutions. Patricia Hill Collins states that, “Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women’s reality by those who live it” (2000, p. 22). For example, Audre Lorde struggled against mainstream, white, reductionist conceptions of feminism that oversimplified the complexity of experiences for Black women and the importance of difference among women. Lorde argued to counter and change this “blueprint” through self-definition: “We sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals” (Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, 2020, p. 123). Autoethnography and Black feminist thought therefore “expose the self” as Black women share personal, political experiences and perspectives which highlight larger theoretical and social realities that form community. bell hooks stresses that the positionality of Black women, through Black feminism, creates a unique space of critique: “It is essential for continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony, as well as to envision and create a counterhegemony” (hooks, 2000, p. 282). Therefore, Black women telling our own stories, through autoethnography and ethnography, provide a necessary starting point for critique because we experience the disadvantages created by systematic oppression. In doing so, we also provide a perspective that can see new, creative, and different ways of resisting.

Joy James, for instance, emphasizes how Black feminists create counterhegemonic discourse to challenge state power. Though women like Ida B. Wells and Ella Baker may go unacknowledged by in larger historical accounts of feminism, as James points out: "Wells [and] Baker's protofeminism offers a black feminist theory of violence. [They] analyze [] gender in relation to state and economic oppression in black life. … The women addressed gendered as well as the racialized dimensions of oppression and violence and resistance." (James J. , 2016, p. 70). This Black feminist critique is, therefore, multifaceted and grounded in a history of resistance precisely because of our experiences with multiple forms of oppression, and, thus, the ability to provide alternative critiques of violence that may go unseen or unaddressed. Similarly, Angela Y. Davis calls attention to the lack of recognition for Black women's efforts, both in historiography and in recognition of their scholarly merits, while decentering Black men's role in resistance:

> Precisely through performing the drudgery that has long been a central expression of the socially conditioned inferiority of women, the black woman in chains could help to lay the foundation for some degree of autonomy, both for herself and her men. Even as she was suffering under her unique oppression as female, she was thrust by the force of circumstances into the center of the slave community. She was, therefore, essential to the *survival* of the community. … Survival, moreover, was the prerequisite of all higher levels of struggle. (1995, p. 205)

Black women's survival is, therefore, tied to both the self and the community. Our personal resistance to oppression is the foundation for the survival of our families,

friends, and entire communities—Black women's experiences in gendered roles in the home and family made our care taking crucial to survival by default, but the ways in which Black women engaged in care work created the conditions for possibility that would foster struggle and resistance to that same oppression that placed Black women in the racialized and gendered roles in the first place.

Davis' emphasis on survival echoes The Combahee River Collective, who trace the roots of Black feminism to Black women's everyday struggles against white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. Importantly, the Combahee River Collective stresses need for Black women's voices as sources of liberation:

> Our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity, not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because of our need as human persons for autonomy.… We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love of for ourselves, our sisters, and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work. (2014, p. 273)

Just as Davis located Black women's survival at the center of community survival, The Collective emphasizes how Black women simultaneously center our own survival through self-love. If the community is dependent on our survival, we must put our own survival at the forefront, because others have not demonstrated an advocacy for our safety. The Collective not only centers self-advocacy, since they argued that Black women can best advocate from their own standpoint and interpretation, but importantly

from self-love. This way of framing resistance and advocacy therefore decenters the tropes of anger that have been associated with Black women, and instead grounds advocacy in love and the struggle for communality in the midst of structural oppression (Taylor, 2017). Black women have been historically subjected to state violence, but the survival and resistance of Black women grew discourses, theories, and practices of Black feminism, even if it is not labeled or called "Black feminism."

Black feminism is not monolithic or isolated; there is no handbook or rules for Black feminism, and each Black woman's interpretation of their feminism may contain personalized nuance, from the more traditional academic writings of Collins to the personal essays of Lorde to the retellings of Sojourner Truth's speeches. Black feminism grows from Black women's survival and resistance, while making sense of personal experiences individually, with other black women, and as a community. For me, this means drawing on my experiences as a Black woman and the stories told to me by my peers, mothers, grandmothers, and others. I also draw on the theoretical framings from scholars like Collins (2000) and hooks (1989) to understand the theories underlying Black women's positionalities and controlling images of Black women. I supplement this frame with the practical experiences of the Combahee River Collective (1977) and Davis (1995) whose activism inform their theory and practice, which I incorporate into my praxis and writing.

I begin with my story and an exploration of a Black feminist epistemological frame with an autoethnographic lens as a way of centering principles of autonomy, community, and resistance - themes that recur throughout this dissertation. Black

feminisms are practical and theoretical expressions of Black women's identities, that also manifest in resistance against attempts to control Black women.[2] Focusing on Black women who are navigating the prison system reveals the different mechanisms of social control, such as prisons and carceral ideologies as a means of control. As such, the following section explores prisons as social control, focusing specifically on their relationship to Black women. It also examines the structures of prison that Black women are forced to navigate, clarifying the social and structural obstacles that Black women face when they are forced to interact with the prison state.

Mass Incarceration and the Silence on Black Women

Punishment for crimes in the United States is rooted in public spectacle; people were put on display for their crimes in order to humiliate the person accused of a crime and to deter others from committing crime. In this way, prisons are "created not only with the purpose of keeping people in but keeping people out" (Shabazz, 2014, p. 571). David J. Rothman notes that seventeenth century European systems of punishment used incarceration only as a means of housing or holding individuals awaiting trial and subsequent punishment. According to Rothman: "the most frequent punishments during that time period included fines, whippings, mechanisms of shame, banishment and the gallows. … The [theory behind the deterrence model] was not to reform the offender but to frighten him into lawful behavior" (1998, pp. 101-102). Rothman argues that this was a moral impulse for the foundation of the United States, to "bring glory to a republican

[2] I frequently use the term Black women, which I use to refer to any person who identifies as both Black and a woman, including cis-, trans-, or a-gender individuals.

government and demonstrate its inherent moral superiority to other forms" by creating a system of incarceration (1998, p. 103).

In contrast, Michel Foucault describes the evolution of incarceration as movement from torture of the body, in the public whippings that Rothman described, to the torture of the soul through incarceration. Punishing the body has physical damage and effects, but the punishment of the soul acts on "the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations" by altering mindset (Foucalt, 2012, p. 16). Wounds of the body may heal or end quickly in death; the emotional and mental trauma of modern incarceration creates wounds that may never heal. For Foucault (2012), incarceration is part of the growth of disciplinary society: the state's use of punishment as social control by marking out delinquents, taking their labor, and removing them from society. Foucault explained it this way:

> It is said that the prison fabricated delinquents; it is true that it brings back, almost inevitably, before the courts those who have been sent there. But it also fabricates them in the sense that it has introduced into operation of the law and the offence, the judge and the offender, the condemned man and the executioner, the non-corporal reality of the delinquency that links them together and, for a century and a half, has caught them in the same trap. (p. 255)

The prison is part of a larger social construction of "delinquent," labeling someone as "other" and ostracizing them from society. In this way, otherization does not just happen through incarceration but happens through a larger social discourse of who is labeled as criminal. Punishment reinforces social hierarchies and the power of the state by defining categories of right and wrong according to compliance with social constructions of

behavior. Punishment of the soul is punishing non-compliance through psychological torture; either creating compliance or perpetual punishment. Though incarceration may have begun as a way of demonstrating moral superiority over the physical punishments of European society, Foucault (2012) reminds us that the effects of the prison as it grew and evolved were more devastating on the mindset of those incarcerated and society.

In the late 20th century, the practical effects of incarceration, and the rhetoric surrounding prisons, shifted from rehabilitation and deterrence to punishment as a means of social control. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, for instance, highlights how "prisons both depersonalized social controls, so that it could be bureaucratically managed across time and space, and satisfied the demands of reformers who largely prevailed against bodily punishment, which nevertheless endures in the death penalty and many torturous conditions of confinement" (2007, p. 11). Incarceration supposedly focuses on punishing the individual person or offender through dispossession, as "the justification for putting people behind bars rests on the premise that as a consequence of certain actions, some people should lose all freedom (which we can define in this instance as control over one's bodily habits, pastimes, relationships, and mobility)" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 12). As such, although prisons may have started with some ideal of punishment as a rarely used social deterrent, over time it became part and parcel of corporate capitalist bureaucracy enmeshed into the culture of the United States. As Robert Chase explains, "The U.S. incarceration apparatus now comprises 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 2,259 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,283 local jails, 79 Indian Country jails, and over 200 immigration detention facilities" (2019, p. 6). Mass incarceration has profound

implications on marginalized communities, with extensive impact on Black, American Indian, and Latinx communities through prisons, jails, and immigration detention facilities that have "turned the gains of the civil rights era into another age of racial disparity" (Chase, 2019).

In California, for example, Gilmore documented the rapid growth of the prison industry in the early 21st century. She noted that political rhetoric of punishment merged with public complaints over the physical conditions of the prison to make prisons simultaneously more oppressive and insulated from social commentary. Accordingly: "Not once, but twice, the rising power bloc of 'tough on crime' and antiurban strategists seized hard-won reforms designed to make the prisoner's lot less desperate and transformed them into their inverse mirror images" (2007, pp. 88-89). Efforts to fight prison overcrowding and deteriorating facilities were used to fund efforts for an endless prison construction industry. Criticism of prisons—based on physical conditions and space—became reasons to build more prisons, just in different spaces. Similarly, the "tough on crime" crowd Gilmore describes claimed the importance of prisons in fighting crime—more prisons were supposed to be related to decreasing crime overall in society. However, as Marie Gottschalk points out: "[M]ass imprisonment has had a more modest effect on the crime rate." (2006, p. 25). Gottschalk cites Bruce Western to show "that only 10 percent of the serious drop in crime between 1993 and 2001 was due to the gigantic growth in the state prison population. The remaining 90 percent most likely would have happened anyway due to other factors, like changes in city policing" (2006,

p. 25). The use of crime and criminality to justify mass incarceration is therefore not an accurate account of the rise of prisons and prison populations, particularly in California.

Modern prisons in the United States not only punish those they incarcerate, but about policing particular bodies to put into prisons, namely people of color and Black people in particular. The mass incarceration of Black people by law can be traced to the Black codes. After the Civil War, laws across the United States criminalized vagrancy and created minor infractions to arrest emancipated Black people, with convict leasing systems to re-sell their labor to the plantations that enslaved them. In essence, Black codes sought to replace slavery with legalized, incarcerated, forced labor; a "a plain and indisputable attempt on the part of the Southern States to make the Negroes slaves in everything but name" (Du Bois, 1935, p. 167). The antebellum criminal justice system therefore "defined southern criminal justice largely as a means of controlling black labor" (Davis, 2011, p. 31). Though the Black codes were repealed, Davis argues that this attitude towards people and prisons has continued in the prison industrial complex. She suggests that "prison construction and the attendant drive to fill these new structures with human bodies have been driven by ideologies of racism and the pursuit of profit" (2011, p. 84). The classification of Black bodies as criminal goes hand in hand with the prison construction industry under the prison industrial complex. The prison construction boom depends on creating a need for bodies to fill that space, and the labeling of people as criminal creates a need for more structures to hold them. This is the cycle of the modern Prison Industrial complex.

Building prisons and filling them with people of color is a legally protected profit center for the Prison Industrial Complex. Alexander argues that the targeting of Black men for mass incarceration is directly connected to the War on Drugs, creating what she terms as "The New Jim Crow." Just as the Black codes and segregation took the place of slavery following the Civil War, Alexander contends that mass incarceration has taken the place of segregation following the wave of Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s, "yet the mass incarceration of communities of color was explained in race-neutral terms, an adaptation to the needs and demands of the current political climate. (2010, pp. 56-57). Today's mass incarceration, Alexander argues, should be characterized as "the New Jim Crow" because it is grounded in racial discrimination in housing, employment, voting, and education by using crime and felony status as a cover (Alexander, 2010, p. 57). The massive, disproportionate increase of communities of color in the prison population should raise alarms, but because it is done under the law, it is normalized and becomes part of the cycle of state violence against Black bodies. Prisons are more corporately organized and managed, regardless of whether they are owned by a private company or the state. Prisons are portrayed not only as "for the good of society," but also for the good of investors. Similarly, prisons are placed in remote locations, removing people from society through incarceration and removing the facility from the view of the public (Gilmore, 2007). Therefore, people who are not behind walls and people who are enacting the punishment are no longer forced to consider the morality of their actions.

Black Women and Mass Incarceration

While Alexander's *New Jim Crow* effectively historicizes and theorizes the legalization of warehousing of Black men, the mass incarceration of Black women goes largely undiscussed. In 2020, the Sentencing Project reported that Black women are incarcerated at "nearly 3 times the rate of white women" (2020, p. 2). Alexander focuses on the role of the war on drugs in creating mass incarceration, yet empirical data differentiated its effects showing that "women are more likely to be in prison for drug and property offenses, while men are more likely to be in prison for violent offenses" (The Sentencing Project, 2020, p. 2). Crime has been racialized through mass incarceration, and as exemplified by Alexander's work, but it has also been gendered. Alexander's work is illustrative: Her analysis focuses mostly on Black men and boys who are the victims of the sprawling prison system. Critics of mass incarceration, like Alexander, have focused on the men of color being incarcerated, but there is significantly less scholarship on incarcerated women, and even less on the families and communities that are left behind in the regime of mass incarceration.[3] Beth E. Richie, for instance, argues that the absence of women's stories should be read as another form of violence caused by the prison industrial complex. As she explains:

> Few of these discussions [about mass incarceration] focus specifically on women in these communities, except to describe what happens to them when there aren't

[3] There are rare exceptions. Chenelle Jones and Renita Seabrook focus specifically on the effects of incarceration on Black women, calling the systematic impact on Black women the "new jane crow" in direct response to Michelle Alexander's work (Jones & Seabrook, 2017). Similarly, the Essie Justice Group in 2018 released a report highlighting the untold stories of women with incarcerated loved ones ((Clayton, Richardson, Mandlin, & Farr, 2018). Both emphasize the lack of focus on Black women within mass incarceration literature, a reminder that a scholarly emphasis on Black women's experiences is the exception and not the rule in literature on prisons.

> men available for the establishment of traditional families. As in the case of responding to the problem of violence against women, framing the argument so narrowly in male-centered terms ignores particular gender relationships and important community dynamics. (Richie, 2012, pp. 147-48)

While Alexander (2010) is not an exception, works such as *The New Jim Crow* highlight how mass incarceration is too often narrowly discussed through absence of Black men in communities and the presence of Black men in prisons.

Similarly, the popular imaginary of incarcerated women, like the Netflix series, *Orange is the New Black* typically focuses on a white protagonist being taught by women of color how to survive a prison sentence.[4] Despite the fact that women of color are the "fastest growing [incarcerated] population," *Orange is the New Black* provides a "reassuring and self-immunizing message for white liberals and progressives" by highlighting the restrictions of incarceration through a white protagonist while ignoring the permanence of stigmatization for women of color (Smith, 2015, p. 280). Even though Black women are overrepresented in incarceration[5] (The Sentencing Project, 2020), our stories are underrepresented in media portrayals of these populations, favoring white women's experiences as a 'fish out of water' trope. The conceit of *Orange is the New Black* is that Piper, the main white character, feels as if she does not *belong* in a prison,

[4] The show is based on the memoir of Piper Kerman but follows a fictionalized version of Piper and women at a prison facility in upstate New York. The show ran for a total of seven seasons, between 2013 and 2019. While the show incorporates the additional characters backstories through flashbacks and other storytelling devices, Piper is the protagonist and central figure throughout the show's narrative. Her relationships, in and outside the prison, are the driving portions of the story.

[5] The Sentencing Project reports a 60% decrease in the incarceration rate of Black women since 2000, however Black women are still incarcerated at the highest rate. In 2020, 83 Black women are incarcerated out of every 100,000 people, compared to 63 Latinx women, and 48 White women.

but her un-belonging simultaneously implicates Black women, hinting that prison is a natural consequence for them. Only certain women's stories matter, even as the show made headlines for including the stories of Black women, and particularly a Black trans woman, the plots still revolved around Piper and her whiteness.

Typical of this approach, women of color who are not incarcerated are frequently discussed through the absence of Black men as romantic partners or as community members. Bryan Sykes and Becky Pettit's quantitative work on mass incarceration and families focuses on projected models for fertility of Black men while incarcerated or not incarcerated is a good illustration of the erasure of Black women. They found that "incarceration has had a very important effect on the fertility of men by removing them from a supply of women of reproductive age" (2009, p. 21). Even as Sykes and Pettit's work analyzes incarceration's effects on parents and children, they focus on Black men who are incarcerated, mentioning women only three times and mothers five times (Sykes & Pettit, 2014). The absence of the stories of women who are incarcerated, or those living outside of prisons whose family members are incarcerated, fails to grasp the staggering scope and impact of mass incarceration. Put differently, while the absence of Black men is a problem, there is also the need to ask, what about the families, children, mothers, sisters, wives, and others, that are left behind?

Equally problematic are the analyses of mass incarceration that tend to highlight the absence of Black men from their communities, usually for purposes of labeling Black men as absentee fathers and blaming problems in the Black community on the absence of Black men. Alexander, for example, notes that "although a million black men can be

found in prisons and jails, public acknowledgement of the role of the criminal justice system in 'disappearing' black men is surprisingly rare" (Alexander, 2010, p. 174). Alexander argues that mass incarceration creates a stigmatizing shame within families and communities that can end conversations on mass incarceration (Alexander, 2010, p. 164), however, her silence on the effects of mass incarceration on Black women is disappointing, if not shocking.

Collateral consequences are almost entirely absent from Alexander's discussion of mass incarceration. Alexander makes passing reference to stigma experienced by families of incarcerated people (2010, p. 164); mentions how the label of felon limits and removes housing and social benefits (2010, p. 143); how Black girls are told to "wait for Mr. Right" (2010, p. 215); and how "the demonization of black men has turned the black community against itself, unraveling community and family relationships" (2010, p. 17). There is no mention of the families that face the stigma together with one of the parents incarcerated. There is little mention of Black women at all. Even when Alexander discusses Daniel Patrick Moynihan's pathologizing of the Black family (2010, p. 45), she fails to mention that Moynihan placed the failures of the family on Black women—labeling Black women as "overly aggressive, unfeminine…matriarchs [who] allegedly emasculated their lovers and husbands" causing them to leave (Collins, 2000, p. 75). All of this obscures how mass incarceration burdens on Black women *without* a felony conviction to continue supporting the family unit emotionally and financially.

Silence, particularly from such a well-cited and important scholar like Alexander, is distressing since the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported in 2010 that 52 percent of

people incarcerated in state facilities and 63 percent of people incarcerated in federal facilities were parents: “4 in 10 fathers in state or federal prisons were black,” and fathers living with children prior to incarceration were far more likely to have relied on another person to provide or co-provide daily care for children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010, p. 2). While parents are incarcerated, 88.4 percent of incarcerated men reported the children’s mother was the current caregiver, while only 37 percent of women reported the children’s father was the current caregiver (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010, p. 5). The most recent survey by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2016 reports that more than 1.5 million persons under 17 years old had a parent in state or federal prison, and approximately 58% of incarcerated women and 57% of incarcerated men were parents (Maruschak, Bronson, & Alper, 2021). While the more recent data did not report caregivers as it did in 2010, the updated information reflects that the majority of non-white incarcerated peoples are parents of minor children, in both state and federal facilities (Maruschak, Bronson, & Alper, 2021), meaning their outside caregivers are shouldered with the work of both raising children and possibly navigating the prison system in maintaining a relationship with the incarcerated parent. The failure to analyze Black women, whether as incarcerated people or in the care work provided to incarcerated partners and their children, is a disservice to these women and fails to craft a comprehensive analysis of the devastating effects of mass incarceration on the Black community.

Black women have a multifaceted and complex relationship with the prison industrial complex: through incarceration (Richie, 2012), through societal and police surveillance (Browne, 2015), as youth or after having children who are policed in and out

of schools (Morris, 2016), as partners of incarcerated persons (Comfort, 2009). These are only the most obvious of a litany of ways that Black women are forced into contact with the prison system. Black women who must navigate the prison system exist in the margins—living between the borders of the prison and the free world. Here I find Gloria Anzaldúa framing of borders particularly helpful:

> Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a defining line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. (1999, p. 25)

For Mainline Mamas, the border of the prison begins with the line of cars outside of prisons that can extend for miles; the line defines the free from the unfree. Pulling up to the line begins a border-crossing, when conceptions time and space shift from the everyday life to the surveillance, monitoring, and regulation of the prison. But the border for the prison is not just the line, it is the entire process of being interrogated by the state.

Crossing the borders and entering the prison grounds can trigger a visceral, full body reactions. Anticipation of seeing a family member, marital partner, or loved one mixes butterflies in the stomach with thoughts of all the obstacles necessary to surpass in order to get to the actual visiting room. First comes waiting in line for Correctional Officers to drive out and signal that visitors can enter the prison grounds. Then comes more waiting, to get a visitor's slip and to be called to the processing desk. Hoping no unannounced changes in regulations will further delay the visit—weekly changes to the dress code, new forms, new background checks, loss of visitation for the incarcerated

person—sudden shifts in policy that are subtle, or very unsubtle, attempts to deter visitors permanently. asha bandele's memoir describes the process of border-crossing in her early visits to her incarcerated husband who would later become the father of her children:

> As instructed, I filled out a form, and when the police called my name, not my name, but Rashid's [her husband's] number, I walked over to the desk. I had put all of my things into a locker, except a change purse, a lipstick, a comb, and a pen…. I handed over my change purse, form, and ID to an officer who did not look at me.
>
> *Remove your shoes, coat, and jewelry. Place them on the desk.*
>
> I did as I was told, and then began to walk through the metal detector.
>
> *Not yet!* I was admonished. *Go back to the other side of the machine and wait until I'm ready. Pen and lipstick ain't allowed I'll hold onto them until you come out or you can put them back in your locker.* He said this, and then told me, *Now, go through the metal detector.* I stepped through and it beeped. *Do it again and don't touch the sides.* I did as I was told, and went through without a sound. (2010, p. 46)

bandele's story highlights the tense interactions with the guards which represent borders that must be crossed in order to visit. Entering a prison is not just about getting to the site and entering a space, it is passing through layers of surveillance and intrusion into your personal space, life, and even a change in how you are seen and treated. Anzaldúa expressed the feelings of border-crossing not so differently:

1,950 mile-long open wound,

dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,

running down the length of my body,

staking rods in my flesh,

splits me splits me

me raja *me raja*" (1999, p. 24).

Anzaldúa's writes of the border crossings of identity as well as physical borders, how people become divided by boundaries established by society. Similarly, bandele's narrative of entering the prison displays the physical boundaries that are constructed at prisons that must be crossed each time visitors come in.

For Mainline Mamas, each visit and interaction with the prison is a border-crossing: waiting in one of the many prison lines, knowing policy to engage with Corrections Officers. We experience the disciplining and dehumanization of the border, chaffing at the wounds that the prison inflicts on people who are trying to help others maintain our humanity.[6] Each crossing of the border/boundaries of the prison is re-experiencing the trauma of entering the prison—hoping you can get through security safely and unmolested, hoping that visitation has not been revoked that day, hoping that the visit will go smoothly. At the same time, the border is also the division of identity for Mainline Mamas. It means keeping the weekend prison visits a hidden part of your life, in order to maintain the appearance of the everyday work life. It means dividing your

[6] Although our border crossings are different, the border crossings that Mainline Mamas experience is in conversation with theorists and poets like Anzaldua (1999), Natalie Diaz's *Postcolonial Love Poem* (2020), or social science work like Reece Jones' *Violent Borders* (2016) or Gilberto Rosas' *Barrio Libre* (2012).

time between a home near work and school, and making an imaginary home on the weekends with an incarcerated partner during visitation and with the community of other regulars, all while managing children and family members at the same time—the burdens that stem from being "essential to the survival of the community" (Davis, 1995, p. 205).

Mainline Mamas and the Communities of Black Women

This work focuses on the experiences of women at the margins of the system of mass incarceration: Mainline Mamas. The Black women navigating the prison system as incarcerated women or in relation to incarcerated persons have unique experiences within and outside the prison. This is especially true for the Black women whose husbands and sons are targeted and incarcerated at a higher rate and are therefore more prone to having to deal with the state in order to maintain a family. Drawing on my own experiences as a Mainline Mama, I believe it is crucial to take up Mainline Mama as a site of resistance through Black Feminist epistemologies. As Patricia Hill Collins explains "Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it" (2000, p. 22). Just as Black women's marginalization in academia, working spaces, and white households provides a "special standpoint" as "outsiders within:" people who have access and may see the innerworkings of power and simultaneously remain marginalized (Collins, 1986, p. 516). Black women navigating prison have special insider

experiences, seeing both the way power in the prison is weaponized against both people who are incarcerated and those who live in the so-called free world.

Black feminist epistemologies draw on different layers of experience: experiences of individual Black women, experiences shared among Black women generally as a result of social oppressions, and, maybe most importantly, experiences shared *among* Black women as a community. Collins describes the community networks of Black women acting as mothers (regardless of biological relationship) as a crucial symbol of power, socializing Black women for survival in a white supremacist patriarchal society. This provides a "foundation for conceptualizing Black women's political activism. Experiences both of being nurtured as children and being held responsible for siblings and fictive kin within kin networks can stimulate a more generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability among African-American women" (Collins, 2000, p. 189).

While Collins shows how the community can be a source of relationships and power, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James highlight how capitalist society depends on the labor of women in the home and community. As they explained:

> The community is the other half of capitalist organization, the other area of hidden capitalist exploitation, the other, hidden, source of surplus labor. It becomes increasingly regimented like a factory, what Mariarosa calls a social factory, where the costs and nature of transport, housing, medical care, education, police, are all points of struggle. And this social factory has its pivot the woman in the home producing labor power as a commodity, and her struggle not to. (Dalla Costa & James, 1972, p. 11).

Women's labor, in the home or in the community, is therefore the unvalued but crucial support system of capitalist society. Women are not paid for labor in the home or community, but yet the labor is mandated by social expectations of womanhood. Capitalist dependence on women's labor in the "social factory" makes women's positionality crucial for subversion. Because the community is "first and foremost the home" women in the home (or in the family unit) are the beginning point for community-based efforts:

> Seen in this way, women are the contradiction in all previous political frameworks, which had been based on the male worker in industry. Once we see the community as a productive center and thus a center of subversion, the whole perspective for generalized struggle and revolutionary organization is re-opened. (Dalla Costa & James, 1972, p. 17)

The prison industrial complex depends upon Mainline Mamas, among other things, to perform emotional labor through visitation and communication. Visitations are used by prisons to maintain order by conditioning visitation on good behavior—visitation and communication with family is a privilege that can be revoked at the discretion of prison administrators and correctional officers.[7] Mainline Mamas do caretaking work while visiting as they care for their children—ensuring that children stay within prison regulations or correctional officer's interpretation of good behavior (Fishman, 1990)—while simultaneously doing care work for the second parent who is incarcerated by

[7] In California for example, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation emphasizes that "All prisoners are eligible to receive visits unless they have temporarily lost that privilege due to disciplinary action." (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, 2021)

offering emotional connection beyond the prison itself. However, performing this emotional labor for the incarcerated partner and the children leaves Mainline Mamas with few sources of support for themselves, necessitating communities of support among Mainline Mamas. Communality—networks of support of women with similar experiences or social locations—becomes crucial as Mainline Mamas form bonds among each other since they can understand the distinct emotional burdens created by prisons.

Communality among Black women therefore provides a central role both in Black feminist epistemologies, but also in political and social action. Angela Y. Davis, for instance, describes the importance of Black women blues singers like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith in affirming solidarity between Black women and defending Black womanhood:

> [T]he production, performance, and reception of women's blues during the decade of the twenties reveal that black women's names could be defended by working-class as well as middle-class women. Women's blues also demonstrate that working-class women's names could be defended not only in the face of dominant white culture, but in the face of male assertions of dominance in black communities as well. (1998, p. 65).

Blues formed a common language for relating experiences among Black women, allowing Black women to express pressing personal issues while responding to white, patriarchal definitions of Black womanhood. Expressions of communality among Black Women also extends into political organizing, both historically and in the present. Deborah Gray White's *Too Heavy a Load* traces the history of Black feminist movements

in the United States, going back to the Black Clubwomen of the early 20th century, describing Black feminist movements as a struggle "to insert black women into the nation's consciousness and scholarship in a determined and systematic way; a movement that returned black women's advocacy to naming and defending themselves—principles established at the turn of the century" (1999, p. 256). Importantly, White's historiography highlights internal tensions that would arise over the course of the varied movements, including classism, colorism, respectability politics and sexuality and sexual orientation. Yet in spite of these differences among Black women, White emphasizes the importance of black womanhood (as defined by Black women themselves) as a central epistemological foundation for social movements among, between and involving black women.

Although I have focused on Black feminist epistemologies of resistance, traditions of women's organizing are not isolated to the Black community as women and mothers from marginalized groups use platforms of motherhood and womanhood to organize politically against oppressive social forces. Because motherhood and womanhood are central to the social factory of domestic labor, they are also centers for resisting oppressive social frameworks (Dalla Costa & James, 1972, p. 17). Histories of Black feminist resistance illustrate motherhood is a space for survival and identity empowerment for the entire community. Children are taught to survive in a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal society that has stacked the odds against them. Diana Mulinari explains that "African American mothers in the United States must find ways to fulfill their children's needs for growth and survival in the context of struggle" (Mulinari,

2000, p. 234). Comparing the struggles of Black women in the United States to those of women in South America, and Nicaragua in particular, Mulinari explains that storytelling in marginalized communities is a form of survival scholarship, as children are taught about social life. Empowerment comes both in the content of the story, and in the act and art of storytelling that empowers the storyteller through the ability to define the subject, identity, and narrative in the story. Accordingly, "[n]arratives, both personal and collective, provide a discourse from marginal locations that challenge the powerful Western discourses through which the third world is seen as advancing when its representations are similar to those of the center" (Mulinari, 2000, p. 244). In this way, stories of marginalized women create an alternative standpoint that centers their experiences to counter dominant narratives of white, Western discourses that may be reductive or stereotypical in portrayals of Black motherhood and Black womanhood. Mainline Mamas are similarly creating their own narrative within the prison industrial complex by finding ways to survive as a family, living resistance to oppressive prison conditions. Telling the stories of Mainline Mamas therefore illustrates the far-reaching consequences of mass incarceration and resistance—revealing that incarceration has far-reaching effects beyond one person's sentence, exploiting the labor of entire communities of caregivers, forcing women into a relationship with the state to provide care work. However, listening to the stories of Mainline Mamas will also reveal insightful, meaningful forms of community and resistance that are created by Black women in these spaces of exploitation and state violence.

But as much as Black women have struggled for self-definition and communality, the power and strength of Black women's communality should not be taken to be the same as the mythical, stereotypical image of the hyper strong black woman. Melissa Harris-Perry explains that "the construct of the strong black woman does not arise from empirical observation of who black women actually are. Instead, it is a racial and political construct emanating from the expectations of African American communities and from the needs of the nation that frame black women in very narrow ways" (2011, p. 27). Robin Boylorn contextualizes the myth of the hyper strong Black woman by contrasting the way Black women are seen and their internal struggles:

> you see her, smiling on the outside, dying on the inside, but you can't tell the difference. She stands on invisible pedestals that set her up to fail. When she doesn't smile, you ask her why she's mad. When she doesn't concede, you throw accusations of bias and unfairness at her feet. She makes babies, you shake your head in disapproval. When she is unmarried, you blame her for her undesirability. She cries in secret and you are hopelessly unaware. You think telling her she is strong makes up for the circumstances that require strength. (2013, p. 130)

Boylorn's writing highlights how the appearance of hyper strength is a defense mechanism for survival; the many masks that Black women wear in daily lives. The complexity of Black women's experiences is undermined by the myth of hyper strength by reducing Black womanhood to a single characteristic, ignoring the intersecting, multidimensional layers of Black women's identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Black women are not allowed to be vulnerable in public, to cry or show what society has labeled as

weakness. Mainline Mamas are trapped in a particular space of vulnerability masked by strength. Choosing to marry or continue relationships with the father of their children, as dominant narratives of family structures seek to enforce. Yet because the father is incarcerated, it creates an additional burden on the Mainline Mama to show hyper strength in the face of the state regulation of relationships and the stigma attached to relationships with an incarcerated person. Collins concludes that

> labeling Black women unfeminine and too strong works to undercut U.S. Black women's assertiveness. Many U.S. Black women who find themselves maintaining families by themselves often feel that they have done something wrong. If only they were not so strong, some reason, they might have found a male partner or their sons would not have had so much trouble with the law. This belief masks the culpability of the U.S. Criminal justice system. (Collins, 2000, pp. 76-77)

The stereotype of the hyper strong Black woman therefore creates a special vulnerability for Black women. In the eyes of society Black women are made culpable for the actions of others—particularly men (partners, brothers, sons, fathers, cousins) who are caught up in systems of mass incarceration—that may then be internalized by Black women.

For, the regulars—Mainline Mamas and other women visiting prisons on a regular basis—these wounds run deep and are reopened every visit. But the regulars continue to visit, developing relationships, finding others who can understand the wounds and scars created by the prison industrial complex and empathize, rather than feel pity. In this kinship, anger is recognized as genuine; anger at the state, anger at the systemic

regulation of people, anger at the regime of prison. It is difficult to fully comprehend the level of anger without having experienced it personally. Even the closest friends cannot provide comfort if they have not lived in these borderlands. Among Mainline Mamas there is a mutual understanding, but most importantly, that one does not experience the borderlands of the prison alone. This solidarity as women find and relate to each other—learning to deal with and understand state violence, their collective circumstances, through the pain and everyday stress of trying to survive—there are shared moments of happiness, collaboration, and assistance that inform resistance. João H. Costa Vargas similarly describes how Black women in south central Los Angeles form kinship relationships despite oppressive conditions. As he explains: "Their specific angles of vision—their standpoint—project a collective consciousness that works both as a source of insight and also as a reference according to which everyday acts of survival and resistance are crafted" (Vargas, 2006, p. 22). When there is a shared understanding of identity through experience, stories can be shared with a fuller understanding, and provide roadmaps for how to survive the most oppressive situations. As the saying goes, each one teach one: the positionality of Mainline Mamas creates connections that not only provide a community web of knowledge in how to navigate the prison industrial complex, but a network of resistance to the dissolution of families. Formal organizations like Mother's ROC (Gilmore, 2007), Essie Justice Group (Clayton, Richardson, Mandlin, & Farr, 2018), or even historical organizations like the Black Panthers (Davis, 1981) and the Black Clubwomen's movement (White, 1999) have relied on the community networks of Black women. Being a Mainline Mama is a taxing situation, choosing to

stay with the second parent who is incarcerated leads to everyday stresses—parenting by yourself, doing everything on your own—it is a different circumstance that is rarely understood by anyone except those involved. Together, Mainline Mamas form communities in their experiences by sharing jokes, food, rooms, space, and time together. Visits to the prison are grueling, and the small moments of happiness make it bearable.

Mainline Mamas therefore build on Black Feminist Epistemologies of communality in the borderlands through networks of support to enhance survival and resistance, often through the uniting experience of motherhood. In the past, Black women's movements have relied on counterhegemonic definitions of womanhood and motherhood. The Black Clubwomen's movement in the late 19th Century, for example, redefined notions of womanhood and motherhood to combat white definitions that would relegate motherhood to domesticity and womanhood to notions of white purity. Because Black women were excluded from these terms by definition, utilizing "words that seemed to reflect the hegemonic culture, that seemed to suggest a consciousness steeped in a limited domesticity, in fact challenged that dominant culture" (Boris, 2013, p. 25). Though there were political tensions among Clubwomen (White, 1999, p. 129), Black women strategized counterhegemonic discourse through self-definition (Boris, 2013; White, 1999). By World War I, "the power of motherhood reached its rhetorical heights" as Black women's peace movements "believed that women's qualities as women—their actual or potential motherhood, their ability to talk things out rather than resolve disagreements through violence—generated a desire to preserve life" (Boris, 2013, p. 46). Eileen Boris emphasizes that it was self-definition of motherhood driving movements,

explaining that "African-American women did not discredit motherhood as a female experience shaped by male demands; rather, they based their political programs as well as their epistemology on their own understanding of it" (2013, p. 47). Similarly, Diana Mulinari's research on the Sandinistas in Nicaragua highlights the international power of motherhood in revolutionary struggles as "women employed maternal ideologies in order to engage in practices that they would not engage in simply as women" (2000, p. 249).

Motherhood therefore creates an amplifier to engage social issues by creating a distinct platform. Speaking as mothers allows women to address not only present conditions of inequality or oppression, but also future generations in speaking on how they are raising children and the importance of children. Mothers not only speak in public venues, but in teaching children mothers have the power to instill perspective and attitudes towards society. Hegemonic definitions of mothers as caretakers or providers therefore can also work against established structures of power as mothers have the unique positionality of being able to speak back to norms of society, to their children and others.

The importance of Black women defining for themselves what it means to be a woman and/or mother through their own words and actions cannot be overstated (Collins, 2000). Controlling images of Black motherhood, as Collins argues, intersect with class to categorize Black mothers by demonizing low-income Black women and mothers as rude, lazy welfare queens (Collins, 2005, p. 136) or glorifying non-threatening yet ambitious "Black ladies" who match middle-upper class politics of respectability (Collins, 2000, p. 139). Self-definition counters these tropes through lived

experiences, often relayed through the stories told by Black women. This is especially important as Collins suggests that motherhood is central Black feminist epistemologies as "mothers and mother figures emerge as central figures in autobiographies" and literature by Black women (Collins, 2005, p. 102). Toni Morrison's literary works, for example, "subvert assumptions dictated by society" by creating Black mother figures "who are searching to attain some sense of individuality and self-worth in a world which denies them these values" (Ghasemi & Hajizadeh, 2012, p. 477). Black mother characters in Morrison's works "are often independent, strong, determined (to a degree that they are sometimes abusive), and self-seeking" (Ghasemi & Hajizadeh, 2012, p. 477). Black mothers have, therefore, utilized motherhood as a site of resistance, both in practice by passing down knowledge and creating communities in spite of white supremacy that would rather take their children as property and use women's bodies for breeding and labor, but also in rhetoric. Black women claiming "motherhood" resists white rhetorics that made whiteness, womanhood, and motherhood interdependent, synonymous conditions. Black women asserting motherhood uses self-definition by Black women to claim care work on our own terms, in our own ways of knowing and being.

Communality and shared political struggle as parts of Black motherhood manifest in prison activism like that of Mother's Reclaiming Our Children (Mother's ROC). Mother's ROC began as an association of Black mothers in Los Angeles 1992, attempting to undermine the state violence of mass incarceration disproportionately imposed on their children. In *Golden Gulag, Ruth Wilson* Gilmore traces the foundations of Mother's ROC as Black mothers in South Central organized around the shared

experience of losing their children—in death and to the prison system (2007, p. 202). Black mothers continued in the long tradition of Black women's organizing to create an organization that would resist the prison industrial complex practically and politically—from meeting as "imperial courts" to discuss and name the state violence they wished to resist (Gilmore, 2007, p. 207) , to involvement in state courts "monitoring relations between defendants and their attorneys" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 210). Mothers ROC has continued to grow, with increasing numbers of Latina mothers "as the Los Angeles County prosecutor extended vigorous enforcement of California's 1,200 new pieces of criminal legislation to Brown as well as Black defendants" (Gilmore, 2007, pp. 226-227). Mothers ROC, as a polycultural coalition, builds on the key foundations of Black feminist thought in not only self-identifying as Black, and Brown, women, but in identifying structural inequalities and problems that must be resolved.

Mothers ROC exemplifies how mothers' resistance to the prison industrial complex grows from the emotional and familial costs of having their families torn apart, and the costs of trying to keep families together. For Mainline Mamas, keeping the family together comes at emotional and financial costs as "family members are forced to make choices about how scarce resources will be spent" (Christian, 2005, p. 45). Johnna Christian tells the story of a woman whose husband was incarcerated, and in her attempts to keep their family unit together, she lost balance in her life:

> It was like oh, the kids, they had no shoes at one point because I was runnin' up there, spending my money to go and see him, commissary things he needed, cause, you know, it's cold in the jails, he needed blankets, you know, all kinda

things. I mean, when you get to a point you just forget that you have children. You forget you have kids, you forget you have another life. (2005, p. 45)

This woman's experience shows again the duality of being a Mainline Mama, how the prison industrial complex places the financial and emotional burdens on them and other family members to support incarcerated persons. Because prisons provide only the bare minimum to the people incarcerated within, the financial burden of supporting basic necessities falls on their family members on the outside. Even then, purchasing food and drinks on a budget is nearly impossible. Anything an incarcerated person wants to keep in their cell must be pre-packaged, from a list of authorized vendors, whose prices are higher than what you could ordinarily buy at a retail store. At the same time, it also shows the precarious balance that Mainline Mamas must maintain while living in the borderlands. Such choices can come down to children or their second parent when finances are tight. When weighing between children on the outside and a partner on the inside, a Mainline Mama may lose herself in trying to balance between others. The Mainline Mama's choices are too often framed only as children or a second parent, and rarely choosing how to best maintain herself, or her own well-being. This again stresses the importance of communality and the relationships that form between Black women as mothers.

One of the few ethnographies about women and their incarcerated partners is Megan Comfort's *Doing Time Together: Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*. Comfort's work tells stories of women who are attempting to survive, and in some ways resist, the state regulation of their bodies, relationships, and, ultimately, lives, as they

attempt to maintain families with incarcerated peoples. Comfort argues that "women with incarcerated partners undergo secondary prisonization… derivative of and dependent on the primary prisonization of their partners. Through their peculiar status as 'quasi-inmates,' these women dwell in the juxtaposition of two ostensibly separate worlds" (Comfort, 2009, pp. 15-16). Introducing the families and women's perspectives are an important reminder of the collateral consequences of mass incarceration and highlight the borderlands of the free and unfree worlds that define the Mainline Mama.

Comfort's analysis of letters between incarcerated people and their relatives on the outside touches on key issues of intimacy and communication, though not without problems. Her analysis relies on normative conceptions of gender roles and dynamics in an intimate relationship, particularly when discussing the ways in which incarcerated persons communicate with their non-incarcerated partner.

> Nobody can deny that to write good personal letters you have to prize the effect of life and have a tendency to look inside yourself, both conventionally feminine qualities. Through their missives, men practice the classically feminine forms of 'emotional support'…. The prisoner's masculine role is thus diminished and he becomes feminized through his passionate communication that conveys empathy and sentimentality. (2009, p. 77)

Letters may highlight different layers of relationality between couples that may go otherwise unseen, but it should underscore rather than undermine state violence. Rather than assume that the men who are incarcerated were unable to express vulnerability or emotionality to women prior to their incarceration, the sentimentality and passionate

communication in letters highlight the role of the state in eliminating almost all forms of communication except letters, since these become the key expressive and communicative sites of intimate relationships. Comfort interprets these letters as a "body substitutes" because people become so involved with their incarcerated partner, and due to the lack of physical time spent together, the letters become a substitute for the presence of the incarcerated partner (2009, p. 73). However, we must be careful not to confuse an emotional form of intimacy for a physical form of intimacy. Letters are the only form of intimacy in these relationships that are not under a time constraint and are not directly and immediately regulated by the state. A letter allows people to spend time choosing words, constructing ideas, and convey emotions that allow the full expressive power of both parties—without a corrections officer or other agent of the state standing, watching, or counting the seconds until a visit expires. The intimacy of letters is highly personal, and private.[8] These are spaces of resistance that can occur within the few areas that physical presence is allowed.

Mainline Mama is a description of the practical experiences for Black women formed in relationship to prisons—through visitation or incarceration—while engaging with family, children, partners, and other women. Mainline Mama is also a theoretical approach to understand both the rules, regulations, and policies of the state, while also navigating these rules to the fullest possible extent to maintain and enhance personal relationships to others. Mainline Mama is therefore a reimagining of possibility from the

[8] Or at least maintain a feeling of privacy. Letters are highly regulated by the state and monitored in their own way, but the expression and the content of a letter is less restricted than the physical visit, the means of expression have to be in words, but those words can be more freely chosen than the touch, proximity, or communication in an in-person visit.

margins—a perspective from precarity that also searches for joy, family, and connection in the midst of a carceral state violence.

Dissertation Summary

This project uses the Mainline Mama as a means of answering the underlying research question: how do Black women who are forced into a relationship with prisons, through incarceration and/or visitation, define, practice, and experience mothering? Chapter Two engages the social definitions of Black motherhood. Starting with two women on television who define two ends of the spectrum of social perceptions of Black motherhood, Clair Huxtable and Cookie Lyons, I explore images of Black womanhood and motherhood, particularly looking at expectations and burdens placed on Black women. Motherhood is particularly complex, since the social expectations of motherhood are both gendered and racialized, leaving Black motherhood in tension with dominant social perceptions.

Chapter Three turns from social perceptions of Black motherhood to self-definition: how Black women define mothering through theory and practice. Here, I explore different conceptions of mothering defined through political and social activism of Black women, then place these ideas in conversation with Mainline Mama as a frame of engaging Black women's experiences with the carceral state. Mothering means more than biological connections or physical proximity. It is also an ethic of care and engagement with other people. These relationships are both a reason for persevering and engaging in spite of incarceration, but also signal the connections that Black women form

while visiting. Mainline Mama is both a personal experience, theory, and community engagement—describing the communality of Black women in the context of incarceration.

Chapter Four brings these conceptions of mothering and stigmas to the experiences of Black women who are navigating the state, incorporating autoethnography and interviews to define what it means to be a Mainline Mama from the perspective of women who have lived it. Here I identify key themes in three areas: depletion, blessings, and bonds. In the depletion, women identified feelings of isolation and shame stemming from their experiences with prisons, and recount the sacrifices they have made because of visitation, incarceration, or in relationships with family. However, despite the stigmas and stereotypes that Mainline Mamas encounter, the women I interviewed identified blessings or benefits they found in the process. The community, mutual validation that these women found in the process of visitation, is a frequently identified, and often relied upon source of support. Women I spoke with also identified the privileges—benefits they possessed that enabled them to navigate or endure their experiences with the state. Finally, I build on the blessings the women identify with the different ways these women are connected and bonded—to their loved ones and visitation in presence, along with the traumas that connect experiences of Mainline Mamas.

Finally in Chapter 4 I explore the connections and different dimensions of mothering that define the Mainline Mama, as told through the stories of the women in this work. My story and the interviews highlight the multiple dimensions of mothering: biological mothering of children, othermothering of children who are not biologically

related and the mothering that happens among the Mainline Mamas themselves. Importantly, these dimensions of mothering highlight how the forced relationship with the state also reinforces the gendered roles of care work, as Mainline Mamas' care work for their partner is exploited and taken to mother the state as well. Prisons reinforce gendered dynamics by relying on Mainline Mamas to do care work with their incarcerated partner to make the prison run more smoothly, facilitating the incentive of visitation. Mainline Mamas therefore are not only forced into a relationship with the state, but the state then becomes dependent on exploiting our care work.

This dissertation concludes with an analysis of the social and political implications of Mainline Mama as a theory, practice, and political standpoint. I approach the dissertation and the Mainline Mama in the context of abolition—the elimination of the prison state and incarceration as a policy, theory, or practice. I argue that Mainline Mamas must be practically, and substantively, included in the conversation on mass incarceration—as research subjects, and as participants who are given space to advocate and engage for change. Part of this engagement also means having a more holistic support system for Mainline Mamas. While we form and find community in the unexpected borderlands of mass incarceration, there are still missing resources especially for mental health, that are necessary for the survival of Mainline Mamas.

After almost twenty years of visiting prison, I feel like a veteran going into retirement. By now two of my kids had grown up and grown out of visiting—they were too big for me to make them come with me to visitation and felt like they were too old to want to come visit on their own. The last time I visited, there was no anxiety, no stress,

no pressures, it was an everyday practice. All the things I used to do to be slick and try to slip through the cracks and subtly resist the state—like wearing things out of dress code and trying to sweet talk the CO into letting me through anyways—are unnecessary. I'm an experienced, regular visitor. Now when I visit, the COs know me, and we have a rhythm. I am like a fixture in the prison. They do not even check my ID anymore. I am a college student home for the holidays, just visiting to do laundry, just passing through before I go back to my life outside this place. I knew the rules better than the COs by this point, how to ask the right questions, who to ask them from. I know everyone's boss, and their boss's boss. I am now into my fifth prison. I am not navigating the wilderness; I am walking a well-worn path I have gone down many times in my 20 years. My community grew and replicated at every new prison. Each time was learning the system, meeting new people, forming new communities of women. I am like a franchise restaurant, each location might be a different place, but it is just replicating the exact same thing in a new location. Mainline Mamas just multiply, and our community networks grow.

CHAPTER 2

COOKIES AND CLAIRES: DEFINITIONS OF BLACK MOTHERHOOD

Black motherhood has been constructed as a binary of the good and bad. In media, specifically television, Black womanhood is centered around two controlling images: the *black bitch* and *the black lady* (Cheers, 2017; Ward, 2015). The *black bitch* is usually poor or working class and is depicted as aggressive, rude, and loud while the *black lady* must reject all personality traits of the stereotypical *black bitch*, while adopting politics of respectability and the bootstrap phenomena. According to Patricia Hill-Collins, "images of working-class Black femininity that pivot on a Black women's body politics of bitchiness, promiscuity, and abundant fertility also affect middle-class [Black] women, [these] controlling images associated with poor and working-class Black women become texts of what *not* to be" (Collins, 2005, pp. 138-139). Two key examples of socially constructed media representation of Black motherhood that best exemplified the trope of the *black bitch* and the *black lady* are Cookie Lyon of *Empire* (2015-2020)[9] and Clair Huxtable of *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992). [10]

[9] *Empire* aired between 2015 and 2020, on FOX television, created by Lee Daniels and Danny Strong. It depicted a Black family in the entertainment industry, beginning the story in season one with the release of Cookie Lyons, played by Taraji P. Henson, from prison, and returning to her ex-husband Lucious Lyons, played by Terrence Howard, and their three adult sons who run a successful record label.

[10] *The Cosby Show* aired between 1984 and 1992, created by Bill Cosby. It was often rated as the most watched show on television. It starred Bill Cosby as Cliff Huxtable, an OB/GYN, Phylicia Rashad as his wife Clair Huxtable, an attorney, and their children. *Cosby Show* showed a Black, upper middle-class family, in a sanitized domestic role that addressed some real world issues, but mostly lived in a sitcom bubble. Before Bill Cosby's conviction and exposure as a sexual predator, he has served as a conservative voice of Black popular culture. His politics of respectability provided an alternative racial frame to the otherwise problematic stereotypes of Black women on television; however this came with its own problems and stereotypes discussed in this chapter.

Clair Huxtable, the mother on the influential *The Cosby Show*, helped shape the image of what a Black mother should be, she was professional, classy, smart, and beautiful. The Cosby aired through the late 1980s, while the United States was in an economic crisis, there was the introduction of crack cocaine, the escalation of the War on Drugs, and enduring influence of the 1965 the Moynihan Report (United States Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965). This meant that Black women are already earning low wages and have no upward mobility. The introduction of crack cocaine and sentencing tore apart families. Black women were made the face of the crack epidemic both as users and as mothers taking care of families effected by drugs and sentencing as fathers of their children were carried off to prison with extensive prison sentences. Yet as Black women work to maintain family and community, Black women are constrained by old tropes reinforced by policy, like the report by Daniel Patrick Moynihan that branded Black mothers as the cause of the destruction of the Black family. In this context, the debut of Clair Huxtable set the standard for Black motherhood. Clair was scripted to have successfully transcended all the issues plaguing the Black family. She was immune—her combination of respectability politics and socio-economic status made her a paragon of Black motherhood, defying tropes of Black women while meeting all the expectations of mothering imposed by white supremacy.

Unlike Clair Huxtable, the character of Cookie Lyon from the highly rated all Black soap opera-musical *Empire* does not represent notions of white idealized motherhood. Cookie is assertive, gaudy, loud, witty, and street smart. In the late 1990's,

Cookie, a young, married mother of three, sold crack cocaine with her husband Lucious to make money to take care of their family, but also used that money to help boost her husband's rap career. Cookie ended up getting arrested and sentenced to 17 years in prison. *Empire* begins with Cookie's release from prison in present day, with a mission to reclaim the music business she helped start and to begin the reunification process with her children. Cookie is coming home in the wake of the Regan, Bush Sr, Clinton, and Bush Jr administrations, all of which were detrimental to Black families, and Black women particularly. In this way, art imitates life because Cookie is coming home in the midst of public conversations on Black motherhood and mass incarceration, both of which define her character. Cookie is coming home to a new context, seeing the harms and lasting effects of past presidents and policies—mandatory minimum sentencing, changes to welfare, elimination of benefits, gendered gaps in pay and employment—to the new state of mass incarceration.

Growing up I remember watching the Cosby show every Thursday night. As a young Black girl, I remember thinking that when I grew up, I wanted to be just like Clair Huxtable. She was like a unicorn, something I had never seen before on television or in real life. She didn't look like my mother or any other women I saw in my neighborhood. I knew that I wanted to be like her. Looking back, it's strange to think that as such a young age her image could penetrate my subconscious and embed notions of respectability. At that time in the 1980's, Clair was the featured version of Black motherhood as represented on TV—*Diffren't Strokes*, *Gimme a Break*, the other popular shows had

Black *women* but no *mothers*.[11] Before *Cosby*, shows like *Good Times* included Florida (Esther Rolle) as a mother-figure, but her story and her plot lines in the show were incidental to the stories of the children. Clair had her own story, as part of the family, and served a role on the screen. Shows like *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* or *Family Matters* would follow the *Cosby* template in including a Black mother with her own plot lines, even if the shows still focused mostly on the children.

For a long time, Clair was *the* representation of Black Motherhood. She was effortless, Clair displayed the perfect work, life balance. She was upper-middle-class lawyer, yet she was always home and available for her family, even though she was a partner at a law firm. Clair never raised her voice or resulted to corporal punishment to discipline her children. Her children loved and respected her, they never talked back. She introduced her children to fine art and jazz while always paying homage to historical and prominent Black men and women. She was able to manage five children, a husband, a career while looking like she stepped off the cover of a magazine. Clair's status as a Black mother exemplifies the *black lady* because of her class-status and respectability politics—her status as an attorney, her family income, her status immunizes her to critiques of Black womanhood that Black women of other class, educational, or even regions, would receive. Cookie, as CEO in *Empire*, might have more riches than Clair

[11] Imani Cheers, for example, discusses the cultural shifts in representation of Black women on television and the television audience. Tropes of Black womanhood followed trends on television, with the 80s leaving Clair to serve as the key of Black motherhood, while other Black women characters served the trope of the mistress, lady, or modern mammy. Cheers places these in the context of Black viewership and Black creators who shape these images. (2017)

did on *Cosby*, but was represented and classed as a woman who came from a low-income neighborhood and wore it proudly. Cookie would never be the *black lady*.[12]

Even though I thought Clair gave me the roadmap to be a *black lady*, I ultimately aligned more with the characteristics of the *black bitch.* I too, like Cookie Lyon, was a young mom with children and married to a man with a questionable background. Nor do I think that Clair Huxtable is the better mother because she subscribes to a motherhood style that is socially acceptable to white culture. Clair's version of mothering becomes monolithic—a Black woman but representing a very particular upper class white style of mothering—implying there is only one way to be a mother. This singular vision of motherhood minimizes the litany of contextual factors that go in to being a mother—race, class, social status, everything that surrounds the parent and their child. Cookie's mothering style is not inferior, she loves her children just as hard as Clair. She voices her opinions and advocates for herself and family no matter how uncomfortable it makes people.

This sampling draws attention to the power of images and the ways in which they inform broader conceptions of motherhood. For instance, Clair's mothering style exists in a bubble – without context, with limited or no correspondence to reality. She is a partner at a law firm, but also able to stay at home. A couple that are both working, wealthy, professionals, are never seen using childcare, or employing people to work within the home, yet the home is always immaculately clean, and the meals are always prepared by

[12] Ironically, in the later seasons of *Empire*, Phylicia Rashad who had played Clair on *Cosby* became the arch-nemisis to Cookie. Rashad's character Diana DuBois is a wealthy Black mother of a family with intergenerational wealth, who views Cookie as too low-class to date her son.

Claire. Even when *Cosby* has their "very special episodes" that raises issues of racism, poverty, teen pregnancy or violence arise in the show it is relegated to a special episode, a onetime event that happens to friends of the Huxtable children. Trauma, and the devastation it can cause to the individual or their family, do not exist for sitcom life of the Huxtables. Whereas, the more melodramatic Lyons experience these societal issues, with the addition of their personal wealth. The Lyon family regularly confronts racism, sexism, homophobia, and the many structural issues facing Black families exist despite their economic status. The middle son, Jamal, is gay but must deal with his father's homophobia, Cookie helped found the company but must deal with the aftermath of her criminal conviction, and the oldest son Andre deals with mental health issues and stereotypes around support for mental health. While their stories and drama are over the top, the underlying messages affirm that generational trauma is real. Cookie doesn't have the luxury to bypass the day-to-day issues that exist for Black mothers. Furthermore, Cookie, is tackling mothering, family and community while interacting with the prison industrial complex.

In this chapter, I analyze the historical and current discourse on the complexities of Black motherhood. Section one focuses on controlling images of Black women and how those are related to Black motherhood. Section two situates these images in the ways that Motherhood is treated by society, and the ways conventional definitions of motherhood is framed by whiteness. The last section argues for a reinterpretation of motherhood. By engaging controlling images of Black women and how they have informed notions of Black motherhood, we see how these harmful negative images,

coupled with the additional stigma of the criminal justice system, impairs their mothering, and causes an extra burden on their lives.

Controlling Images of Black Women

The dichotomy of good and bad mothers stem from the dichotomy of Black and white women. The introduction of the Cult of True Womanhood characterized white women as the only "true woman" (White, 1999; Davis, 1981). It described white women as beautiful, smart, feminine, and worthy of being protected by white men and society. These white supremacist, patriarchal notions of womanhood informed social norms which became racialized, thus imprinting the bad mother label to Black women. Dorothy Roberts, for instance, traces the good/bad mother dichotomy to slavery, as "Black women produced children who were legally black to replenish the master's supply of slaves. White women produced white children to continue the master's legacy" (1993, p. 8). White supremacy creates a hierarchy of which bodies are valued and which bodies are expendable. There is no simple binary that can define motherhood. Melissa Harris-Perry highlights the problematic ways in which Black motherhood has been defined over the years, as the production of labor during slavery turned to eugenics and sterilization following emancipation, up to the welfare queen's perceived procreation to create state dependence. Black motherhood has therefore been pathologized and "blamed for social ills ranging from crime to drugs to urban disorder" (2011, p. 284).

Motherhood has special meaning for Black feminists, contrasting against white patriarchal conceptions of motherhood associated with the "cult of true womanhood."

Intersecting oppressions define motherhood—including race, class, social standing, and marriage—to define the role of a "traditional mother" as in the home (Collins, 1997, p. 326). Motherhood does not fit into any general category or image but should be defined through lived experiences.

Images of Black women, and Black womanhood, have been constructed to regulate and subordinate Black women, in a system of control to enforce social roles. Donald Bogle notes that recurring tropes and stereotypes, such as the Tom, Coon, Mammy, Mulatto and Buck, were all used "to entertain by stressing Negro inferiority" (2001, p. 4). K. Sue Jewell further reminds us that tropes and stereotypes are means of normalizing structural and social inequalities:

> The mass media, as instruments of those who control private capital, have systematically proliferated cultural images of African American women that attribute their depressed socioeconomic status to individual and cultural deficiencies. Such deficits are said to be an integral component of cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors. (1993, p. 17)

Media representation therefore plays a role in the subordination and oppression of Black women by obstructing structural conditions created by capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. The image of the "crack mom" perpetuated in the 1980's became a normative narrative of Black motherhood of Black women being promiscuous—for having all kinds of kids—being neglectful, drug addicts, all these negative traits that are ascribed to their Blackness rather than the social conditions that created a drug epidemic. Black women are blamed personally for financial instability, rather than the white supremacist capitalist

patriarchy that make these conditions occur (hooks, 1989). Media depictions of a drug epidemic were reduced to a failure of Black women, summed up in *The Washington Post*'s 1989 headline "CRACK BABIES THE WORST THREAT IS MOM HERSELF" (Besharov). Roberts explains how this type of sensationalism was typical for the 1980's engineering of an epidemic as a media phenomenon targeted at women:

> Having whipped up a panic over crack exposure, the media next created the drama's leading characters—the pregnant addict and the crack baby, both irredeemable, both black. The pregnant crack addict was portrayed as an irresponsible and selfish woman who put her love for crack above her love for her children. … The pregnant crack addict, then, was the exact opposite of a mother: she was promiscuous, uncaring, and self-indulgent. … The monstrous crack-smoking mother was added to the iconography of depraved Black maternity, alongside the matriarch and the welfare queen. Crack gave society one more reason to curb Black women's fertility. (1997, pp. 150-151).

Success becomes an individualized exception while any deficit or negative trait is ascribed to Black women categorically. The Black crack mother is a continuation of tropes regulating Black womanhood, adapting, and transitioning to new technologies and new eras—a national media response spreads the new controlling image rapidly. The growth of news media allowed this new controlling image of the crack mom to infect society rapidly, and provoking response from those in power with laws targeting Black mothers for incarceration and the removal of children, warehoused in foster care or

juvenile detention facilities (Roberts, 1997, pp. 159-160), compounded with prisons as criminal punishments for drug use or distribution.

Racial, and gendered, tropes create meaning and reality by effecting perceptions of the way things are and cause Black women to be treated accordingly. Imagery of Black women is therefore a part of what Cedric J. Robinson calls a "racial regime." Racial regimes are "constructed social systems in which race is proposed as a justification for the relations of power" (Robinson, 2007, p. xii). Minstrel shows, for example, become representations of Blackness where Black bodies are rendered enslavable. This is possible by representing Black people as ignorant, mischievous, thieving—all working to legitimize the violence against and regulation of Black bodies by white supremacist moral orders (Robinson, 2007, p. 129). It is a cyclical relationship between meanings that are created as tropes of Blackness and the way Black women are treated—Black women are portrayed in a negative light to ensure their subjugation, leading to negative depictions of Black women, which ensures they are oppressed, and so on to infinity. The cycle continues even as it takes on different forms, each generation provokes new depictions of Black women and womanhood, while relying on these tropes to continually undermine the status of Black women.

According to Collins, "the dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of four interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (2000, p. 71). The tropes or controlling images specific to Black womanhood are the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare queen and the jezebel (Bogle,

2001; Bridges, 2011; Collins, 2000; Jewell, 1993; Robinson, 2007). The Mammy is the obedient domestic worker whose portrayal may range from the "big, fat, and cantankerous" militant maid to the "sweet, jolly, and good-tempered" housekeeper that is caring, asexual, and inconspicuous (Bogle, 2001, p. 9). The matriarch, or sapphire, is most recognizably known as the mythical "strong black woman," who is independent, bossy, holds everything together, sometimes seen as emasculating to a black man, and often a loudmouth. The sapphire's existence is "predicated upon the presence of the corrupt African American male whose lack of integrity and use of cunning and trickery provides her with an opportunity to emasculate him her use of verbal putdowns" (Jewell, 1993, p. 45).

Both the mammy and matriarch operate as measures of control over Black womanhood, that are non-threatening to white men, not parallel to white women, and less intimidating than constructions of Black masculinity. In the most famous filmed version of the mammy image, Hattie McDaniel's character in "Gone with the Wind" (1939) is only named Mammy and exists only as a trope and image of womanhood. She cares for the children, for Scarlett and Rhett, she has no sexuality, no life or energy beyond her work in caring for the white family. She has no agency; she only offers the occasional wisdom and provides support to the white family. She instead supports white supremacy through her actions, caring for the physical and emotional wellbeing of the O'Hara family. Mammy and Matriarch images are not in control but depicted as controlling: they manage the daily activity of a home and domestic labor, but they have no decision making authority, but are always subject to higher power, for the mammy in the white

house it is the white family or for the matriarch in a Black household her authority is subject to some male or white authority figure (a Black husband or a white employer) that ultimately dictate her time. Both are not sexualized and ultimately work within white Supremacy, ensuring the regime of white racial power endures—unlike a Nat Turner image that threatens revolt or deconstruction. Both mammy and matriarch are constructed in relationship to Black men and masculinities, ensuring that Black women are no threat to white sexuality and Black men are no threat to white women since the mammy and matriarch emasculate Black men (Collins, 2000). In essence, these images function to control and demean Black humanity.

Similarly, the welfare queen and jezebel images are tropes used to control or demean Black womanhood while undermining potential threats to white supremacy (Collins, 2000). Unlike the Mammy, there is no stereotype of docility. The welfare queen and jezebel are dangerous because they go against white norms of family—multiple children by multiple men, children outside of marriage, support networks beyond heteronormative, monogamous relationships. Black motherhood in this way is a reminder of Black women's sexuality and therefore serves a threat to white womanhood —Black women's sexuality is a potential threat to disrupt the heteronormative white family unit in drawing the sexual attention of white men or act in the stead of white women as mothers interfering with their power within the family unit.

The welfare queen is characterized as lazy and does not want to work; she may be an adult or a teen and survives only off the welfare state by continuing to have children. As Khiara Bridges notes, the welfare queen image is a paradox: "she is uneducated yet

informed enough to make lucrative her reproductive capabilities. She is stupid, yet smart enough to shift to the government the costs of maintaining her (luxurious, or at least undeservedly excessive) lifestyle to the tune of billions of dollars a year" (Bridges, 2011, p. 211). This contradictory image is about whiteness and controlling Black women's bodies, combined with capitalist notions of work and merit, making the welfare queen undeserving of anything she earns, yet also a policy scapegoat whenever there is a need to cut social services.

Roberts also emphasizes that welfare queen as a trope has become part of a mythological figure used to indict public services. As she explains: "the picture of reckless Black fertility is made all the more frightening by a more devious notion of Black women's childbearing. Poor Black mothers do not simply procreate irresponsibly; they purposely have more and more children to manipulate taxpayers into giving them more money" (Roberts, 1997, p. 17). Within this frame, Black women become the trickster, scammer, boogey-woman, updating stereotypes of Black women's sexuality. Though the welfare queen trope has roots in images of the breeder woman from slavery, the welfare queen is a relatively new image grown during the Reagan era, as public programs and services were under attack from conservative groups. Black teenage mothers became the face of economic policy meant to exclude, encouraging conservatives and moderates to destroy the welfare state by painting beneficiaries as Black and undeserving. These policies effectively exclude Black mothers from public life by removing social programs designed to benefit low-income women of color, particularly Black women. The image of the welfare queen became so prominent that

welfare became “a failed euphemism for race. It has failed insofar as euphemisms are generally polite methods of referencing topics perceived to be impolite; yet there is very little polite in the signifier ‘welfare’ as it is presently understood” (Bridges, 2011, p. 213). In other words, welfare and Blackness are made interchangeable, negative, and pejorative to ensure white supremacy—Blackness and welfare are portrayed as dependents of the state, harkening back to the portrayal of enslaved Black people as childlike or reliant on support, negating the power of Black people and legitimating white supremacy. Welfare becomes the newest incarnation of code, justifying targeting Black communities with surveillance, harassment, and incarceration.

The fourth and final image noted by Collins is the jezebel - the hypersexual Black woman (Collins, 2000). This image is rooted in the slave master’s attempt to regulate and claim ownership of the Black female body by suggesting that Black women are sexually aggressive. Jewel notes that the jezebel evolves from the “tragic mulatta”—a hypersexual black woman with a light complexion who cannot join a white man in marriage due to her relationship to blackness—into a general statement of black female sexuality (1993, p. 46). The tragic element can come from either her impossible romance with a white man, or her blackness—her existence is tragic, since she comes from the unsanctioned racial mixing that undermines white racial purity. According to Jewel, the tragic mulatta “fulfills the sex objectification requirement of White womanhood, although she is portrayed as a less naïve, more worldly seductress. The bad-black girl reinforces cultural stereotypes regarding the hypersexuality of the African American female, who yearns for sexual encounters” (Jewell, 1993, p. 46). Her hypersexuality is

immoral because of her Black womanhood while reinforcing an assumption of white desirability—Black women are branded hypersexual aggressors, legitimizing their sexual assault. Collins explains that the Jezebel's "function was to relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by white men" (2000, p. 77). Here the jezebel exists to regulate Black women's sexuality, while maintaining the "cult of true womanhood"—a nineteenth-century notion of femininity that was "virtuous, pure, and white" (Roberts, 1993, p. 12), with the effect of erasing the humanity of Black women in all realms, including women as mothers. As women are the only ones capable of the power to give birth, this trope attempts to negate the power of women to procreate, and thereby removes their womanhood.

Roberts emphasizes that the hypersexual jezebel trope as the "opposite of ideal motherhood," voids the sexuality of Black women and demeans Black mothers. As she explains: "the devaluation Black motherhood is a way of disregarding Black humanity… Discouraging Black procreation is also a means of subordinating the entire race; under patriarchy, it is accomplished through the regulation of Black women's fertility" (1993, p. 11). The demonization of Black sexuality sought to regulate and discourage procreation outside of white control. This eugenical motivation may manifest physically through forced sterilization (Bridges, 2011) or ideologically in these controlling images and social stigmas. Controlling images are proxies for control over Black women's bodies, providing social surveillance and policing of Black women's sexual activities through shaming and devaluation (Roberts, 1997). In slavery, control was legally

absolute—Black women didn't have any right over their bodies, their children, their choices. After emancipation, controlling images became more necessary to regulate Black women's bodies and thereby Black motherhood—legitimizing mistreatment, the removal of social services, or the general devaluation of Black motherhood.

The cycle of tropes—or the evolution of controlling images from mammy to matriarch, to jezebel, to Black lady and welfare queen—functions as part of Robinson's "racial regimes" (2007, p. xii). Political and social changes necessitate alterations to controlling images that reiterate the same devaluations of Black women, while adapting the imagery to the current social climate. These images are ideological and pedagogical. They create stigmas about who belongs and who matters, and they teach lessons as to who is deserving of rights and who is deserving of discipline. For Black mothers, these controlling images mean Black women belong only insofar as they care for white people or support white power, sexual only as much as they matter to the white gaze or as a contrast for white women, but always undeserving of dignity or rights under white supremacy. Thus, mammy becomes matriarch, jezebel becomes welfare queen, and the controlling tropes evolve to maintain white supremacy. Just as Clair represented the Black lady trope of respectability politics of Cosby (the man and the character) on television in the 1980s, Cookie represents the Black bitch trope of the 21st century, demonstrating the evolution of controlling images of Black women from the unattainable, fictive *lady* and the ever-branded *bitch*.

Mainstream "Institutionalized" Motherhood and Black Mothers

Controlling images of Black womanhood highlight aspects of mothering—sexuality and reproduction, the role of Black women in the home. In patriarchal society, Motherhood is a set of socially constructed expectations, structured around the home and service for others, a proscribed status that also comes with unique social capital. Motherhood in the mainstream means raising the next generations that will sustain the status quo, or enhance it: "maternal selflessness has endowed mothers with a unique moral authority which in the past has been used to promote temperance, maternal and child health, kindergarten, more lenient juvenile justice system" and recent policy efforts like Mothers Against Drunk Driving (Crittenden, 2010, pp. 1-2). The image of "mother" thus has political and social currency in the United States—at least when it is applied to white women.

In the United States, conceptions of motherhood are often constructed in a binary of good and bad. Lindal Buchanan argues that the mother "operates as a god-term within public discourse and connotes a myriad of positive associations, including children, love, protection, home, nourishment, altruism, morality, religion, self-sacrifice, strength, the reproductive body, the private sphere, and the nation" (2013, p. 8). Drawing on conservative rhetorician Richard Weaver, Buchanan explains that god-terms "encapsulate ideas and ideals that subjects feel 'socially impelled to accept and even sacrifice for," in contrast to devil terms which provide a contrast and "afford society external adversaries and internal scapegoats" (2013, p. 8). Conversely, Buchanan argues the devil-term is a negative rhetoric of woman invoking "childlessness, self-centeredness, work,

materialism, hysteria, irrationality, the sensual/sexual body and public sphere. Woman is the antithesis of Mother—the dark to its light, the failure to its success—and a necessary internal scapegoat" (2013, p. 8). This false binary, Buchanan argues, is part of the constructed system of gender norms that "provide speakers with immediately recognizable (and culturally resonant) stereotypes, each comprised of well-known quantities and associations" (2013, p. 8). Thus motherhood, in one sense, is glorified and praised. Becoming a mother is thus conflated with an escalated status, the natural progression or desired promotion for womanhood.

When Motherhood becomes hegemonic, it becomes an end-goal for all women in patriarchal society (Davis, 1981). As Adrienne Rich explains, this version of motherhood should be viewed as an "institution, which aims at ensuring that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" and distinct from the status of mother as a "potential relationship" between a woman and her children (1995, p. 13). Motherhood becomes "institutionalized motherhood," which is "male defined, male controlled, and deeply oppressive to women" (O'Brien Hallstein, 2017, p. 2). This conception of motherhood resists changes and coopts feminist—or at least white feminist—understandings of women's empowerment through "new momism" (O'Brien Hallstein, 2017; Douglas & Michaels, 2005). The burden is placed on women's autonomy and the idea that women can do it all, as the reason for taking away their freedom (Douglas & Michaels, 2005). Resistance to state sanctioned control of women's bodies is too often framed around this illusion of autonomy, underestimating the comprehensive and complex network of practices necessary for reproductive justice. For example, in the

rhetorics around access to abortion framed its simply as being "pro-choice" or the option of whether to have a family, yet this is reductive for Black women. In the book *Undivided Rights,* Jael Miriam Sillman, Marlene Gerber Fried, Loretta Ross, and Elena R Gutiérrez emphasize that the reproductive justice movement transcends the question of abortion to consider social factors:

> Early in the abortion rights struggle, before these organizations were created, women of color resisted the coercion that masqueraded as 'choice.' … 'Choice' implies a marketplace of options in which women's right to determine what happens to their bodies is legally protected, ignoring the fact that for women of color, economic and institutional constraints often restrict their 'choices.' (Sillman, Gerber Fried, Ross, & Gutiérrez, 2016, p. 5).

Women's so-called choice to have children is therefore a choice to give up a sense of self or agency, and to instead become everything to the child—tutor, service, custodian, driver—with separate identity. As D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein explains: "[G]ender roles and expectations have changed in the public sphere without significantly changing in terms of ongoing gender-based assumptions and expectations that mothers are still primarily responsible for childrearing and caregiving in the private sphere" (O'Brien Hallstein, 2017, p. 3). Motherhood is not a choice, but a social mandate under white supremacy and patriarchy: women are expected to choose motherhood regardless of their situation, in addition to any ideals of career or changing gendered norms.

However, these expectations of service, gendered labor, and controlling institution of motherhood are not new for Black women, the majority of whom have been expected

to serve as mothers in their homes and the homes of others. For women of color and, Black women in particular, motherhood and womanhood have been demonized and made, to paraphrase Buchanan, the "necessary internal scapegoat" to both white womanhood and white motherhood (Buchanan, 2013, p. 8). Institutionalized motherhood manifests differently for Black women in white supremacy, filtered through the controlling images of Black women described by Bogle, Collins, and others. The trope of the mammy evokes both children and childlessness—caring for white children at the expense of her own. Black motherhood is disregarded in white supremacy while Black maternalism is exploited and used for white benefit.

Historically, Black motherhood, like the institutionalized motherhood described by Buchanan and O'Brien Hallstein, is in service of patriarchy, but the addition of white supremacy mutates the relationship between woman and mother. In slavery, Black women were expected to be fertile and have children, not to create a family unit or connection, or deification of the family that happens for white women, but rather to produce for a system of slavery. To create more people as product. Black women's fecundity is simply value added for whites, and any mothering must also be given to white children. As Stanlie James explains, the public/private dichotomy of woman/mother simply did not exist for Black women—due to expectations for labor in the fields or home alongside men in addition to the labor of home and mothering both their own children and any they were tasked with (1993, p. 48). The mammy is good enough to take care of white children, while Black women are demonized and labeled as unfit to take care of their own families. The only stability in the family unit was the

relationship between Black mothers and their children—in addition to all other responsibilities—since "the nurturance provided for enslaved children was primarily provided by already over- burdened enslaved women" (James S. , 1993, p. 48). Black motherhood becomes both the mule and scapegoat for society's ills; having to carry the social burdens of woman and mother as terms, without any of the benefits, advantages, or credit, only the blame and fault for failings.

Other "devil-terms" (Buchanan, 2013) associated with womanhood take on different form when applied to Black women. Self-centeredness and materialism evoke the jezebel, sapphire, and Black Lady, but also connect to the reproductive body in sexualization of fertility and materialism. The sapphire and Black Lady tropes are loud and emasculating, connected to the hysteria and irrationality of womanhood (Collins, 2000; Collins, 2005). Women in patriarchy are deprived of agency, often for false assumptions of biology that it is a period, or vagina, something else biological making them crazy—as if insanity is the natural state of womanhood. Black women especially have always been on the front lines of having to advocate for themselves and their families, because there are rarely others to stand up for them or stand up with them.

Black women are expected to take care of everyone in their family, and in turn are blamed for taking care of everyone in the family, with the implication that they have not taken care of their own. In the infamous 1965 report by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," the Assistant Secretary of Labor detailed how Civil Rights legislation was not enough to help Black families, and economic disparities in income, family wealth, employment, and housing would continue without

additional governmental intervention (United States Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965). Moynihan placed the blame on Black mothers, particularly low-income and working-class mothers, for almost all problems he saw in Black communities, more than racism or even the history of slavery:

> In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male, and in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well. (United States Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965, p. 29).

In this view, mothers were the crux of a "tangle of pathology" that prevented Black empowerment—the reason why Black fathers were absent, Black youth were more likely to be involved in crime, and faced educational obstacles—all due to "matriarchy" in the Black community (United States Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965). Even this report that presumed to argue for benefits to the Black community has become legendary for its misogyny, and particular hostility for Black women. Particularly at the time Moynihan is publishing, there are no Black women in a position of similar power to respond to the report, so blaming Black women comes without an equal response on the public stage. Angela Y. Davis explains that even those contemporary responses to Moynihan's Report that draw on history and sociology to "dethrone" Moynihan's Black matriarchy thesis fail to explore the "multidimensional role of Black women within the family and within the slave community as a whole" (1981, p.

4). Black women spoke against Moynihan and made his report infamous, but the report itself reflected how Black mothers are considered and valued in a white supremacist society. Black motherhood is made liable for the failings of the entire community, which in turn fails to address the particular struggles of Black mothers with racism and sexism. Black women are blamed without consideration of our struggle.

Today, even as Black women are elected and gain more political clout, Black mothers are still burdened with any perceived failings of the Black community. For example, when the first Black woman to serve as Vice President Kamala Harris was the District Attorney for San Francisco, she became the face of California's anti-truancy laws. In an attempt to decrease chronic absences in California's schools—in LA County for example in 2010-11 20.5% of students had unexcused lateness or absences for more than 10% of the school year—California enacted laws to increase attendance by creating penalties for parents (Watanabe, 2013). Harris was a leading advocate in laws that would criminalize parents whose children were chronically truant, requiring students to increase attendance or parents could potentially face a misdemeanor punishable by 2 years in jail or up to $5,000 in fines (Watanabe, 2013; Mason & Finnegan, 2019). In trying to address the concern over education, Harris creates a law that could easily be focused on criminalizing the Black community. More importantly this created criminal penalties that could be specially applied to Black mothers—particularly the working poor—for mothers who have trouble taking their children to school on time due to work schedules, or whatever other reasons. This law criminalizes parents for the actions of their children, but we never see these laws applied to the predominantly white children who are causing

serious harm in the form of bullying or mass shootings. This law is yet another example of how motherhood—and Black motherhood specifically—become the target of any community criticism and become the focus of punishment or blame. With the Moynihan Report, it was a rhetoric and policy that named Black mothers as the source of problems, while with Harris' truancy policy it was more covert, discretionary targeting that left Black mothers criminally liable for their children's school absences.

From Moynihan to Kamala Harris, the role of Black motherhood remains the same—a focal point for blame and demonization of the Black family. For Black women, motherhood is not an elevating god-term. Black motherhood is controlled in different ways by patriarchy and white supremacy. Rhetoric of Black motherhood is code for projecting antiblackness—like Moynihan's claims that Black "matriarchy" has "retarded" the progress of the entire community—that presents Black women generally as incapable, inadequate, and damaging.

Towards a Black Women's definition of Mothering

Black women continue to be undervalued. Black womanhood and motherhood are under-theorized by mainstream (mostly white) scholars of motherhood.[13] Black mothers' social and familial contributions are undervalued by policymakers, activists, and even Black family members. Audre Lorde explains the trap that Black women face, from

[13] For example, Jennifer Nash's review of Black mothering literature highlights how Black feminist scholarship has succeeding in highlighting on Black motherhood, while white scholarship on motherhood has failed to grasp this experience. Even then, Nash's insightful summary of literature highlights questions of care work, tedium, and exhaustion that are often missed, even in Black feminist scholarship on mothering (2018).

all angles: “Either I denied or chose between various aspects of my identity, or my work and my Blackness would be unacceptable. ... [I]f I didn’t define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people’s fantasies for me and eaten alive” (Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, 2020, p. 137). Black motherhood is complex and does not receive the nuance it deserves because it is too often defined and constrained by those who do not inhabit it. Black motherhood must be defined by Black mothers or be “crunched into other people’s fantasies… and eaten alive” (Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, 2020, p. 137). Black women neither have to inhabit the space of Cookie or Clair. Having a good job, living the elevated new negro married life of Clair Huxtable, or the hood, with the shits, lifestyle of Cookie Lyon are both challenges to ways Black women have been depicted. Clair challenges the welfare queen and mammy tropes, while Cookie challenges the matriarch, Black lady tropes. Yet both are still bounded by the trope of controlling images of Black women that are external constraints on the way that Black women live, thrive, and mother in a white supremacist, patriarchal, heteronormative society.

Simultaneously, motherhood is not an across-the-board concept that elevates women. Motherhood may demonize womanhood, with rhetoric that provides a path of ascension for white women—for white women in a white supremacist patriarchal society, mothering is the natural evolution for women and fulfills the cult of true womanhood. But for Black women motherhood is a site of blame, punishment, or property. Seen through the controlling images of Black women, motherhood creates no additional status or cache, but instead reaffirms their outsider status in society. Buchanan raises the

example of Diane Nash, a Black woman activist who co-founded the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. During the lunch counter sit-ins, where Black youth sat at the counter at segregated diners in protest, Nash and others took the platform of "jail-no-bail," refusing to pay fines to give any money to courts that enforced racist policies of segregation. Nash wrote a press release arguing for the jail-no-bail tactic to spread across the movement. Buchanan analyzes the rhetoric of Nash's press release and male historians' later writings on Nash's motherhood and the civil rights movement, arguing that Nash's failure to emphasize motherhood in her press release "in retrospect, was surely a missed rhetorical opportunity. The civil-rights activist may not have fully grasped or exploited the available means of persuasion afforded by her pregnancy, but subsequent chroniclers of the event certainly did" (Buchanan, 2013, p. 64). Buchanan rightly points out the way Black and white male historians have over-emphasized the pregnancy of Nash—replicating the deification of white motherhood—and undervalued Nash as an organizer and strategist.

However, Buchanan simultaneously patronizes Nash and demeans her strategy by failing to recognize the way that Black motherhood manifests in a white supremacist society. Black motherhood, particularly for activists, is a threat to the state. Nash did not miss an opportunity to use motherhood to gain support, but because Black lives are demeaned in the mainstream, motherhood presents just a question of more Black people that are threatening to white society. Black motherhood as a status gains no sympathy from a white supremacist society that only recently stopped exploiting Black women's care work and reproductive capacity for slavery. While slavery may have ended

exploitation of Black women has not. Black motherhood is still subject to the controlling images and rhetorics that demean black women. Black women are thus trapped between Cookie, Clair, and every trope in between. Black women's humanity is not generally recognized under white supremacy, and Black maternity and motherhood are most often used to demonize Black women. Controlling images of Black women and rhetorics of motherhood serve similar purposes—to glorify white womanhood/motherhood by negating Black women and mothers. Black women and mothers therefore become responsible for all the ills of the Black community, and like Diane Nash, are only credited for the success in relationship to male counterparts.

So, like Nash, Black mothers must take the rhetoric of motherhood to define, explain and create for themselves. As noted, Black womanhood, especially mothering, when defined by others always has negative implications for Black women. Representations of Black women and motherhood cannot be narrowed to a binary, where every woman fits a Cookie or Clair, or some other controlling trope. Black feminist epistemologies and Black women's ways of knowing must be the starting standpoint for thinking about Black mothering and motherhood. As Collins maintained: "Because U.S. Black women have access to the experiences that accrue to being both black and female, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a Black women's standpoint should reflect the convergence of both sets of experiences" (Collins, 2000, p. 268). The same goes for Black mothering, which should include the standpoints of those who have the experience of being Black and a mother—of all various types of mothering from those

who adopt, serve as othermothers, or engage in acts of mothering through kinship networks.

In the next chapter I explore how Black women, and other women of color, have employed "mothering" as a step beyond the conventional definition of motherhood. Mothering is an act of "creating, nurturing, affirming, and supporting life … Mothering is the glad gifting of one's talents, ideas, intellect, and creativity without recompense." (Ross, 2016, p. xv). This radical, revolutionary take on mothering is in direct response to the conventional expectations of motherhood as the apex of femininity and womanhood under white supremacy and capitalism.

CHAPTER 3

REDEFINING BLACK MOTHERHOOD IN THE BORDERLANDS OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

For the longest time I used to lie to people about my life. To many who saw me I had the perfect life. I was a young Black professional working a well-paying job at a prestigious investment banking company. I had two handsome little boys, a new top-of-the-line car, and owner of a newly built three-bedroom house in southern California. I spent my working days eating out at fancy restaurants, going to evening happy hours with co-workers, shopping at Nordstrom's, and spending time with my boys. After growing up "in the hood," I was living a rich lifestyle by legal means, with no financial worries; I had made it. However, those who weren't close to me did not know how I spent my weekends—my secret life. Only those closest to me knew my truth.

On Fridays I would come home from work, pack up myself and my kids for a three-hour drive to the middle of nowhere and check in to our usual hotel. From there, I would meet up with my close group of friends, and we would drop off one of our cars to reserve a spot near the front of the line for visiting. Once the car was parked in the line, my weekends at the prison began. I switched from the young investment banker to a "regular." My friends and I were "regulars:" women who go to visit family incarcerated at the prison every weekend for both days, always near the front of the line. We regulars knew everything about the prison town—where to eat, where to buy clothes if the dress code changes—and we knew how to navigate the prison's regulations, which is why we always left a car near the front of the line to reserve a spot. Together we had created a

community and a system to overcome and outsmart the rules of the prison to maximize our visiting time. We regulars would spend Friday and Saturday nights together, spending our Saturday at the prison all day. Sunday mornings we would check out of our hotels and spend the rest of our time at the prison, until 3 pm rolled around and we all packed up to head back to our homes. Monday would be back to the workweek routines, telling everyone I had just spent the weekend with my kids, seeing movies or going out to dinner together—without ever mentioning it all happened in the prison town.

I kept my weekday and weekend lives separate out of fear of the stigma that comes with being in a relationship with an incarcerated person. Despite the appearance of a perfect life, I feared how people would judge me not only for being in a relationship with an incarcerated person, but also for being a regular—I worried people would judge me for my commitment to keeping a family together every week by visiting the prison. The other regulars and I lived in two, juxtaposed worlds: the prison and the free world. This binary is very real to those living it, the stark contrast between weekend visits and weekday lives, but the existence of the binary is itself proof that the world outside the prison is not free. Not only did I face societal oppressions as a Black mother of two, but my fear of being exposed as a "regular" shows how illusory the freedoms outside prison can be.

My friends and I were what I call "Mainline Mamas" - mothers who live in two worlds as we raise our children whose second parent is incarcerated. While "mainline" traditionally is a prison slang that refers to someone who lives in the general population of the prison, I use it here strategically to evoke a new framework for discussing

mothering, intimate relationships, and the context of family while living in the borderlands of the criminal justice system. The majority of scholarly engagement with the relationship between parenting and the prison system typically, and justifiably, focus on the parent who is incarcerated. However, there is relatively little discussion of the second parent who while not incarcerated, also must engage with the prison industrial complex, and in a sense, does "time on the outside" (Braman, 2004). The term Mainline Mama thus invokes distinct experiences created by the tension of navigating the weekday life of work, friends, and family, while simultaneously navigating the rules, regulations, and unspoken codes of the prison industrial complex.

Although the Mainline Mama is not physically incarcerated, she is still subject to the authority of the prison—from dealing with correctional officers during visiting hours to paying phone bills from collect calls from prisons—but must also navigate the struggles of everyday life in maintaining a job, familial obligations, and even a social life beyond the prison walls. The Mainline Mama identifies the often-overlooked women raising children with an incarcerated person and provides space for stories of resistance to counter hushed conversations, looks, or stereotypes Mainline Mamas encounter in everyday life.

Building on the previous chapter's exploration of controlling images of Black women and mothering, this Chapter engages conceptions of mothering, focusing on the perspectives of Black women. First, I engage Black feminist epistemologies as a framework for grounding mothering as theory and practice, from a Black woman's perspective. Second, I look at notions of political and revolutionary mothering, and how

these are related to Black women's experiences. Finally, I interrogate the Mainline Mama framework as applied to the lived realities of Black women. As noted previously, this dissertation centers the perspectives of Black women, particularly those who identify or can be identified as mother because they engage in care work, with and for other people around them. Mainline Mama thus builds on the frameworks of political and radical mothering to provide a context and identify the mothering practices of women who are forced into a relationship with the state through the prison system.

Defining motherhood for ourselves

Black women's ways of knowing are part of a larger context of intergenerational knowledge and kinship networks. Modern terminology like intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, are critiques of power from Black women's perspective, building on the Black feminist traditions. In 1851, Sojourner Truth highlighted her intersecting identities in public political forums with her "Ain't I a Woman" speech, speaking from her experiences as an enslaved black woman to respond to white understandings of what it means to be a woman and Black in the Nineteenth Century. Sojourner Truth's speeches show that being a Black woman constitutes a specific experience, unique both within womanhood and Blackness, since in the struggle for rights among feminists and abolitionists, Blacks were gendered male and women were raced as white (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 36; Painter, 1996, p. 271). In the Twentieth Century, the Combahee River Collective made their intersectional politics clear:

> we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis practice based upon the fact that these major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions create the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (Collective T. C., 2014, p. 261)

The CRC made clear that for Black women there is no separate struggle: white women can engage feminism yet disengage from a racial critique of power; Black men may similarly focus on racial politics and ignore the ways in which patriarchy and gender oppressions affect Black people. Black women's struggle against oppressive conditions necessarily takes place on multiple fronts because Black womanhood represents a multitude of identities. Other scholars, activists, and writers such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde have used an intersectional analysis to interrogate the intricate, layered identities of Black women through scholarly research and personal experiences. Lorde argues that "[i]n a world of possibility for us all, our personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action… In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower" (Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, 2020, p. 112). Identities are too often reduced to binaries—like black/white, good/bad, assertive/aggressive—that can reduce complex experiences to nothingness. Empowerment must come from self-definition—personal experiences and visions of society.

Black feminist epistemologies draw on different layers of experience: experiences of individual Black women, Black Women's experiences with oppression based on their particular context—how race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. manifest in their lives—and the ways Black women connect and organize into community grounded in their Blackness and womanhood (Taylor, 2017). Collins describes the community networks of Black women acting as mothers (regardless of biological relationship) as a crucial symbol of power, socializing Black women for surviving in a white supremacist patriarchal society. This provides a "foundation for conceptualizing Black women's political activism. Experiences both of being nurtured as children and being held responsible for siblings and fictive kin within kin networks can stimulate a more generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability among African-American women" (Collins, 2000, p. 189). Community is therefore built on practices of mothering beyond biology; thus, I extend Collin's definition of othermothering to include the community network: Black women engaging in care work for those who are with and around them. Mothering, in this sense, is foundational to community organizing and political work to resistance, revolution, and liberation. Black women's mothering work is foundational—whether recognized in the foreground or background—to struggles for Black liberation, ranging from revolutionary movements to integrationist and accommodationist ends.[14]

[14] For example, Deborah Gray White's accounts of the Black Clubwomen's movement documents the efforts of Black women in working in both mainstream and revolutionary spaces during the 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly as Black women worked behind the scenes for related men's movements (White, 1999).

Mothering as Resistance

The power of the mother comes not only from the basic biological creation and birthing of children but shaping future generations through mothering. Angela Mae Kupenda argues that motherhood grants "practical [political] power beyond voting. Women have the ability to shape the lives of the next generations as mothers, through strategic and critical use of their power to teach boys and girls how to live either with a focus on the equality or a focus on the inequality of others" (Kupenda, 2012, p. 511). This is the power of motherhood that the state has attempted to regulate in the history of silencing the Black body, from enslavement of children to forced sterilization. For example, Marie Jenkins Schwartz's *Birthing a Slave* differentiates between the value of reproduction from capital. Children brought value to slave owning whites since children "enhanced their financial position and helped them cultivate an image of themselves as stewards of slaves whose 'benevolent' rule allowed bondwomen and men the privilege of a family life" (Schwartz, 2006, p. 93)—from the value of motherhood to Black women in slavery, "offering a welcome respite from the dehumanizing slave regime," (Schwartz, 2006, p. 11) and a source of power for resistance when Black women regulated their fertility through abortions induced through herbs or otherwise which "challenged the slaveholder's authority" and represented alternative knowledges that "posed a threat to southern society. Slavery could not continue if Black women ceased bearing children" (Schwartz, 2006, p. 110).

Motherhood is not an end unto itself. As explored here, motherhood is constructed as the apex of heteronormative white womanhood and becomes the standard

by which all women are judged. But motherhood is not and should not be the ultimate destiny or responsibility of all women. Not all women are mothers and not all mothers are women. Mothers can be women, men, cis, trans, non-binary, gender fluid, of varied gender identities or orientations. Mothering is a practice; a social, cultural, and political practice in various capacities—by blood, chosen, or other familial or kinship networks—that creates a unique standpoint for people who engage in care work.

Motherhood is therefore a particular social location that requires deep engagement. All those who identify as mothers and take care of others engage in some aspect or form of mothering. Mothering in the different forms and definitions are ways of gathering and conceptualizing ideas of what it means to take care of others from particular social locations. This dissertation focuses on Black women engaging in mothering as a practice— subverting and resisting the deified "god-term" social status described in the previous chapter and applied almost exclusively to white women (Buchanan, 2013).

The conceptualization Mainline Mama echoes a "political mothering," that frames mothering as a political act as mothers shaping their children's futures through resistance and engagements with the state. Jenna Loyd explains that

> political mothering simply refers to the ways in which mothers critically work with sites and practices of mothering, and allows me to examine differential relations to, and contests over, maternalism and domesticity as hegemonic forms of motherhood… to foreground how women with differing political

> consciousnesses could work together by mobilizing around their mothering practices and children's futures" (2014, p. 111).

Loyd's definition breaks patriarchal norms of the home that constrains motherhood to simple acts of feeding or clothing. Here, mothering extends to the survival of everyone involved—it may be basic needs like food but extends into acts of resistance to ensure a better life for generations to come. For Loyd that means looking at the way mothers organized against the Vietnam War by challenging state violence as a disruption of both the idealized domesticity associated with motherhood, and the actual process of mothering and caring for others. In the anti-war movement, this meant forming coalitions on the basis of mothering, to make political statements against war and to rally support by exploiting gendered paradigms of the home for more radical interpretations of considering future generations and arguing for the viability of peoples in resistance to state violence. Loyd highlights how not only was mothering a focus for coalitions, but also central to the repression of movements and the function of imperialism. Accordingly, "The 'war at home' was not a metaphor for antiracist, peace, and welfare rights groups, but represented another front of the same imperial war being waged abroad" as military recruiting and social programs targeted Black mothering as a problem for white supremacy, patriarchy, and imperialism that needed to be insulated and resisted (Loyd, 2014, p. 149). Macho recruiting and the focus on Black fatherhood, are both tactics of patriarchy and white supremacy that attempt to eliminate mothering by declaiming Black mothering as "matrifocal" or the root cause of ills in the Black community—rather than the very structures of oppression that political mothering sought

to undermine. Thus, the opposition to Black motherhood re-emphasizes the political power of mothering as a form of resistance to both white conceptions of motherhood and the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that makes those rhetorics of motherhood powerful and controlling over black women. Thus care-work makes revolutionary struggles conditions of possibility.

This is why Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams argue for Revolutionary Mothering—a praxis which centers love, knowledge, and care work as the keys to mothering and political action. Loretta Ross, who conceptualized the notion of reproductive justice as a framework from the experiences of Black women, explains how care-work can be a radical, revolutionary praxis: "Women are socialized (not created) to care for others and to expect others to care for them. Mothering, radically defined, is the glad gifting of one's talents, ideas, intellect, and creativity to the universe without recompense. 'Radical mothering is the imperative to build bridges that allow us to relate across…barriers'" (Ross, 2016, p. xv). Revolutionary mothering captures the practical work of women advocating for loved ones, working for others without expecting a return or repayment. It is self-less in that it centers caring for others above individual concerns but does not lose a sense of self. In both radical and political conceptualizations of mothering, mothering is centered as a shared experience and focal point of political movement; it is a rallying point for social and political collective action that benefits self *and* others.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore's characterization of the mothers in the Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC) movement in Los Angeles, discussed in the introduction,

exemplifies mothers generating social and political action in response to their children being sent to prison. As Gilmore explains:

> Their techniques of mothering, in and as Mothers ROC, extend past the limits of household, kinship, and neighborhood, past the limits of gender and racial divisions of social space, to embrace the political project to reclaim children of all ages whose mothers are losing them, at a net of fifty-five Statewide per business day, into the prison system. (1999, p. 28)

The women of Mothers ROC were not professional organizers, yet still they formed a cohesive social movement around their practices of mothering and their resistance to the state. Gilmore points out that "Mothers ROC critically used the ideological power of motherhood to challenge the legitimacy of the changing state" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 238). In other words, these women use the shared knowledge of mothering and care work, derived from personal experiences, to connect and collectively organize.

The practice of centering care work in political, revolutionary, or insurgent movements is not new, but changes and evolves. Mothers and women have always played a central role in challenging structures of power in slavery (Schwartz, 2006) and the loss of mother figures centrally in the ways antiblackness manifests in slavery and its afterlife. Because mass incarceration raises specific issues and challenges that Black mothers are addressing (Gilmore, 2007), the following section incorporates activist paradigms of Revolutionary Mothering (Gumbs, Martens, & Williams, 2016) and Political Mothering (Loyd, 2014), into the unique positionality I call Mainline Mama.

Mainline Mamas: Mothering against Mass Incarceration

The Mainline Mama is a theoretical, practical frame for understanding relationships between Black women, families, incarcerated persons, and the state. Rather than focus on prisons, Black womanhood, or mothering as separate relationships, the Mainline Mama focuses on the nexus of relationships that form through mothering. Understanding the acute precarity and deep communality of Mainline Mamas is very difficult, if not impossible, for those who have not shared lived experiences with Black mothers of children whose second parent is incarcerated.

In other words, if you have not lived as a Mainline Mama or talked extensively with a Mainline Mama, their existence is either unknown or reduced to stereotypes. Writings by women who have lived as Mainline Mamas is sparse; asha bandele's memoir *The Prisoner's Wife* (2010) is one of the few mass market books that actually addresses the complexity of lived experiences of a Black woman maintaining a family with a second parent who is incarcerated. Some stories are exotified and represent the extremes of women's relationships with people who are incarcerated, (i.e., women who meet and begin relationships with men who are already serving a life sentence or on death row); (Fishman, 1990). Other works emphasize mothering and prisons but focus critical lenses on mothers who are incarcerated either while pregnant (Sufrin, 2017) or postpartum (Golden, 2013). Others emphasize relationships and family connections (McKay, Comfort, Lindquist, & Bir, 2016). As noted in chapter one, academic writings on the prison industrial complex have become more extensive, but there remains a gap in the literature on women raising children with a second parent who is incarcerated,

specifically from the view of a Mainline Mama. This gap is symptomatic of the erasure of stories of Mainline Mamas and other family members who go through relationships with incarcerated people, since our stories are told by others, to others, but rarely from our own voice and perspective, unless they are in memoir like bandele's work (2010).

The complexity of these relationships can become bogged down in a love story, focusing on the romantic attachment rather than the complexities that arise from having to navigate everyday life and the prison industrial complex. For example, Ava DuVernay's film *Middle of Nowhere* (2012) gives a bird's eye view of the relationship between a Black woman and her incarcerated husband, showing many of the struggles of having to visit her incarcerated partner while maintaining school, work, a job, and everyday life. The film centers the romantic relationship between the protagonist and her partner. Importantly, the film does not use prison for spectacle or to eroticize the trauma of incarceration, instead focusing on the lengths the protagonist, a Black woman, will go to for love. By staying on the romance, however, the film misses out on the larger network of relationships that Mainline Mamas have to navigate. While the film touches on some of the struggles Mainline Mamas may face with travelling to visitation or the hoops that we must go through to visit, it is difficult, if not impossible, to capture the level of stigmatization that Mainline Mamas and Black women experience for trying to stay connected with an incarcerated partner. More cogently, the protagonist in *Middle of Nowhere* does so without children. What *Middle of Nowhere* and similar portrayals do capture well, is how, despite the oppressive forces of incarceration and social stigmas associated with maintaining a relationship with an incarcerated person, these

relationships are still very real and experience ups and downs that are found in relationships with non-incarcerated people. Such portrayals offer a counter narrative of the negative controlling images that have been assigned to Black women.

Even though Black women may actively reject the tropes imposed on us, controlling images like the jezebel or welfare queen significantly and negatively impact Black women in the institutions we are forced to navigate, like prisons or hospitals. In *Reproducing Race,* Khiara Bridges analyzes these damaging images in relation to Black women seeking prenatal care in a hospital setting. Bridges describes the stereotype of the "wily patient;" a patient who fails to understand the demands of the medical institution but cannot be trusted and attempts to trick the system (2011, p. 202). Like the welfare queen, the wily patient exists in a duality of unintelligence and sinister tricksterism, attempting to game the medical provider while incapable of understanding what medical providers may think of as simple instructions or questions. "The wily patient, although stupid (simply put), nevertheless possesses the ability craftily and astutely exploit the hospital for the purpose of attaining access to undeserved appointments, ultrasounds, and other gratuitous healthcare" (Bridges, 2011, p. 202). The wily patient is also related to the jezebel, I would argue, since patients are seen as hypersexual because of the spaces in which they encounter medicine, i.e., gynecologists and obstetricians. Many women of color encounter medical institutions most directly through pregnancy, because they otherwise may not be able to afford regular services and would come to the medical institution only in case of emergency (Barbee & Little, 1993, p. 184). These limited encounters often serve to brand women of color as hypersexual and deviant in line with

the jezebel. It is important to note that Mainline Mamas have a similar experience to the "wily patient" that Bridges discusses, due to the negative stereotypes that have been placed on their bodies. They too, are seen as hypersexual, dumb, yet cunning which is tied to the controlling image of the jezebel and welfare queen. These notions are based on the prison's misconception that the state is taking care of the whole family, i.e., housing for the incarcerated parent, cash-aid, medical, and food stamps for the family left behind. These assumptions are harmful and are untrue, thus important for Mainline Mamas to tell their own stories.

Stories of Mainline Mamas, particularly as created by Mainline Mamas and Black mothers, are crucial for understanding the role of the state and incarceration as extending beyond the punishment of the individual who committed a crime, into the entire family and community. Focusing on Mainline Mamas telling their own stories is a form of resistance, building on Black feminist epistemologies and from histories of revolutionary practices of motherhood. Stigmas are attached to Mainline Mamas, whether it is the act of raising children with a second parent or the fact that a woman has made the choice to continue their familial relationship with an incarcerated person. However, in spite of the stigma, the Mainline Mama teaches the importance of family regardless of location or other status that might separate family members. Furthermore, Mainline Mamas demonstrate communality and kinship relationships that can develop between women who are attempting to survive and resist the state. Mothering and families therefore transcend space and biology in the borderlands of the prison industrial complex.

Mothering is so transcendent, in part, as a matter of necessity; the extensive burdens of mass incarceration affect the entire family. Donald Braman recounts the story of Lilly, a Black mother whose son is incarcerated in a different state, living on a fixed income of $530 per month. Her average phone bill was $130, mostly charged through collect calls from her son in the prison. For Lilly, the bill was less important than keeping her son connected with his children through phone calls (Braman, 2011, p. 121). Lilly's story shows the moral imperative and obligation felt by families of incarcerated peoples, to try and keep a connection with their incarcerated family members. No court order or force is making Lilly keep her family together, but instead she sees the vital importance of staying connected to her son, and his connection to his children, who do not even live in her household. In essence, the state is placing the financial burden on the families of incarcerated people for attempting to maintain a familial connection that the state uses to incentivize incarcerated people.

Economically, for Mainline Mamas, the prison industrial complex is at least two-part drain on resources. First, attempting to hold the family together, through visitation, travel, food, phone calls—becomes part of the monthly necessities. Second, the absence of a second parent means the entire family relies on the earnings of a single parent. Braman summarizes this predicament:

> states collect tens of millions of dollars in kickbacks from collect phone calls to prisoners' families, they disproportionately burden poor and minority families that are struggling not only to keep their families together but also simply to make ends meet. And, when these families lose a family member's income or the

> childcare that the incarcerated family member provided, the loss is significantly more acute. (Braman, 2011, p. 122)

Even if a Mainline Mama is married, she operates financially and practically as a single parent; there is little-to-no financial assistance from a second party, whether from the state or the second parent. Mainline Mamas cannot receive alimony, child support, or other financial support that would ordinarily be enforced to support a single mother, simply because their incarcerated partners do not have the income to provide it.[15]

In-person visitation creates huge burdens on families, some are tangible others are not. First, prisons are typically located in rural, remote areas. The remoteness of prisons promotes businesses near the prisons as part of the incentives to small towns and increases subsidies and exaggerates elected representatives of prison towns, providing political and economic advantages to rural, predominantly white populations (Walker, et. al). Gilmore, for instance, describes how the town of Corcoran, CA was sold on building a prison in their town, including "CDC estimate[s] that the local job market would gain 400-600 multiplier, or spin-off, employments—principally in food service and retail" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 150). Visiting families have few, if any, options for where to stay if they are visiting for a weekend, allowing motels to overcharge for poor facilities. Once inside the prison, food prices multiply exponentially. Families visiting for the day are not allowed to bring food in and do not want to waste valuable visiting time going in and out

[15] Incarcerated partners are unable to work, at least in ways that provide meaningful financial support to themselves, let alone their families. As Nathan Link and Caterina Roman's work on incarceration and child support demonstrates, this creates cycles of debt that impose unrealistic financial burdens (2017). Incarcerated persons are still subject to child-support or alimony court orders, but since they are unable to pay them due to their incarceration, it creates debt burdens that the state monitors for repayment upon release. This can lead to reincarceration, thus perpetuating the prison state apparatus.

of the prison to get food. Megan Comfort also notes that "many women who are restricted to buying snacks in the prison routinely bring in the maximum amount of money permitted and spend the bulk of it on overpriced victuals for the prisoner" (Comfort, 2009, p. 106). For those visiting with children, like Mainline Mamas, the costs of feeding a family on overpriced vending machine food grow exponentially. The prison's visiting room itself is not set up for children to interact with their incarcerated parent. It is a space where visitors are regulated with the same measures of control as incarcerated persons—limiting physical interaction between children and parents. As Laura T. Fishman also noted, rules restrict visitor's movement, making it difficult for parents and children to actually visit during visiting time:

> Children's behavior was supposed to be regulated by their parents. i.e., children were not to play, run, scream, or cry, but sit quietly. If they did not guards could terminate the visit. Thus, wives complained that visiting tended to center on controlling their children. (Fishman, 1990, p. 160).

Prisons may rhetorically support keeping the family unit together, there are blatant and hidden costs associated with the prison industrial complex that add to the burdens families face in staying together in spite of incarceration; while Prisons claim to value families, capitalism and financial gain take precedent.

Stress and emotional burdens also run high for families, and Mainline Mamas in particular. Engaging with the state, in trying to visit and maintain family ties to people who are incarcerated, creates stress at administrative levels (whether the daily regulation of the prison will prevent or allow visitation), interpersonal levels (a correctional officer's

mood may determine how long someone is able to visit before they are removed because of children making noise or other reasons), and within families (lack of visiting time or distance creating obstacles). Braman explains that

> incarceration has immediate effects that are less tangible, such as added stress of knowing that one's son, husband, or father has lost his freedom and is kept in what is often a hostile and dangerous environment. The stress related to the incarceration of a family member takes a toll not only on relationships with the prisoner, but on relationships between other family members who disagree about the need to maintain family ties. (Braman, 2011, p. 118)

These hidden stresses are often obscured as collateral consequences of the prison industrial complex. The experience of trying to keep your family together and stresses in visiting, leads visitors, particularly Mainline Mamas who are regular visitors, to create their own communities to come together in order to navigate the often-confusing intricacies of the prison system. Mainline Mamas create communities of support, both emotional and practical, in sharing the stresses of weekly visitation and providing tips on how to deal with institutional policies.

In sum, the prison industrial complex is symptomatic of capitalist enterprise with serious adverse consequences not only on those incarcerated, but their families as well. Prisons, as a form of social control, therefore, are not only to police and regulate individual bodies and spirits, but entire communities. While men of color are locked into systems of incarceration, their families (wives, partners, parents, and children) are also caught up with the financial and emotional burdens of incarceration. Yet, in spite of

these systems of regulation and control, Mainline Mamas and other family members of incarcerated people are able to form communities to navigate the entrenched hierarchies of the prison industrial complex.

Reframing Motherhood

Women raising children with an incarcerated partner are an often obscured, ignored, and underserved population, at the margins of both society and the prison system. Naming this position "Mainline Mama" locates our struggle in its particularities, the uniqueness of our situation, and most importantly, points to the community of women involved in this struggle. In this chapter, I explored the different framings of motherhood by Black women engaged in social and political work for resistance, and the different names that are given to the care work that women (cisgender, trans, and any person who identifies as such) perform in a community setting. Women raising children with an incarcerated partner face unique challenges, particularly in the economics of prison life which simultaneously depend on and exploit Mainline Mamas to provide unpaid care work and pay into the system of mass incarceration through food, visitation, and the entire industry of prison towns. Black women coming together around shared notions of resistance and mothering are not new, but the Mainline Mama concept focuses on the specific manifestation of mothering as a site of resistance among Black women engaged in care work adjacent to the system of mass incarceration. While there has been academic literature on the experiences of families and partners of incarcerated persons, the key works I mention in this chapter represent most of the field. In studies of mass

incarceration, as I described in Chapter One, stories about Black women—specifically focusing on Black women and our perspectives—are rare. Works written *by* Black women, who have lived experience with the prison system, are even more rare. Mainline Mamas, as a theoretical framework drawn from lived experience, is unrepresented in academic literature. While asha bandele writes lyrically about her experiences in her memoir, this work is the first intervention in academic literature to use Mainline Mama as a framework with autoethnography. My story as a mainline mama can no longer be a lie, or something I hide away from my coworkers as I go away to visit the prison on the weekends. Instead, it is the center of my research. The remainder of this work, therefore, draws on the theoretical frame of the Mainline Mama to understand the experiences of women like me—who may lie about their life visiting prison at some point, but are willing to engage in truth-telling about our experiences navigating the borderlands of the prison.

CHAPTER 4

MAINLINE MAMAS

Asking people to participate in my dissertation research puts my stomach in knots. I feel queasy, unsettled deep in my stomach as I plan how to approach and talk to women that I consider close friends. Women who have some personal experience with prison, through a loved one or their own incarceration, typically keep these experiences extremely private. It took a long time for me to share that part of myself with others, and I only opened up to select people because of the negative stereotypes about women who visit prisons; assumptions that we're some kind of criminal, that we lack intelligence or self-esteem. People don't understand why you would be in a relationship with someone who is incarcerated. And then come the questions, asking you to explain your life and defend your choices.

This is partly why I think so little academic or even public writing exists on women like us—it is not an experience shared lightly. This also made finding participants for my study difficult. Each of the women I interviewed comes from a personal relationship; I know them on a very intimate level. I would be asking them to trust me with their stories, their wins, their joy but also some of the most painful parts of their lives and share them with the world; this was no small feat. The interviews are uncharted territory because there will be no witty banter. I'm still their friend, and we are having conversations we have had a thousand times in casual ways, but this time there's a set list of questions and a recorder. In the interviews, I ask direct questions about our collective experiences navigating the borderlands of the prison industrial complex—

experiences filled with trauma and memory.[16] In some ways, these questions are no different than all our conversations over the years at meals, over food, on long car rides, and phone calls. Put into an interview though, the conversation is a new and different context. For me to do an academic analysis of their lives, I worry about people I care about sharing their story with me. Even though we have talked about our feelings, either at the time or in process, we are potentially picking at scabs and opening up old wounds. We might talk about our problems and traumas, but when talking friend to friend, it is easy to just push past. I worry about opening up old wounds with my friends. I don't want my friends exploited. Once I put the work out there, and their voices and stories leave a conversation between us, it can be taken up and put into the wrong context, taken in unintended ways, and cause harms to a community I belong to and people I care about.

However, and because I am a member of this community and I know the research on prisons and the academic literature on tropes of Black women and mothers, I know our experiences are left out. Even when Black women and mothers raising children in the borderlands of prisons are part of the research, we are more often talked *about* rather than spoken *with*. Our stories are taken, but our ways of thinking about our experiences get left behind. Research and literature on prisons and mothering rarely overlap, and the few works that exist do not come from women who have lived that life. So, I pushed through my unease to recenter our voices, and our stories in this work. The stories included in this work are presented in their fullest voice, to acknowledge both the stories

[16] These questions are attached in the appendices. Interviews were conducted over a period of 3 years, from 2017 to 2020. All participants visited different prisons, some knew each other personally in real life, but all are identified as pseudonyms. All participants identify as Black women, over 30 years of age.

these women are telling, and the ways in which they tell their stories. I want their stories to be honored and not taken.

This chapter is the culmination of my dissertation research, highlighting insights from interviews I conducted with the seven women and structured around the themes I found in our conversations about our collective experiences. Based on my memories of the interviews and my own autoethnographic writings and self-interview, I expected to find themes of isolation, shame, and sacrifice when I reviewed the transcripts. However, after coding and reflecting on my own autoethnographic story, I found a total of nine themes that I organized into three groups. First, I look at the ways in which we are depleted and negatively impacted by having to navigate between the free world and prisons, focusing on the feelings of isolation, shame, and the sacrifices. Second, I connect the different positive experiences, which I term blessings. Women's stories highlighted the benefits they found in their experiences rooted in community and the sense of validation they received from other women, and the different privileges that the women said they benefitted from. These blessings are ways that we combat the negative feelings discussed in depletion, or ways we resisted the state-sanctioned depletion of our lives. Finally, I connect these six sub themes together through the final thematic, Bonds. Presence, trauma, and mothering connect our experiences together and the ways in which we resist together. Above all, in my discussion of these themes, it is crucial for me to maintain a grounded sense of place, putting the stories of these women at the center of the research, analysis, and discussion, so as to engage their/our whole story.

Depletion

Feelings of isolation, shame, and sacrifice were the most common and powerful themes in the stories of the women I interviewed. These negative feelings were the foundational and most clearly defined representation our experiences, so I subdivided this general theme into the sub-themes of isolation, shame, and sacrifice. These three sub-themes represent different aspects of depletion because they are the energy zappers—these are what will break you down and take extra strength to manage, on top of the additional feelings and burdens that come from navigating prisons. Each of these emotions come from a variety of sources, starting with the personal, feelings of self and how you feel about your own situation. These extend to your family, the ways that your family reacts or engages with you because of your relationship, because of your choices. Beyond the personal and familial, these feelings come from structural and societal burdens—the prison itself and the ways procedures, surveillance, and the invasiveness of the state are a drain on your energy—to broader social reactions of how people view or react to Mainline Mamas. Particularly in those friend networks where they do not have their own friends, loved ones, or others who visit or are incarcerated themselves.

Isolation

Across all the interviews, and my own experiences dealing with the prison, isolation was the most prevalent theme. Each woman mentioned isolation, in different contexts, but this feeling of being alone is common to all participants. In part this is a byproduct of the prison system, and the ways visitation draws people to small prison

towns as residents or on the weekends. These are rural, mostly white towns; so, when Black women move to these spaces there is no community for them in that place. As discussed in previous Chapters, prison towns are designed to further the isolation of those they incarcerate, to place people in areas where their presence and labor becomes more commodity than community (Gilmore, 2007; Shabazz, 2014; Comfort, 2009). For Black women raising children and dealing with prisons, the geographic isolation of prisons presents a difficulty in travel and the burden that it creates in having to go out to the prison. As someone who had to make these trips on the regular, you become accustomed to travel. It becomes normalized, a 3-hour drive to a prison town for a few hours of visitation. One hundred and seventy-five miles just to come within a few feet of each other. In some ways it was like getting to the other side of the mountain, a reward after a long week of work capped off by the long drive to the prison town so you could see your loved ones for the weekend.

However, for the rich literature on the geographic isolation of prison towns (Shabazz, 2014; Gilmore, 2007; Eason, 2017), few address the ways that Black women experience the isolation imposed by visiting prisons. Particularly women like Cheryl,[17] who previously lived in New York and would fly from New York to California on the weekends for visitation, women who move to the prison towns end up a part of a new community in the middle of nowhere, where there is no life outside the prison. The costs of visiting, in terms of travel time and finances, make living in a prison town more sense. Cheryl started renting a home for $400 a month, and "at first it was just for on the

[17] Author interview 9/24/2018

weekend, and then after a while I wind up moving there permanently because I was working from home, and it just made more sense to me." Cheryl's weekend visits, she estimates that "If I rented a car, let's say $100, I'd say about $300." Moving to the prison town made financial sense and made life easier on weekends for visits. Although it makes financial sense, the prison town itself is mostly white farmers, who have held family land for generations, Latinx migrant workers coming to California from Mexico for seasonal work, but a complete lack of any conveniences that people from the city might be used to. In a town with one gas station, maybe a motel, and a mom-and-pop grocery store, you had to drive for 30 to 40 minutes for anything resembling a supermarket, a retail store.

The rest of the women I interviewed were regular weekend visitors to the prison. But living on the outside and being a physical proximity to other people still leads to emotional separation. Love,[18] who is formerly incarcerated and experienced visitations with her oldest child, explained that even being around other people, the experiences and connections to the prison caused emotional isolation, long after the fact:

> It's nobody, I have nobody. I've tried, too, like I've talked to therapists. Therapists get excited to, like, have a formerly incarcerated person, strangely as it sounds, [laughter] but I've met plenty that are like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, no, I got this, I can help you." And then they can't. They actually are more like curious and then they like ask curious questions that are more like voyeuristic than they are

[18] Telephone interview on 07/06/2018.

like helpful. And so, I've never met anybody who's been able to like help me sort through stuff.

Love felt so isolated even from a professional support service, that she had to turn to those that could comprehend the experience. Support networks form among Mainline Mamas because of, and in spite of, the isolation that comes from proximity to the prison. For Love, this need for connection also highlights the feelings of isolation:

> I actually was in a bad state the other day where I was just like, I had reached a point where I was not even sure what was going on with me, so I called a friend who was locked up with me. Again, I didn't ever spend any time with this lady, [laughter] like I know her, I know of her ... I knew she had a daughter that was similar in age to my daughter. I know her loosely, but I called her, and I just literally just broke down and was like sobbing and I told her, "I can't leave my house, [laughter] there's something wrong with me," like, she's like, "I can't either." And we sat on the phone together for like an hour and I just let the steam off. And that happened once since I've been home six years. You know, like I don't have anybody who understands it and have no place to put it. You can't go to your daughter and she's just the person I'm close to in terms of family. My husband is actually not supportive, even a little bit, like he doesn't understand it and he's also, like we have a troubled relationship so it's like, geez, I don't even go to him at all about it. Yeah, I don't have anybody at all.

The deep-seated isolation was so embedded in the experiences of all the Black women I spoke with, though it manifested in different ways. Each expressed the emotional and

social isolation that comes from living in that between-space, the borderlands between the prison and the free world.

However, Love's inability to connect with her husband, or more accurately her husbands' inability to understand her frustrations and experience, reflects the disconnect and particularly of Black women's experiences. Although partners, friends, and others may have heard our problems, even listened to complaints, people without that particular experience—who can identify with the feeling of isolation and other feelings wrought by state violence and having to deal with the state in a carceral context—are unable to fully empathize in a meaningful way. In part, these feelings are the collateral damage of state violence, having to deal with prisons makes you feel uncomfortable engaging with others who don't know about incarceration or regularly visiting prison, because it is such a particular and specific experience. Fortunately, for Love, she was able to reach out to another woman who shared the sense of isolation, part of the unseen community of women, that builds both because of, and in spite of, the isolation. Here, the feelings of isolation necessitate finding community both beyond and within carceral contexts.

Reasons for self-isolation varied among the women, for some it meant feeling more comfortable staying at home—because you're shy or just because you don't want to risk a conversation about your personal life. Isolation means missing birthdays and holidays with family either because you are at the prison or the ways family and relationships outside the prison start to disconnect from Mainline Mamas. Annie,[19] a nurse originally from the South, lived 3 hours from the prison she visited regularly. Her

[19] Telephone interview on 2/26/2020.

isolation manifested as a lack of emotional support. She spent most of her 30s visiting but did not feel comfortable discussing her relationship with her family, and as a "private person" did not seek many connections with whom she felt comfortable sharing about her life and relationships. Sunshine,[20] one of the most senior participants and formerly incarcerated herself, explained it was "safer for me to disassociate from the relationship of mother-daughter… From an emotional standpoint it was easier to do my time." Isolation may therefore come from a sense of self-defense, or even defense of family because, as Sunshine said, it felt safer. Particularly for Black mothers who have been incarcerated, it becomes easier to detach from the world—your parental rights are so curbed and limited that you can't engage in the ways you want or need to. Similarly, for Annie, that "private" part of reckoning with isolation and detachment comes as a way of compartmentalizing your life—one sense of self in relationships with the state, another in a relationship with her incarcerated partner, a whole other self for your family. These feelings of isolation, from compartmentalization, for self-defense, or simply as a result of a loss of other relationships and the uniqueness of having to deal with the state as a Black mother, fuses with stigma (shame from others) and internalized shame.

Shame

Shame represents the social pressures and feelings that Mainline Mamas experience for failing to meet expectations of women, mostly derived from controlling images and tropes of Black women and mothers, discussed in Chapter 2. Mainline Mamas are shamed more acutely, perhaps more viciously, in the comments from family

[20] Telephone interview on 1/08/2017.

members. Annie[21] related that society would brand her as "crazy," but her mother in particular

> basically stated that [visiting her incarcerated partner regularly] was the biggest mistake I've ever made in my life, and she, you know, I, she don't even know what happened, what corner I turned. And to be frankly honest she was right…. Well, she said that because I was never brought up, you know, as actually interacting with anyone in the system. She knows I've always been the type of person, I was a snob, you know, I would turn my nose up at a person like that. That's why she said, because my mom, I mean, my mom used to say, "You're very bougie, you're very this," when, I, I'm a Southern girl and coming from Louisiana, being raised by my grandmother, those things we never thought of doing.

Annie's shame, both from her family and her own sense of her background, may clarify Annie's isolation. Her shame is experienced as self-doubt and guilt, imposed by the labels of negative images of Black women and her own mother. Shame is used to make sense of the negative experiences encountered through the state and isolation—if you feel bad because you are visiting prison it is because you are doing a bad thing or are a bad person. This lets the state and the purpose of mass incarceration remain invisible, the effects of state violence are obscured by the sense of shame that is placed on Mainline Mamas from society and their own family.

[21] Telephone interview 2/26/2020

Melanie,[22] who has both been incarcerated and visited her incarcerated partner, has the unique perspective of seeing how stigma affects visitation from the perspective as a visitor and as an incarcerated person whose parents came to visit. When Melanie was in prison, she felt that her parents were her greatest source of support and didn't feel any shame about her parents coming to visit her—though was worried about her parents visiting her out-of-state. Here's how she put it: "I didn't want my family to spend all that money to come there because visiting was very messed up. It was in an old gym, they had no air conditioner, no heater, you know, so I didn't get visits and I was okay with that." When she started visiting her incarcerated partner, she felt the burdens and shame associated with visitation. As she explained:

> I think some people are understanding when it's a parent going to see their grown child or, you know. But when it comes to like a woman and she's not married to the person, I've heard people say, "Oh, staying by his side, you're not married to him, you're not obligated to do this and that," and it's like the mindset is designed just like the, a lot of the COs that work there… They want to tear the families up, you know, they want to discourage you not to come. But when people say, "I wouldn't waste my time going out there to see them," it's not wasting your time, it's helping them to serve their time and keep their sanity, so they don't end up in there on the drugs, on the medication, you know not wanting to deal with how much time they have or just being away.

[22] Telephone interview 4/18/2020.

Shame is a vicious cycle. Melanie shows how shame becomes a no-win situation for Mainline Mamas—visiting the prison is a source of shame, to maintain a sense of normalcy in a relationship, but the relationship's legitimacy is denied too. As Mainline Mamas maintain their connections, particularly as Black women, the shame is placed squarely on our shoulders, rather than look at other factors and other connections. People always have something to say—the controlling images of mammy, jezebel, welfare queen, are quickly reinforced and become suffocating. Anything unpalatable is quickly discarded, branded, and removed.

Sacrifice

Shame serves as the first, acknowledged layer of sacrifice in entering a relationship with the prison. Across the conversations with Mainline Mamas and from my own experience, we are conscious of the controlling images of Black women who live as Mainline Mamas. Even one visit will subject women to stigma and branding as a welfare queen, jezebel, or just a fool. For women who enter a relationship with the carceral state by continuing their romantic relationship with an incarcerated partner, the first layer of sacrifice is self-sacrifice. This is a knowing sacrifice—aware of the potential stigmas and issues, but with less understanding of the depth or extent of that sacrifice at the outset—of parts of oneself to endure the relationship to the prison. Becoming a Mainline Mama means entering into an abusive relationship with the state, that subjects you to stigmas on the surface, with deeper sacrifices, pain, and suffering that accumulate the longer you have to maintain that relationship.

Sacrifices are layered, growing on top of each other like the petals of an onion—each layer envelops the bulb, covering and growing more with each layer added. For Mainline Mamas, that sacrifice means each year a part of yourself is lost or covered by the layers of having to deal with the carceral state. Megan Comfort explains these sacrifices come from having to navigate the spaces of the prison and outside world, as "women with incarcerated partners undergo *secondary prisonization* … derivative of and dependent on the primary prisonization of their partners" (2009, p. 15). Academic literature analyses effectively explore the social and structural dynamics at play, but after extensive searching, none have captured the raw emotional feelings of loss that come from having to visit. This loss is difficult to articulate without having experienced it personally, and no other academics have written from the perspective of someone regularly visiting an incarcerated loved one. Looking back on my own life, I do not have any Christmas or holiday pictures with my larger family because I was too busy visiting prison. I never realized how much I was missing, or what I had lost, until I started looking back on all the time I had spent and invested as a Mainline Mama.

Financial sacrifice is the topmost layer - the most visible and quantifiable. Of the women I spoke with who discussed their finances, costs of a single weekend visit ranged from $170 to $300, depending on whether they shared gas, rooms, or split costs with other women who were visiting that weekend.[23] Prison policy dictates part of the

[23] Mainline Mamas in this paper did most of their visiting in the 2000. It is difficult to generalize the costs of visitation because the sample size in this dissertation is small, and other quantitative research struggles to identify the exact costs because, as I have mentioned, as Mainline Mamas we do not often discuss our experiences with outsiders. For example, Angela Bruns' study of women's employment based on a larger dataset on family wellbeing was not able to identify the costs of visitation, but linked the incarceration of a partner to having to take on additional employment on top of a job and family care work (Bruns, 2019).

spending. In my experiences with visiting prisons in California, prisons limited the amount of money you can spend in a single visit to $40 per adult, and $20 per child. Prisons also limit the type of currency you can bring in, to either dollar bills or quarters, which can only be spent on vending machines. Financial sacrifices are state ransoms for the ability to see your loved ones. These that can put a strain on the home since people have other bills, children, other expenses that could use this money. Mainline Mamas pay the state to be stuck in a small room, a kiss at the beginning and end of the visit if you're lucky, and to be bossed around by the Corrections Officer's (CO's) at the facility. Prisons' actual deterrent effect is on the familial relationships for people they incarcerate. The high cost of visiting prison makes a visit intentionally burdensome—it creates a large financial cost on the visiting family, which puts stress on other bills, threatens the financial stability of Mainline Mamas. I know from my own experience. Once I was visiting regularly, I limited my career choices to stay within a reasonable distance of the prison where my loved one was incarcerated. I limited the financial opportunities for my family so I could maintain my family connection by visiting the prison.

The time and space of visiting prison is the next layer of related sacrifices, since each Mainline Mama I interviewed estimated a 3-hour drive, each way. Part of this touches on the financial costs of visiting prisons—the cost of gas, the wear and tear on the car that aren't factored into weekly expenses, but the miles you put on your car call for additional repairs, oil changes, and expenses that add to the financial burden of visitation, especially when you are a regular. Melanie mentioned this is why she started

to ride the bus to the prison, spending the $20 dollars each way so she would not have to make the drive herself.

The 6 hours to drive is only part of the time spent visiting. A three-hour drive means you have to leave on a Friday, immediately after work, so you could make it to the prison by the nighttime, park your car on the road leading to the prison to get in line for tomorrow's visit. Sometimes you might just stay in your car, but most of the time you go on to check in to your hotel or wherever you are staying to get ready for the next day. Saturday means visitation, which opens at 8 am, and if you're lucky, you get processed and through prison security by 8:15. Hopefully they were able to get your loved one to the visitation area when you are in security. If you try to leave to get to the prison or show up without getting in line, you likely won't get into visitation until noon. Visitation ends around 2:45 pm, so you'd have spent more time driving than you would actually visiting.

Maximizing your visiting time, however, also means losing time on the outside. I mentioned the fear of moving too far away where you would lose connection or the ability to visit, but for some the combination of time and finances also meant sacrificing aspects of your relationships with other people. Annie, for example, mentioned that she was living with her mother when she was visiting, "and if she said, 'hey, you shouldn't go visit, you need to pay this bill; you know, I would, I was defiant, and I would go visit." Annie had the financial means to pay her bills and visit but made it clear that even though visits were important, her child came first: "when it came to [her child], as providing for him, I'd say, 'screw this visit,' I took care of mine." The visitation, the

time spent at the prison with her child and loved one turned into a wedge issue between Annie and her mother. The sacrifice of time and money, also means sacrificing relationships, losing connections to family which cause additional financial burdens.

For Love,[24] the visitation process cost her a relationship with her child's paternal grandparents. Love was incarcerated at the time and had to rely on her child's paternal grandparents to bring the child to visit—they would visit every other weekend, and all was well until the father decided to sue Love for full custody of the child. Love was faced with either allowing the father to have full custody or subpoenaing the paternal grandparents to testify against the father to show that he was not the full-time care provider and testify as to her parenting. Love had to make the difficult choice to sacrifice the relationship "because they were also really good, like it would have been so easy for me to just lay down and give up custody and they would have still visited me and they still would have been like friends and we would have still, like, I would have seen my daughter, but just a lot less… they ended up having to pick." Love was able to keep custody and her relationship with her daughter, but only by sacrificing the relationship with the grandparents. Staying in a relationship with your family while incarcerated means entering a relationship with the state and the prison, but it also means potentially sacrificing relationships with others. For some of us it was missing out on family gatherings or small connections of relational maintenance, while at the extreme for Mainline Mamas like Love, it meant sacrificing the entirety of the relationship in order to maintain her relationship with her child.

[24] Telephone interview 7/06/2018

The sacrifices Mainline Mamas experience are a form of state sanctioned violence. While all experienced sacrifices differently—Love experiencing it mostly from the perspective of incarceration and others like Melanie experiencing sacrifices mostly from visitation—they each experienced loss. The loss of finances, time, and relationships that comes from having to be in a relationship with the state through visitation, are pain and suffering inflicted on Mainline Mamas directly or indirectly through the carceral system. Sacrifices deter visitation and isolate both the incarcerated person and their loved ones, while shaming these women for maintaining the relationships that are important to the family and the prison. Prisons simultaneously use visitations as a reward for incarcerated peoples. This secondary prisonization thus forces women into a relationship with the state, if they wish to remain in relationship with any loved one who is incarcerated (Comfort, 2009). However, in spite of all the isolation, shame, and sacrifices, Mainline Mamas practice love and joy in unique ways that elude and undermine the state violence of visitation, finding blessings even in these harmful spaces.

Blessings

Blessings may be couched in religious language, but in the Black community a blessing is often colloquially more than a dogmatic symbol of faith, but an appreciation of positive outcomes or benefits even in the midst of sorrow (Lu & Steele, 2019; Laymon, 2018). For Mainline Mamas, blessings are the avenues to joy found in the midst of extreme conditions dealing with the carceral state. Although we encountered the burdens and oppressions identified in the previous section, the blessings are the

unanticipated or unexpected spaces of community and validation that we found through our experiences. While other works have identified the individual struggles of women raising children while navigating the carceral state, there is little analysis on the joy found in the community of women. Black joy is tied to spaces of resistance and struggle (Lu & Steele, 2019; Laymon, 2018). Joy is a refusal to succumb to the state, even as Mainline Mamas particularly have to navigate it to maintain our families. In this section I explore the three key areas where Mainline Mamas in my study identified blessings, sources of joy and resistance, even if they did not conceptualize it as resistance themselves.

Community

Among the Mainline Mamas I spoke with, the most foundational, shared experience of joy is community. Community is likely the least expected outcome of becoming a Mainline Mama, considering the feelings of stigma and isolation that all the Mainline Mamas shared. However, community is a co-learning space where you teach each other how to navigate these carceral spaces, how to visit is more than understanding the codes and regulations of the prison, but also knowing how to talk to the CO's, what you can get away with and what you can't, how to engage in the covert practices of resistance that maintain familial bonds with your incarcerated loved ones. The community bonds represent a chosen family as women facing the same obstacle of visitation become a support network that extends well beyond the prison.

This community bond is vital to the Mainline Mamas who have visited on a regular basis but does not come quickly or easily. Sharon[25] was around the same age as the other women I talked to, but` she was still the "newbie" in the group, with less than a year of experience visiting her loved one in prison, where all the other women who participated had at least ten years of experience. Sharon, however, still saw the community bonds between other women based on necessity, even if she had yet to find her network: "you see a lot of, sometimes it's just a group of Hispanic girls or a group of African American girls, or both of them combined together. Because some of them carpool there… Versus trying to either have to find a rental car . . . with having to find a room out there, because that's more financial for them. So, for the most part I see it from the financial aspect." Many of the sacrifices that Mainline Mamas experience are made easier when those burdens are shared among similarly situated women. Similarly, Melanie mentioned how she started to learn just by watching other women navigate, bringing "extra clothes" in the car if a CO was being particularly strict for visitation, or Cheryl[26] discussing figuring out how to hold space in the line to the prison using a traffic cone. These financial and practical considerations make visits easier, but the community that forms between Mainline Mamas goes deeper.

Sunshine[27] saw the community of Mainline Mamas as a mutual aid or extended familial network. Sunshine was one of the most senior Mainline Mamas I talked with, formerly incarcerated herself, with experiences visiting many others. Her experience

[25] Telephone interview 4/16/2020.
[26] Telephone interview 9/24/2018.
[27] Telephone interview 1/08/2017.

with incarceration drew her to activism and formed the basis of her community network. The community that forms creates space for mentoring, support, and understanding—creating a sense of normalcy through a family dynamic. Sunshine explained: "we all have community, we all have family, when we are placed and when we're placed in this environment that is a false environment, we make the most to make it a normal environment. We do the most we can to make it a normal environment." The prison is an artificial, "false" environment that represents the social construction of crime, punishment, and incarceration. Sharing space with loved ones, spending personal time, family, and community, are all at the center of the "normal" experience. When existing in these artificial spaces, we make community in new and dynamic ways to stand-in for what the state attempted to take away. Mainline Mamas feel an acute sense of isolation from life as they knew it before they started visiting, so we create a community and life of our own that understands the very specific experience of visiting prisons regularly, knowing other women who comprehend what it means to be a Mainline Mama.

This community forms organically, at first through observation, as Melanie and Sharon explained that you have to watch carefully to learn how to navigate the space at the beginning, but as bonds and connections form with other Mainline Mamas, the network begins to form. Mentoring begins and you learn to thrive. Sunshine[28] emphasized that the extended family was critical as other people "come into our environment and, and we mentor them and, and we create safety for them, and we create opportunity and solutions for them. So, while my daughter is my biological family

[28] Telephone interview 1/08/2017.

member, our family is broader than just that. I mean, I know the people I, I consider close are broader than just direct family members." The network of Mainline Mamas becomes a crucial emotional support network of women who see each other during stressful, vulnerable times. We go through pregnancies, births, divorces, being sick—all the events that happen outside the prison affect our lives at the prison, even as our lives at the prison are isolated or kept separate. While feelings of isolation from the outside world are a common sacrifice, Mainline Mamas form strong community bonds together in sharing each other's lives in totality—the isolation and shame from outsiders does not exist, and instead becomes a source of mutual understanding.

Each Mainline Mama might come to the prison every weekend to visit their incarcerated loved one individually, but Mainline Mamas go through the process of visiting as a unit. It is a shared experience. As Cheryl,[29] the only woman I talked to who does not have biological children of her own, acted as a Mainline Mama by mothering other women's children: "I would step in mostly when [a neighbor, who also visited the prison] couldn't do it." This othermothering (Collins, 2000) that Cheryl describes, but does not name as such, is part of being in the community of Mainline Mamas. For support, Cheryl explains, it was only "your dude, and like your crew. So, there was no like, outside people that you would get like any kind of support from other than like, you had a crew." The crew of Mainline Mamas forms a community based on support, the financial support, the expanding of time, the mentoring, are all part of being in that community. Like Cheryl explained, those without children may take time to watch

[29] Telephone interview 9/24/2018

other's children, sharing food, sharing rooms, sharing money. Cheryl's story exemplifies how othermothering is a non-transactional space where women help, not because they expect an immediate return or are doing in trade, but because they understand that support is necessary to survival.

Although these relationships form over a series of weekends, the community that forms extends well beyond the weekend visit, and even beyond the visitation process or the loved one's sentence. Cheryl mused that when she got arrested, she asked one of her Mainline Mama friends to drive three hours and pack up her apartment, because Cheryl felt like she could not trust anyone else. The community formed between Mainline Mamas is more than acquaintances, forming lifelong bonds between women who share that experience. Melanie[30] mentioned that after visitation stopped "like when their boyfriend got out and my boyfriend got out, we would go to the beach, you know, we would hook up and hang out, you know go to dinners or go to somebody's, each house and, you know, just hang out and feel like a friendship bond." Mainline Mamas may lead double lives—one at home and one at the prison on the weekends—but the women they share both lives with, their fellow Mainline Mamas, show a deeper bond that Melanie, Cheryl, and the many Mainline Mamas I spoke with, and even in my own experience.

Mainline Mamas become a familial network that does visitation as a group, even though they go to their individual visits with their particular loved ones. As they get to know each other, Mainline Mamas get to know their extended families—the incarcerated loved ones of other Mainline Mamas who they may never meet in person until they are

[30] Telephone interview 4/18/2020

no longer incarcerated, if at all. These are not casual acquaintances, friendships with coworkers formed by proximity, or a simple transaction. These people become family. Often these friendships go beyond the relationships that drew people to visitation in the first place. Of the women I talked to who had spent decades visiting prisons, they remained on good terms with their networks of Mainline Mamas—staying in regular contact, knowing what is going on in each other's lives, meeting up occasionally, sending support when needed. The community continues. Ironically, those who started visiting prisons because of a romantic relationship with an incarcerated loved one, none of them were still romantically involved, though some remained on speaking terms. All of the Mainline Mamas however maintain contact with their fellow Mainline Mamas.

For the most part, this deep bond applies to the immediate network of Mainline Mamas—the women formed community at a particular jail or prison, for a set period of time. However, for some this extends into work and activism long beyond prison visits, Love and Sunshine especially. For me, this is the driving force behind this dissertation and my academic writing. My experience as a Mainline Mama and the bonds I formed with the women at the prisons I visited are women I still talk to on a regular basis. These are the women who helped me get to this place in my dissertation, and in turn this has turned into activism for the abolition of prisons; working with national and local organizations on campaigns to end money-bail, working with incarcerated women, and in my community work with other women who have been Mainline Mamas or formerly incarcerated persons. We, as Mainline Mamas, understand the prison in a unique way because of our experience, and we understand how arbitrary and senseless the process

can be. We see the harms of incarceration and we feel the long reaching effects of the prison sentence. We form a community of mentoring and teaching, with a shared body of knowledge and a unique positionality. Love[31] saw the trauma of visitation and her own incarceration, "but then I also look at it as though it's a space for organizing and where I, where I do most of my work." Love's experiences of parenting while she was incarcerated turned her into an advocate for other incarcerated women, helping them with their custody paperwork, then after her release creating a network for education and mutual support that would connect abolitionists and advocates on the outside with incarcerated peoples.

Love and I are part of the few who turn our experiences into activism,[32] but that the advocacy begins as a Mainline Mama. The body of knowledge comes through community, as Cheryl, Melanie, and Sharon emphasized, it is about learning how to navigate the prison both from watching other women, but also in the active formation of community and teaching other women in your same position. This creates bonds that go beyond the incarceration process itself. Mainline Mamas face isolation, shame, and go through many sacrifices in order to endure the visitation process—having that recognition and understanding shared by other women creates a unique community that recognizes our struggles, but also each other as whole human beings. The community is the deep

[31] Telephone interview 7/06/2018.

[32] Activism in this sense refers to political organizing, working with formal organizations and networks towards community or political ends on the outside. Organizations like All of Us or None, or the Formerly Incarcerated Convicted People and Families Movement, represent organizations I have personally been involved with, at conferences, organizing, or in networks. I have not named or included any organizations any women involved in the study have participated in, so as to preserve their anonymity. Activism can take many forms and may include even non-political activities of support, like that Cheryl provided in the form of childcare, but here this refers to these overt, political acts.

and long running source of validation that Mainline Mamas receive from each other and select others.

Validation

Unlike the feelings of community, or even the privileges that women acknowledged in our interviews, feelings of validation were less explicit in the interviews. Instead, feelings of validation came between the lines of the interviews with the Mainline Mamas. Women often discussed the problems of isolation, shame, and sacrifice that they endured, referencing those who do not understand their situation. Cheryl,[33] for example, mentioned she is in a new relationship, with a man who knew about her prior relationship and history of visiting, but he was not incarcerated and had never been incarcerated himself. One night while they were looking at Facebook:

> There was a picture of an incarcerated man, like you could see him in his, in his, like the, the suit, the little blue pants and the little white shirt, whatever, and the girl was in like a little white dress, but they were in a courthouse getting married and I think the caption was like, 'he got 25 years, like would you still marry him in jail, would you marry a man in jail?' And [he] was like 'Hell, no, this bitch is stupid.' [Laughs] And I said, 'Why is she stupid?' He was like, 'Man, this is a dumb bitch, girl, go live your life.' And I said, 'Really?' I was like, 'But what if she loves him?' He kept saying, 'I don't give a damn.' [Laughter] And I, and I just started laughing, I said, 'if you only knew.' And I'm like, so I said to him, I

[33] Telephone interview 9/24/2018.

> said, 'Well, what if that man was you?' and he was like, 'No' … he asked me how did I have my first marriage and I said, 'I was married over the phone.' … because my husband was in the county jail, so. [laughter] That was a legal marriage in jail over the phone. So, it was like, we didn't go far with that convo because he was like, 'You're sitting up here making up shit, like I ain't going to believe this shit.

Cheryl's new boyfriend refused to acknowledge her previous relationship could have happened. Mainline Mamas' family, friends, and acquaintances, who have no experience with incarceration themselves, fail to recognize the importance and validity of their relationships. Even though Cheryl's boyfriend is fully aware of her politics, her character, he is so quick and nonchalant to echo the same kind of invalidating stigma that Cheryl has heard from others, just as Annie's mom shamed her. When loved ones invalidate relationships because of incarceration, it speaks down on all Mainline Mamas. So, for Cheryl, her relationships were only validated by the other Mainline Mamas, the other women who knew from personal experience that these relationships were vital.

Validation reinforces the Mainline Mama community. Mainline Mamas offer listening without interrogation; no need to authenticate your relationship status to someone else. Validation comes from simply being, and existing, without being in-validated by the state, or society—validation fulfils psychological needs as part of belonging that forms the backbone of community (Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Talò, Mannarini, & Rochira, 2014). Love[34] mentioned that when she was incarcerated her

[34] Telephone interview 7/06/2018.

identity as a mother was invalidated by the state because the prison would strip away and invalidate her parental role simply because of her incarceration. The state easily recognizes that incarceration does not change racial or gendered identities, since the prison recognized her as a Black woman, but because she was incarcerated and not able to be in close physical proximity to her daughter, the state would not fully recognize her as a mother because she was not able to enact "motherhood" in a way that is legible to the state. Mainline Mamas, those who have been incarcerated or those who have visited prisons, are able to validate and recognize the importance of relationships and relationality regardless of physical proximity. Mainline Mamas provide recognition of each other and our struggles as a whole human being.

Privilege

Importantly, the community and support that Mainline Mamas provide each other revealed a heightened self-awareness to the privileges that individually allowed them to endure the process of visitation and living as a Mainline Mama. Inasmuch as visitation exacts a heavy financial toll and is burdensome, women like me and Ashley in the study explicitly mentioned our jobs and financial stability that enabled our visits. For me, I had my own car, I had a job that allowed me to work only on weekdays to visit on the weekend. Ashley,[35] who is now middle aged but did most of her visitation in her early 30's explicitly mentioned her age as a privilege that enabled her to endure some of the stigmas of visitation:

[35] Telephone interview 1/10/2017

> I've known young women who had a child and they, and their partner was in prison, and they had the dual stigma of also being young, which is another way of saying that people were going to speak to me in a certain kind of way. … I ended up having my daughter in a free-standing feminist, you know, birthing center. So, you know, there were choices that were available to me.

Although Ashley felt the acute pain of being functionally considered a single mother, since her partner was incarcerated, the benefit of her age was not lost on her because of how she saw and knew other women were treated. Love,[36] explicitly mentioned privileges that she did not fully conceptualize until she was in prison: her mother's whiteness and background as a feminist organizer gave her an advantage when she was incarcerated because "she taught me how to struggle against the system fearlessly because she was a white radical feminist, she always questioned everything and she was an organizer, so I had the privilege of having access to that. I had the privilege of having an education so I could read and write when I got there. I had the privilege of having a support system." Mainline Mamas have so many struggles and obstacles at the time, it becomes difficult to consider the privileges we have when visiting. Mainline Mama's experience privilege—working Monday to Friday with a good enough job to finance these trips to the prison, own your car, make the payments, pay for gas. Community helps us to find a way to make it work, particularly for those within our immediate support networks who are struggling, but relative to those who are completely disconnected and isolated by incarceration. Then having the language to speak back to

[36] Telephone interview 7/06/2018.

power that allows you to navigate the process—knowing about bureaucracy, following the steps, speaking the language of bureaucratic structures to follow through on the prison. Community forms from the knowledge that individual Mainline Mamas possess and share amongst each other, how to navigate and succeed at a particular prison, what the local culture of the COs and other women is like, to help women acclimate and smooth a difficult time. Mainline Mamas share what privileges they have through their community, providing validation missing from the state and society.

Bonds

The final thematic area I found in my interviews with Mainline Mamas is the bonds that the women experience. Bonds are the relationships that connect Mainline Mamas both to each other, to their loved ones, and to the state. The three aspects described below—presence, trauma, and mothering—delineate the relationships between people based on the shared experiences of having to visit the prison. Presence refers to what draws people into the process of becoming a Mainline Mama. The reason for visitation is rooted in the importance of being physically present with the people you love, and —why people seem to endure the system of visitation and the carceral state. Trauma gets to the specific stresses that Mainline Mamas endure because of the way they are forced into a relationship with the state—the initial harms experienced during visitation and its long, branching effects into the lives of Mainline Mamas. Finally, the crucial aspect of mothering—not just the mothering of children but mothering as a practice that goes beyond biological connections—defines the experiences of Mainline

Mamas as they care for each other, for their loved ones, and learning to care for themselves.

Presence

Mainline Mamas rely on the importance of sharing space with another person—the intimacy of proximity is the key to visitation. Both visitation and phone calls have their own financial costs, and phone calls help to keep a day-to-day connection with your incarcerated loved one, but being in the same room as another person, being able to share space and look each other in the eye is absolutely vital to the survival of both the visiting person and the incarcerated person. Proximity is an important expression of relationality and love; visitation is a state regulated outlet of that love. Megan Comfort's work on women visiting prisons noted the reification of gender roles, meals serve as occasions "to re-create, or import, 'home' within the penitentiary walls by employing the practical and symbolic functions of food to nourish their partner's bodies and souls … to domesticate the carceral environment" (2009, p. 109). Just as these gendered domestic roles are social constructs, the way they are imported into the prison is a state-construct. Prison rules mandate who may visit the vending machines, the microwaves, dictating what food is available. The meal is less about the food or the place, but the sharing of space and time between people who care for each other. Sharing food is something that can only be done in-person; it is a feature of relationships that is frequently taken for granted on the outside.

Presence is a central motivating feature for Mainline Mamas because it is crucial to relationships. Cheryl[37] explained that she visited as a way to bring their relationship together, because there was no option to visit during the week. Prison visits are highly regulated to only set-hours on the weekend—imposing limits for Mainline Mamas who might want to visit but now cannot take a job that requires her to work on the weekend, or risk losing out on family activities. Without a visit there is no other way to be in each other's presence, even though the over-priced phone calls and long waits for letters might facilitate other means of connection. "I felt like I was in the free world, and I can come and go as I wanted to, and he couldn't. At that was at least, that was the least that I can do, was to go and see him." Cheryl's emphasis on the visit as "the least she can do" was not a sense of guilt or obligation to her incarcerated partner, but an understanding of the ways that prisons and the state restrict relationships. There was simply no other option. It was the least allowed to her. Incarceration is regulated by the state, and because her partner is incarcerated, her relationship gets regulated. She can only visit as much as permitted, and Cheryl took every chance she could get because of the importance of sharing space together. Five days a week, the state made sharing space impossible, so visiting for two days a week was the least she could do.

In some ways this importance of visitation as physical presence can even shift women's perspectives of time. Each woman spoke of the sacrifices of time in how many hours they would spend commuting to and from the prison, for myself and most Mainline Mamas it averaged to around 3 hours. For me, my incarcerated partner had spent years

[37] Telephone interview 9/24/2018

being at least 12 hours away, for Cheryl she had spent two years visiting on plane rides from New York. The draw of an in-person connection was just as strong, but less financially and practically feasible to make regular weekend trips. Once my partner was closer, or once Cheryl moved closer to where her loved one was incarcerated, the visits become more regular because the prison feels closer—less hours away, means less time on the road, more time visiting on the weekend in those few hours that the state sanctions proximity that is so vital to relationships.

Sharing physical space is a crucial part of relational maintenance that often goes unspoken but becomes more salient in visitation because of the ways the state denies or defines physical intimacy. Touch is restricted to maybe a hug at the beginning and end of the visit. Even holding hands is forbidden in many prisons. Instead, a visit emphasizes the importance of sharing physical space—being in a room with your loved one where you can look each other in the eye, breathe the same air, share the smells of sweat and microwaved food and cement, touch the same table and chairs at the very least. This is a moment where space connects people and, as Melanie[38] explains, makes the life of the incarcerated loved one just a little bit easier: "one visit, even if it's once every six months, can make their time so much easier and so much better just having some kind of contact with someone on the outside world, it will make your time, you know, a lot easier." Being in each other's presence is a profound source of comfort—Mainline Mamas don't receive the casual intimacies of daily life, so we must find them where we can. Even if it only comes on the weekend.

[38] Telephone interview 4/18/2020

Annie[39] mentioned how she would try to make the most of visits "you know, spending family time. We would eat, we would talk. I probably would sleep, you know, because of driving, because I would actually get off of work and drive straight there like on a Friday night, and I would get off of work at 11:00 pm. We would talk, we would socialize with others at the tables, other tables, take pictures." Taking a nap on the shoulder of her loved one takes on an esoteric significance in the context of visitation. Mainline Mamas travel hours to visit, and it may be difficult to understand why you would spend so many hours driving only to sleep during a visit. But for a relationship without the state imposing—a relationship that does not have to navigate incarceration—these small physical intimacies are easy to take for granted. The ability to vent, to spend time on each other's shoulders, to simply *be* together, is what makes any relationship work. For Mainline Mamas, the opportunities for presence are simply more heavily restricted, regulated, and overseen by the carceral state.

The state's restrictions do not necessarily mean that all intimacy is lost. Mainline Mamas find unique ways to engage in physical intimacy during a visit, both as an important part of their relationship, but also as an act of resistance against the state's regulation. Cheryl[40] described the two versions of a visit. First is the state-sanctioned story of the visit, the rules the prison she visited asked her to follow:

> There was a greeting in, entering greeting and an exit greeting. So outside of that we pretty much were to keep your hands to yourself and there was like no in between. You can get food, you can go out on the, the fake little patio. [laughter]

[39] Telephone interview 2/26/2020
[40] Telephone interview 9/24/2018

> Take your little pictures towards the end., and then that was about it. That's what it should have been. [laughter]

However, Cheryl, was clever and figured out her own ways to visit. These went well beyond the formal, stringent rules of saying hello and goodbye for her brief period:

> Depending on the CO, and the majority of them were cool like that, they would allow you to hold hands or to kiss, or you know, and to be lovey-dovey throughout the whole visit. If it went overboard, they would kind of, you know, give you a little warning, or ten. A few would turn a blind eye to everything. You learned the system where you can go out on the patio, and, and go up against the wall where you couldn't be seen through the window, you'll have somebody watching the door to let you know if or when the CO was coming, and you could have sex up against the wall. [laughter] God. Yeah. And I, I know there was a CO or two that they know that was happening, but they just didn't come out there.

Visitation, under the state-sanctioned script of a visit, is like a mirage. It's an illusion of intimacy and connection, but in that space Mainline Mamas find ways of making those connections real. Cheryl highlights the different ways that women avoid surveillance by relying on your community, building on knowledge of the system, and the space. Knowing a friend who you can rely on enough to watch the door for a CO. Knowing the system, visiting regularly enough to know which COs are permissive and which are strict—to understand what you can get away with on particular days—is an assertion of autonomy and resilience. Mainline Mamas learn the system to get all the joy, love, and

intimacy, they can get on the weekends by using their guile and community to every advantage they can find.

Presence also extended to other familial relationships, particularly for parents who are incarcerated in visits with their children. Prisons impose into romantic relationships, but for parents their parental authority is restricted by the state—through a legal loss of parental rights, or a loss of perceived authority as an incarcerated person is labeled as a "bad parent," regardless of the reason for their incarceration. The state's regulation of an incarcerated person further undermines their authority as a parent because the prison asserts so much control over the parent's autonomy or presence. Love[41] made this an assertion of rights. Her own incarceration disrupted her assumptions about parental relationships. As she noted: "I learned that it can be done and that a quality relationship can still be maintained despite the state. I learned that people need to know their rights because … the system can be pushed, and a lot of folks don't." Navigating visitation means involving the state in relationships, whether they are romantic or familial, particularly when a custodial parent becomes incarcerated. So, the parent must navigate ways to be a present parent—when physical presence can't be constant but find time to share physical space and then maintain connections through letters, phone calls, or other ways of connecting. Physical presence, sharing space, is the apex of relational connection, and the state's imposition for Mainline Mamas makes that connection more salient, and, as Love notes, stresses the importance of pushing for rights, and advocacy. The State imposes boundaries and restrictions, but these can either be navigated in a

[41] Telephone interview 7/06/2018

resilient way, like Cheryl's understanding of the CO's and space of the prison in finding where she could have intimate, romantic, and even sexual, time with her incarcerated loved one. The state could also be resisted outright, on its own terms, as Love emphasizes, in knowing one's rights and pushing against the prison to ensure those rights in relationships, be they romantic or parental, are satisfied.

Sharing physical space maintains the importance of relationships, that can last even beyond a visit, or as relationships change and grow. For most of the women, they were no longer romantically involved with the partners they visited while incarcerated. Cheryl,[42] however, emphasized the extended bond that develops through the relationship of visitation, phone calls, and finding ways to stay connected in spite of the state.

> We're still friends. He considers me his best friend. So it's 2020, it's been eighteen years. Damn, it's been eighteen years. That's crazy. I consider him one of my best friends, I can talk to [him] about anything, anything, anything, and everything.

For Cheryl in particular, the connection was more than a simple couple relationship, but extended through her former partner's familial network.

> And I'm still, I'm still close to his family, his family is my family, his mama is my mama, sister is my sister even though I don't like her, [laugher] but, yeah. Now I'm to the point of his brother being cremated and, and I got the ashes, or some of them. So that's, yeah, if, if anything they said, 'Okay, bitch, you got to

[42] Telephone interview 9/24/2018

move,' I could pack up all my kids and, and my five dogs and go stay with his mama [laughter] with no problem. Probably with the nigga I got, honestly.

Relationships are built on connections between people and maintained by physical space, but Cheryl's experience demonstrates how Mainline Mamas form connections that transcend both the romantic and physical. Physical presence through sharing space, even in a prison forms Bonds between Mainline Mamas, their partners, and others in that space. These bonds grow deeper as Mainline Mamas navigate the prison and many restrictions imposed by the state—restrictions on touch, time spent together, the ways you are allowed to interact with other people and your loved ones while in the space of the prison. The state's restrictions on the amount of time people can spend together or the ways you can interact physically inadvertently creates bonds that transcend the romantic relationship, based on those times spent in shared physical space.

Trauma

While the bonds from shared physical space are crucial and important, entering that space on a regular basis is a source of long-lasting trauma that many Mainline Mamas do not fully process until long after the fact. For those Mainline Mamas that spent time in prison, they easily identified their incarceration as a source of trauma. Love[43] plainly stated that "my relationship to prison, I look at it as a source of trauma in my life, but then I also look at it as though it's a space for organizing and where I, where I do most of my work." Love has attempted to turn her incarceration into a source of

[43] Telephone interview 7/06/2018

motivation for organizing and political activism after her release, but because Love spent most of her child's early years in prison, Love still carries a trauma and guilt with her and sees how the trauma of her incarceration extends into her family.

> I feel like I did it to [my daughter]. And so, when she, when she acts out or gets frustrated, like I absorb it because even though it wasn't my intention [to go to prison] . . . I still feel like she has a right as a kid to be entitled, and she's entitled to parents and she didn't get those, so I just let her, I let her have her moment and it is devastating because she also doesn't want to be mad at me so it harms her because she know it hurts me to have to listen to things. And she also suffers because she's like, "it's not your fault," and so where do we put any of it, we have nowhere to put it.

Incarceration's primary effects can be traumatic; visitation is traumatic, and this trauma branches out deep into the family network, spreading to everyone it touches. Love and her child endure the trauma of separation, but then the family members who take on care for Love's child then bear additional burdens and traumas of care and visitation, which extends into their family networks. The trauma caused by incarceration is a far-reaching web that extends well beyond the walls of the prison. Love found herself unable to cope, redirecting her emotions to work or exercise, but found she was only prolonging the burdens of dealing with the trauma.

For Sunshine,[44] the trauma manifested as emotional distance. "It was almost easier, or safer, I'll say safer for me to begin to disassociate around the relationship of

[44] Telephone interview 1/08/2017.

mother and daughter… Being incarcerated really harmed my relationship with my daughter. It had me carry out, carry on a level of guilt, but it also had her carry on this, this blame for, for me, and anger, and also I think she felt some abandonment." Sunshine experienced different stretches of incarceration, not just one long sentence, but a repeated series of events. Disassociation made it easier for Sunshine, but her daughter had to repeatedly suffer the trauma of separation. The emotional distance created by incarceration causes long-term trauma that Sunshine had to reconcile with, even to the point of acknowledging that her relationship with her daughter might never be repaired, though Sunshine and her daughter formed a meaningful relationship once her daughter was well into adulthood. Prisons impose into relationships long after incarceration through trauma, what Ruben Miller calls "the afterlife of mass incarceration" (2021). Any facade of rehabilitation or semblance of social meaning to be had by removing a person from their family, only creates a long-term punishment for every person connected to a person who is incarcerated. Prisons create webs of trauma that overlap and ensnare everyone within entire communities by reaching from the immediate family into the community, on to people who have no direct relationship to a crime or the criminal justice system.

Mainline Mamas largely have to decipher how to navigate this trauma on their own—either individually or as a community—without the assistance of organizations or institutions that are justice-oriented. Some amazing organizations and networks have

formed; the Essie Justice Group[45] or the Formerly Incarcerated Convicted People and Family Movement[46] are paragons of mutual aid for Mainline Mamas, their incarcerated loved ones, and families. Other organizations that might be more well-known were less supportive of women I interviewed. Love, for instance, sought help from the American Civil Liberties Union in fighting for custody during her incarceration, but "the ACLU told me 'No, we can't take court case, we can't, we can't take your case because it is—you're in prison, what do you expect, you're not going to win custody.'" Love was able to win her custody pro-se, acting as her own attorney, but felt traumatized and devastated by the rejection of such a well-known organization. Even though the ACLU was not able to take her case, the attorney made her case sound hopeless, and reinforced the trauma imposed by incarceration.

For Love,[47] this rejection accentuated feelings of isolation and shame she felt as a parent, which still manifested as trauma well beyond her incarceration. "I will miss the life that I wish I had every day and I think of myself as some kind of damaged thing… I settle for less in relationships, I settle for less in work, I settle for less constantly because of it." Mainline Mamas feel isolated by their visitation and incarceration, but that manifests in a multitude of areas in our lives. For me, this often manifested as suffering in silence. Like Love, the long times I spent visiting had long-term impacts on how I see

[45] Essie Justice Group, https://essiejusticegroup.org/, is a non-profit organization created by and for women with incarcerated loved ones. Founded and mostly run by Black women, Essie provides support groups, research, and advocacy on behalf of women and families. Mostly based in California, their healing to advocacy program is especially remarkable in providing women with the tools to advocate for themselves and their loved ones during the time of incarceration.
[46] FICPFM, https://ficpfm.org/, is a network of community advocacy groups that connects incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons, families, and communities. They organize annual conferences, and operate nation wide across different advocacy networks, engaging family and community.
[47] 7/06/2018

myself. For Love, she saw this manifesting as settling. For me, it manifests as a constant questioning—*am I making the right decisions*—since the stigma and shame and isolation for visitation impede on everything else. Doubting whether visiting my loved one in prison was the right decision had me questioning everything I have ever done—*am I staying in this job too long, do I deserve more, am I raising my kids the right way*. The shame and stigma create traumas that spill into every aspect of life. In these ways, the prison imposed itself into every aspect of my life without having to incarcerate me.

Sunshine and Ashley, the two oldest women in the group, looked retrospectively at their experiences and wished for more clinical support. Sunshine[48] specifically mentioned grief counseling—one of the reasons she spent time in and out of prison was substance abuse, which she linked to the death of one of her children. Ashley[49] similarly wished she had gone to therapy as a preventative measure— "so that when depression hit, as it did for a period of time, I could have responded to, I could have, I could have anticipated that and responded accordingly… I never put anything in place to make sure my own self-care and balance, even though I could have anticipated reasonably that having a child and being separated from the person I was in love with was going to create an unspeakable level of depression."

Prisons inflict trauma on anyone who comes in to contact with that site, and it manifests differently depending on the type or frequency of contact you have with the prison. Incarcerated persons are trapped in that space for extended periods of time. Mainline Mamas visit regularly and are in frequent contact with the violence imposed by

[48] Telephone interview 1/08/2017.
[49] Telephone interview 1/10/2017.

the state, but still reside in the free world. Our trauma is more ephemeral, and difficult to grasp. From my experience as a Mainline Mama, to put it bluntly, I always saw the prison as fucked up, but I did not realize the long-term effects it has until long after you leave the prison. The anxiety of a prison, something that was once regular, the over worry about having to encounter this in the future. The fear for children. Unrealistic anxiety, any kind of connection to a prison space and feeling like it will break you and you won't come back together. That erosion, that slowly wears you down, by the time you realize it you don't even know. The trauma as far as going back. Constantly scared of going back, living in a fucked-up world. PTSD, that fucks with you. Disengaging from state as a way of avoiding state violence, even though it's unavoidable. Time lost is traumatic, even as much as you try to maintain the connection with presence, the loss, those other days of the week, and separation, are a shared trauma that develops.

The Mainline Mamas who had children while visiting or incarcerated, and then had children after not having to be at a prison regularly, still felt the aftershocks of the trauma of the prison. Love[50] said it was an "irrational fear" of losing her newborn, even though she had been home from prison for years before having another child, the loss of her parenting time with her first child continued to traumatize her and challenge her relationship to her newborn. Love's fears echo my own—the fear your child might be arrested, the fear they might have to go to jail or prison, with the dread that there is nothing I can do to prevent that from happening. The fear is not "irrational" in the sense of being unrealistic—Love and I both know that these are feasible, real, tangible fears.

[50] Telephone interview 7/06/2018.

Love's use of "irrational" is a knowing understanding based on personal experience, "irrational" only because he's a 2-year-old baby who lives entirely at home with his mother. Once he starts to get older and leave the home, Love's firsthand knowledge of the state power recognizes that fear becomes very rational and very real. Knowing the state can take chunks, if not your entire, life from you. Knowing that this can happen at the drop of a hat. Incarceration is always a possibility if you are Black. As a Mainline Mama this means a fear for yourself, but a fear for any children you might have.

Mothering

Mothering is more than biological ties of kinship, or a gendered dynamic imposed on women to care for a child. Not all women engage in mothering, nor seek to be mothers, or act as mothers. Even women who have biological children do not always act as a mother. Rather, mothering is a practice of care, and way of being that women engage in through their actions, concerns, and mindset (Dalla Costa & James, 1972; Gumbs, Martens, & Williams, 2016; James S. , 1993). In this sense, mothering means giving of yourself to others as you care for their wellbeing, practicing care for self and care for another. Mothering goes beyond the biological, and for Mainline Mamas manifests in four ways. First, biological mothering, for women who reproduce and have children and visit prisons or are incarcerated. Most of the women I spoke to fit in this category, but all fit into the second category, othermothering. Patricia Hill Collins and others have explained how othermothering occurs, particularly in Black communities, as women who care for children that are not biologically theirs and serve as responsible

persons and caretakers (Collins, 1997). Third, Mainline Mamas also mother each other. The community I discussed earlier also becomes an intergenerational mentoring practice as Mainline Mamas care for other women who begin the visitation process. Finally, mothering occurs with an incarcerated partner—engaging in care work while visiting or by maintaining relationships. This kind of mothering goes beyond romantic connection, particularly for some women who would mother their incarcerated partner or loved one even after their romantic relationship ended. Importantly, the state exploits these four mothering relationships. Mass incarceration relies on Mainline Mamas to serve as care workers for the community as well as their incarcerated loved one, drawing on Mainline Mama's personal work to make them mothers of the carceral state.

Biological Mothers.

First, as biological mothers, Mainline Mamas main concern is in connecting their child to visiting their incarcerated parent, and for women who are incarcerated it is maintaining a connection to her biological child on the outside. The priority is the child's need, but also to connect the family and teach them lessons of how to stick up for themselves. Whether visiting or incarcerated, remaining connected to a child takes a lot of creative work. This is not something that can be done in silence. The way a Mainline Mama or incarcerated parent interacts with the state, with the guards, with each other, are all part of a learning experience—teaching children how they are going to maneuver and navigate in the world. Prisons are intense spaces of violent state control. Teaching a Black child how to navigate visitation and maintaining relationships in spite of prison is a

microcosm of how to move through the world as a Black person—the surveillance, the arbitrary policies, how to talk to people, how to carry yourself, are all life lessons that a child learns while visiting their incarcerated parent. Maintaining familial connections in spite of state separation and barriers are fundamental to the experience of being a Mainline Mama, whether women are incarcerated or are just visiting.

When Ashley[51] and I spoke about our experiences in being a Black mother dealing with the state, the pressures and stigmas that come with parenting and authority, Ashley framed her experiences in historical context:

> So, number one, Black mothers have never lived in America in a way that allowed us to have the freedom to live out our motherhood. Right, or access to our children. So whether you're talking about mothers of children who have an incarcerated parent or mothers who are incarcerated themselves, or you're talking about Sybrina Fulton and her son not being able to walk down the street to his own house with a bottle Arizona iced tea and Skittles that he bought for his little brother while he was on the phone talking to a little girl who was being bullied, which is what he was doing when the killer did what he did. So Black motherhood has never been a right in this country for any of us, nor has it been respected. If it was respected, they wouldn't have let Mike Brown lay out there for four hours, they wouldn't have shot Oscar Grant in the head when he had his hands behind his back at Fruitvale Station in Oakland. Never, ever, ever, ever, you know. They wouldn't do that to any mother's child. And that's been

[51] Telephone interview 1/10/2017.

something that, you know, we've, we've known since slavery. Including prison, because there's less, in prison it's exacerbated you know.

Injustices are not isolated events, state violence is not one case, one story, that happens in a remote place. Ashley's list of citations to publicly known killings of Black persons demonstrates this is a regular part of the Black experience, and particularly for Black mothers this is the way that institutions inflict harm on Black mothers without having to even target them specifically. Black motherhood has been restricted and constrained by the need to protect Black children from white supremacy, before any other work of care or free relationship between mother and child can take place (Boris, 2013; Dalla Costa & James, 1972; Gumbs, Martens, & Williams, 2016; Harris-Perry, 2011; Kupenda, 2012; Bridges, 2011). As Ashley makes clear, the safety of your child is an underlying concern, but the systemic state violence that Black people are subject to alters mothering—even mother's grief in the loss of a child is swept into national narratives.

For Ashley, mothering means putting your child at the center of decisions, even when those decisions are hard. While Ashley and her child visited for several years but the continued bad behavior of the CO's and negative experiences just trying to visit the prison led to her deciding not to continue visitation. Despite all the shame, sacrifice, isolation that Mainline Mamas go through to ensure familial connection, the state itself can become too burdensome and too overwhelming. "Had [the father of her child] not been in prison, had he been out here perhaps there would have been other hard decisions that I had to make. I think that is what happens when you are a parent, you would put your children in the center, and you make every decision accordingly." Mothering means

fore fronting the wellbeing of the child and centering your decisions for care on what will best serve your child both at that time and in the future. Plans change to meet the overall goal, which is the wellbeing of the child, and mothers have to make the best possible decision at the time, based on whatever information they have available. For Mainline Mamas, the goal is to connect with your child in spite of state violence. How you achieve this goal is constantly changing, based on circumstance or resources available, and as Ashley illustrates, sometimes that comes with hard decisions like ending visitation.

For Mainline Mamas who have to maintain that connection while they are incarcerated, the state's intrusions on mothering are more acute. Sunshine[52] said mothering to her meant "protecting her child from the state," including racism, incarceration, and other forms of state violence, but the fact that she was incarcerated suddenly branded her a "bad" parent. The state's imposition on the mothering relationship, between Sunshine or Love and their biological children, caused them to feel like they were not mothering "authentically." State power takes away from connections in person—the ability to hug, touch, or kiss a child in casual ways—and negative stigmas of incarceration make it so that her incarceration is the primary identity not her motherhood. Treated as a prisoner, rather than a mother, Sunshine and Love have their care corralled and restricted, their connections with their children become secondhand and, even as they engage in mothering to the best of their abilities, it may not be enough—either for them to feel fulfilled as a mother or for the child to feel fulfilled.

[52] Telephone interview 1/08/2017.

Mainline Mamas mother their biological children and face significant state obstacles in doing so. Biological mothering may be the most commonly assumed or traditional form of mothering, but incarceration presents such significant barriers to the practice of enacting this care between parent and child, that it becomes a source of stigma and pain. Black mothers, and Mainline Mamas in particular, are held up to perceptions mothering that are made unattainable or demonized by white supremacy. Mainline Mamas are acutely aware of perceptions of Black motherhood in white society, and so take mothering where they can on their own terms. For biological mothering this means maintaining connections and making choices that place the child at the center, as Ashley, Sunshine, and Love illustrate. The way the state limits biological mothering, or the relationships between mothers and their biological children, also means that mothering manifests in additional ways.

Othermothering

The second way mothering manifests for Mainline Mamas is in othermothering, or the caring for children that are not their own. Othermothering involves engaging in care work for the community of other Black women (Collins, 1997). Caring for other women's children isn't just care work for the child, it is a care and concern for the community in helping other women. Cheryl has no biological children of her own but was a Mainline Mama in caring for other women's children and other women throughout her experiences with prisons. Cheryl[53] explained that she would "step in" for other

[53] Telephone interview 9/24/2018.

women when they were "overwhelmed with other stuff, you know, she needed to bring the car to the, to the line, I would watch the kids, or. I think it was times when she might have been short of food, we kind of swapped things or whatever the case may be, or she needed to, to rest for a minute I might have went over there and, and calmed the baby."

Cheryl's othermothering highlights mothering as a practice of care, but that effect is not necessarily a hierarchical one-to-one relationship from adult to child, but a care work that cares for children as the center of community praxis: it is both an ethic, a relationship, and practice that center care for others through a multitude of actions of support. Mainline Mamas, who were biological mothers, centered their child's interests, but Mainline Mamas in othermothering center the child and community together as the focus of their care work.

Othermothering often occurs in smaller acts of care that assist a child's mother by allowing her to focus on everyday tasks. In the context of Mainline Mamas during a visitation weekend this might mean taking turns watching each other's children while they're getting dressed, or even changing clothes in the parking lot if there's a potential dress code problem. In visitation that might mean entertaining or occupying kids' attention while Mainline Mamas take turns filling out forms for visitation. This *is* care work that might be practically focused on a child, but also cares for othermothers in the process. Particularly for women without biological children of their own, othermothering turns women who visit prisons regularly into Mainline Mamas as they regularly engage in care work for other women in assisting in tasks that people without children might take for granted.

Othermothering is not just a parent-child relationship but goes beyond biology and can occur between adults. Mainline Mamas engage in care work for women who are younger than them that they might see visiting. Melanie[54] discussed the relationships she formed with younger women who were incarcerated, far from her own home. "I was like talking to them, trying to encourage them, 'Come on, you, you're in here, you got all them babies out there getting adopted and going into foster care because you want to get high or you want to be with this abusive man and stuff,' you know, so I basically the person they would come to, strangers because I didn't know nobody in Oklahoma." Being a Mainline Mama goes beyond the assumed biological connections of parenthood into the network of relationships that form from caring for others and putting their growth and success at the center of that relationship. Melanie is older, could have done her time alone and attempted to avoid others, but instead the proximity of women being in the prison served as the basis for forming closer relationships. Importantly, Melanie's attentiveness as she related above, demonstrates how she engaged in these relationships as mothering where she is actively caring for these other women's success—beyond a mentor or peer role where she is trying to teach a particular skill or craft, mothering is a holistic ethic of caring that actively engages others and pushes for their benefit.

Sunshine[55] turned othermothering into her life's work. She started like Melanie, serving as an othermother on the inside, but once she was out, she started a network and movement that formed her life work, founding a successful nonprofit organization. Her personal experiences helped her "understand the power of voice and power of

[54] Telephone interview 4/18/2020.
[55] Telephone interview 1/08/2017

organizing." Motherhood, for Sunshine, was more than a biological relationship, "mothering means a bonding love, it means stress, it means perseverance and prosperity, it means wisdom, it means trust." Mothering is a process of care that women engage in with others for their benefit. For Sunshine, as a woman with biological children, she also serves as an othermother to women who have been incarcerated, to keep them from being pulled back into prison and disrupt the carceral process.

Mothering each other.

Othermothering forms a larger community bond between women, a process and act of caring by Mainline Mamas. But in the process, Mainline Mamas form smaller, tightly knit groups that more directly and concretely mother each other. More discreet than the community or status of a Mainline Mama, when Mainline Mamas mother each other, it is a deeper form of mentoring and care work that we engage in for each other. When I started visiting prison regularly, and became a Mainline Mama, I made a friend who taught me how to maneuver, how to move and be safe. I am eternally grateful to her for that. Those who I saw regularly I was able to try and teach, to pass on the mothering I had received and the lessons I learned about the process of visitation. Mothering among Mainline Mamas goes from the broader community and othermothering practices to mothering each other.

As Sunshine[56] explained, "we do form community and sometimes we even formed family." Mainline Mamas mother each other and become family, in the sense

[56] Telephone interview 1/08/2017.

that knowledge is passed down intergenerationally. Annie[57] related that she learned many of her strategies for visitation "from I guess, [laughter] I call them the OGs, from the OGs, others who actually been doing that you know, for years." The other Mainline Mamas in her immediate group became part of her family both in and outside visitation weekends. Annie put it this way: "If I take you home and you have met my mother, that's the plus, I don't let too many people in my circle. That's why I, you know, I truly say that certain ones that actually was close-knit, and, you know, formed that community with me were friends and they're still friends until this day." Mainline Mamas form even tighter bonds that are born from the shared experiences with incarceration.

Mothering among Mainline Mamas includes othermothering, but also engages in care work for each other because we uniquely understand the process. For Mainline Mamas that visit, that means not just ensuring your visit goes smoothly, but checking in on your closest fellow Mainline Mamas to make sure their weekends go smoothly and doing whatever you can to make sure we all get the most out of our weekend. Annie explained that, during the time she was visiting, the practice would be to form a line of cars, the night before visitation weekend, and leave a car close to the entrance for the visitor's parking lot to ensure they would be first in through the gates. Annie described her "common practice:" "You know, we would actually call all our friends and be like, 'Have you, have you made it yet, have you parked the car?' and they would be like, 'No we're almost there,' you know, and then we would all get together and maybe leave a spot, a space open. We would use cones at the time, you know, at the time to actually

[57] Telephone interview 2/26/2020.

save a spot for someone." These small acts make sure that we, as a group, are happy and safe—not just one person's visit, but a family, a sincere form of mothering—coordinated care work to ensure everyone's success. Checking in on the drive, coordinating during the week outside the visits. This is the kind of mothering relationship that forms from circumstance, but as Annie and the other Mainline Mamas I spoke with emphasized, it went long beyond the weekend visits and into everyday life.

Love emphasized that the connections that you might form through prison create family—a chosen family created by circumstance, or coincidence, or life choices, that has no blood relationship but become so deeply connected there is no other description. Love[58] talked at length about her friend,

> who I consider my sister, who is a white woman from [a mid-sized city], total white privilege, had a really serious heroin addiction that landed her in prison, but our lifestyles were completely different, our whole, everything was just completely different. But we woke up in the same place, we talked day and night, when things happened in the system on us, she showed up for me and I showed up for her. When we were separated, we were heartbroken and we found ways to stay in contact with each other that were like extra, took so much effort and time and we put so much into just holding and maintaining our love for each other.

Love emphasized how deep a bond they shared that persisted, despite time and changing space in the prison. Long beyond Love's incarceration, she still feels a connection to this friend, even though they are very different people:

[58] Telephone interview 7/06/2018.

> I think of, I, I will always think of her as family and what I, how I contribute to that relationship will always be on the family level. She calls me, I come, if she asks for something and I have it I'll give it to her. When I think of like the things that, like I, I get benefit from in this world I always think, 'Ooh, I got to tell [her], I got to figure out how she can, how she can get it, too.' And I think of that, that to me is like a total, like she's like a sister to me, and it's because of like those moments and how that, but, but politically, [laughter] like that's another thing, she's a Republican, can't understand it about her but I, I love her anyway, like you would love your family anyway and you figure out how to just avoid it and like be in each other's lives and our, each other's worlds because you choose to be, you want to be because they're so special to you. And I think it's those pressures and those difficulties and sticking with it and, showing up for each other that made us family. And I've been, I've known her, I didn't, so just to give context, I was locked up in 2003, we became roommates, we moved out of our room together in 2004 and I have never seen her face since in person. But that's the relationship. It's still there, it's just as strong."

The circumstances created by prison, through visitation or incarceration, create bonds between women who may never have spoken or met for any other reasons. People tend to form relationships based on similarity, but the shared circumstances created by the prison form bonds that transcend life circumstances or a particular situation. For some of these relationships, the care you have for another person transcends the proximity of the relationship—just as Love still would do anything for the woman she calls sister, who she

admittedly has little else in common with, Mainline Mamas form relationships that go beyond the limitations of a particular time or place. These are the bonds of chosen family: the relationship may be born of circumstance, but endures and lasts through time, space, and struggle.

Mothering Partners and the State

The state imposes and creates burdens in the course of these mothering relationships, but this is most acute, present, and looming in the relationship with an incarcerated partner. While the basis of the relationship to an incarcerated partner may be romantic, mothering becomes a centerpiece of the relationship as a result of the state's intrusion into every aspect. Through incarceration, the state regulates relationships through the visitation process—attempting to control the means of communication by monitoring letters, phone calls, and the many layers of control over in-person visits. Mothering an incarcerated loved one therefore mothers the person incarcerated through care work to ensure their wellbeing and survival, but the state attaches to, and exploits that mothering to facilitate its incarceration. Visitation only happens through compliance with state regulations, and it becomes a parasitic relationship where the state's compliance feeds on the care work done by Mainline Mamas, using visitation as a motivation and removing it as a punishment.

Melanie[59] discussed the stigma of being a Mainline Mama but highlights the importance of that care work for her incarcerated partner, "it's not wasting your time, it's

[59] Telephone interview 4/18/2020.

helping them to serve their time and keep their sanity, so they don't end up in there on the drugs, on the medication, you know not wanting to deal with how much time they have or just being away." Visitation is crucial for both parties, so when the state policies stop visitation, it can be damaging. Melanie told the story of when she had her visitation revoked for 30 days based on federal policy. The guards swabbed her hands when going through the metal detector and it came back positive for drugs:

> Mind you, I don't smoke cigarettes, I don't smoke weed, never did drugs ever. I drink on occasion. And so, I went to the visit and they had me rub this, they randomly will pick people and they had me rub this thing on my hands, on my inside wrists, and like on my clothes. Mind you, I did spray a little perfume on, I'm not thinking about nothing like this. And it came back positive for drugs, and they just cancelled my visit. They didn't let me, they didn't tell me "Well maybe it's the perfume," or nothing, they was just like, "Nope, you can't come visit." And I had drove . . . like two hours. … I was so mad. The person that I was coming to visit was sick because of what happened and he knew I didn't smoke or do drugs or none of that, and he was just like, and then they end up putting him n lock because he was going off about, "That's bullshit," you know what I mean, and they put him in the hole for trying to file some papers, a grievance or whatever, about that. . . . It depends on what guard it is, what guards are working, and it can go smooth sailing, you know, it just depends on how they're feeling.

Melanie's role, and other Mainline Mamas, is therefore crucial to the state in maintaining a balance between the incarcerated person and the state. Her visiting is so important to

maintaining his compliance at the prison, that the denial of a visit sets off a chain of events that leads to extreme punishment. If the visit went smoothly, then balance is maintained. The state, benefits from both the smooth visit and benefits from the extreme controls the visitation process as well, because when Melanie's visit is revoked—with no explanation to Melanie or her incarcerated loved one—the state maintains itself as the center of power in the relationship. The visit that all three parties, Melanie, her partner, and the state, all benefit from is subject to the will of the CO's. Once Melanie's partner wanted to file a grievance, it's at the discretion of the CO's what level of discipline to enforce, and there's no negative to the state for going to the extreme—only punishment for Melanie and her partner.

Visits are vital, both to the personal relationship and to the state. Cheryl[60] explained recognizing the importance of her visitation for her partner. "There is a lot of sacrifice that we have to make coming there to see them and they have to go through a lot, which may seem like a little to us, even to get out to see us. Sometimes it, the visits will be long, sometimes they would be short, and I know that they looked forward too, to seeing us. And the disappointment was real to them if they couldn't. Because I know there were time when, when I should have gone for it, [he] expected me to be there and I just had one of them days where I just didn't get up." Visitation is care work, and for Mainline Mamas it comes with burdens and blessings, but for those who are incarcerated too it's an important process that takes work. Staying out of trouble can be difficult, staying on the good side of COs to ensure that nothing happens during the week that

[60] Telephone interview 9/24/2018.

would interfere with the visitation process. Cheryl visits because the relationship is important to her but recognizes how meaningful it is for her partner. But in order to visit, in order for their relationship to happen in person, they both must navigate the state. And for Mainline Mamas that means the need to engage in care work with your incarcerated loved one to help them remain calm, stay out of trouble, navigate the system—to mother them through the week to ensure the weekend visitation, with its relational and romantic potential, actually happens.

Prisons depend on Mainline Mamas and exploit their relationships to incarcerated persons and communities. While Mainline Mamas face stigmas, shame, isolation, and a variety of collateral consequences from visitation, the process is so important to maintaining the relationship and to the wellbeing of their partner, the benefits often outweigh the negatives. However, the state exploits Mainline Mamas in their mothering, reaping the benefits that Mainline Mamas provide through their unique position in relationship to their incarcerated loved one. In instances of conflict between incarcerated peoples, Mainline Mamas become negotiators and mediators outside the system. We can speak to other Mainline Mamas and partners, negotiate, and discuss ways to calm down tensions at the prison because we all have a shared interest in visiting.

The larger community of Mainline Mamas forms a network of relationships, both in the core familial unit between Mainline Mamas in a particular clique, but the shared status provides a shared norm of communication: all Mainline Mamas want to visit, we all want to make sure our loved one is safe. Even if all the Mainline Mamas and other visitors don't all like each other or get along, we organize to ensure that our visits

happen.[61] We each take on the role of caring for our incarcerated loved one to ensure they comply with the norms of the prison to ensure that visits happen for everyone. If there's a riot, or a lockdown, then no one gets to visit, and everyone misses out. Mainline Mamas then work to make sure everyone maintains on their end, and the state ultimately benefits. Even when CO's act out of line, or the state creates opaque and entangled regulatory standards—what you have to wear to visit, what behavioral standards we have to maintain in and outside the prison—Mainline Mamas engage in care work with their partners and each other to ensure that everyone is able to visit. The visit becomes the crux of the parasitic, exploitative relationship between Mainline Mamas and the state because we rely on the visit for our family, the incarcerated loved one relies on the visit for their sanity, and the state benefits in coordinating its own power over the system and people caught up in it. By the end of my incarcerated partner's time, I had learned to speak with the prison fluently—to call the yard and CO's, who to talk to in order to understand what was happening at the organizational and institutional level. COs would even ask Mainline Mamas for assistance in keeping their loved ones calm, to maintain order at the prison.

Mainline Mamas are exploited by the state; the state relies on their care work to ensure its continued existence. This exploitation also manifests for the two Mainline Mamas who spent time incarcerated and focused their lives afterwards on activism and care work. Though both would identify as abolitionists and against the system of

[61] While I have focused on the important community bonds that form between Mainline Mamas, I also do not want to romanticize the experience. There are cliques and there are groups, and there are personal dislikes that exist between groups of women. Not all Mainline Mamas get along, but Mainline Mamas will form their own groups and communities.

incarceration, the system takes advantage of their work. The work these women do is what the state claims as its own—the work of helping women adjust from life in prison to life in the free world, making sure they have places to stay, work, with viable skills, to reunify with their children. The actual care work that ensures that these formerly incarcerated people are recognized and treated as full human beings. Activist work is care work, and the state attempts to claim credit or will punish severely for any failure of that work. The prison is not a system of rehabilitation, and it takes incredible amounts of care to secure people's humanity. Any decline in recidivism or changes to incarceration are claimed as state benefits, when in actuality that work stems from the care work, from mothering, of women like Love or Sunshine who work against the system of incarceration but focus on the humanity of those who have been incarcerated. The work the state should do, or claims to do, or purports to do with incarceration, is done by Black women as care work. But they do it for the love of the person, which the state attempts to exploit or appropriate. Mainline Mamas, as they mother their children, themselves, each other, and their incarcerated loved one, and in the process, become unwilling mothers of the state.

Conclusion

Across eight interviews, seven with other women and one autoethnographic self-interview, I identified nine key themes, which I grouped into three categories. From these interviews, I develop an image of the Mainline Mama—an image developed by stories of Black women's strategies for surviving a forced relationship with the state

through incarceration. Mainline mama is a source of connection between women that is often hidden intentionally or obscured by the scale of mass incarceration. The eight women in this dissertation represent a sample of the stories, experiences, and techniques used by Black women in navigating the prison system as visitors or incarcerated persons.

The first theme - depletion, encompasses external forces of isolation, shame, and sacrifice that Mainline Mamas experienced as energy drains from women navigating the prison system. Isolation referred to the feelings of loneliness from having to go through the experiences with the state—as if "I am the only one in this situation"—as well as the loss of connection to family, friends, and others. Shame is expressed as both internal and external feelings of guilt, stereotypes imposed on women navigating prison, the constant questioning of character, and assumption of negative flaws. Mainline mamas also described the sacrifices that come from their experiences navigating the prison—missing out on friends, family, job opportunities, the costs of visitation are all common threads that the interviewees shared.

I found that Mainline Mamas stories were not totally consumed by negative experiences but included insights into the ways they found happiness and joy, in creative and unexpected ways. These themes represent what I term blessings, describing the community, validation, and privileges that Mainline Mamas experience. Although they experienced isolation and shame from family and friends on the outside, they also experienced connections formed with each other. While these may take place at the prison, these relationships go beyond the weekend. Mainline mamas described a community that was more than transactional or temporary, but lifetime relationships that

often outlasted the relationships with an incarcerated partner. In this network of relationships, Mainline Mamas explained how these relationships provided validation—of self and of the relationship with the romantic partner or with children. Incarcerated mothers are treated as non-parents, relationships with incarcerated partners are not considered "real" relationships since they do not conform to norms of dating, time and space that are expected. Mainline Mamas discussed how they found validation in the community, and the importance of self-validation: how Mainline Mamas find ways to authenticate their own experiences without depending on validation from those who doubt the sincerity of their relationships. Finally, I found Mainline Mamas with a self-awareness of privileges, which I characterize as a blessing, that helped them through their experiences with the state. Mainline Mamas mentioned having a car, having the kind of job where you can visit on the weekends, coming from a particular background where you learned to agitate and advocate for yourself. All these acknowledged privileges that made their visitation experience easier, smoother, or more fulfilling. Importantly, when Mainline Mamas recognized their privileges, it was often in relationship to the ways it connected to the community of women—if one had the privilege of owning a car, they would carpool to the prison.

This highlights the third theme, bonds—the ways we connected and the shared experiences. Even though we did not visit the same prison together, we shared experiences that reflected our perspectives on presence, trauma, and mothering. Presence was the purpose for so many of us—it is the importance of being in the same shared space as your loved one, despite the interference of the prison. Presence encompasses

both the physical space, but feelings of touch and connection that make that presence meaningful, the type of presence the state is so controlling of while in person. However, because of this presence and the way the state controls people, that presence is a source of trauma imposed by the state. That trauma follows Mainline Mamas beyond having to deal with the state on a daily basis, for example Love mentioned fearing for her 2-year-old son and how the state would incarcerate and treat him. But above all, the bond that tied all our experiences was this experience with mothering. This includes the biological definition of mothering for children a woman has birthed personally, but even those who did not have biological children engaged in othermothering—serving as mothers and engaging in care work for others' children. I also found that Mainline Mamas mothered each other, more than mentoring and showing each other how to deal with the state, this is the ways in which women engage in care work to resist the state by checking in on each other during the week, beyond the visits and the visitation process. Finally, I engaged how women mother their partners and the state, in other words engaging in care work to assist their incarcerated loved ones during their time in prison, and how the state exploits this care work as labor to maintain the prison system. Visitations are privileges, incentives given to an incarcerated person to make them compliant, while the importance of presence, and visitation for the Mainline Mama is either ignored or exploited, while alienating the Mainline Mama both from other people and from the care work she engages in out of love.

CHAPTER 5

"LITANY FOR SURVIVAL"[62]

Mass incarceration is a far-reaching network of coordinated oppressions, that directly affects those who are incarcerated, and everyone connected to them. For Black women raising families, being caught in the web of the prison creates special ways of being, knowing, and acting in order to navigate the carceral state. Mainline Mamas are women who engage in care work that attempt to navigate carceral spaces and mass incarceration for themselves, their loved ones, and children. This happens in the narrow sense of a biological family unit, and also extends to the chosen family and communities that form around these shared experiences. Being a Mainline Mama is not a chosen lifestyle, it is the result of the prison system insinuating itself into every aspect of your life. For myself, and other Mainline Mamas who have had to learn how to live in the shadow of the prison, it creates a unique perspective of the prison and society. We understand the stigmas that come from association with the prison, and sometimes we reenact those stigmas in the way we speak about other women. But we also find community, build networks that validate ourselves, our relationships and each other. These create connections that bond women through mothering, through the care work that Black women engage in with their biological families, the families around them, and their loved ones.

[62] The title of this chapter references the iconic poem by Audre Lorde: A Litany for Survival, which in the final stanza reminds us:
"So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive." (Lorde, 1978, p. 32)

The care work that Black women engage in through mothering—in children, in peers, and larger community networks—go unappreciated by those who may not see, understand, or engaged in that care work themselves. The stories of children, community members, incarcerated partners, and other loved ones are important to unravelling the web of mass incarceration and understanding the imbricated traumas imposed by the state. For this work, I focus on my experience and the experiences of those like me, Mainline Mamas, whose care work in mothering has gone under-discussed and analyzed. Although our care work is unappreciated, it is still appropriated by the state into the carceral system. Being a Mainline Mama comes with stigma, trauma, and sacrifices that the system of mass incarceration relies on to ensure the operation of prisons. Visitations are used as a reward for incarcerated peoples, and the prison looks to Mainline Mamas to ensure the compliance of incarcerated peoples during the week. Mass incarceration encourages Mainline Mamas participation in the system because of the potential for exploitation, while encouraging the shame, sacrifices, and stigma that Mainline Mamas face.

Black women connected to prisons who are engaged in care work are therefore a part of the imbricated network of oppressed peoples of mass incarceration, but their work and their voices go largely ignored. Mainline Mamas are incorporated into the system of mass incarceration through care work, and we also form part of the movement for liberation. While some authors like Ruth Wilson Gilmore have highlighted either the activism of mothers of incarcerated people (Gilmore, 1999), or Megan Comfort's emphasis on the "secondary prisonization" in the ways Black women are affected by

prisons in visitation (Comfort, 2009), such works rarely are take up perspectives of a Mainline Mama. This dissertation therefore centered my own experiences as a Mainline Mama and the voices of women that are working against mass incarceration after living as Mainline Mamas. Our role in liberation and abolition are critical, just as they have been in previous social movements (White, 1999; Gumbs, Martens, & Williams, 2016), and as Black women who have been incarcerated or directly affected by incarceration, we engage in care work for others to form the network of resistance, to undermine and work against the systemic burdens and oppression that prisons create and that affect us all.

As everyone works to survive mass incarceration, Mainline Mamas understand how that survival takes a different toll on everyone affected. This dissertation explores my perspectives and those of the 7 other women I talked with who all visited prisons in the southwest United States. While experiences may differ at particular prisons, the women I spoke with and the activist networks I have engaged with, like Essie or FICPFM, find common ground. The experiences in this dissertation are not easily generalizable but reveal common experiences. We engage in this care work to make sure that we can all survive and make it through whatever sentence is imposed as best as possible. However, even as we survive the prison term, there are other costs. There are financial struggles and the stigma and pain that have gone largely unseen. Most importantly, there is a growing movement for liberation built by Black women—Mainline Mamas—that is barely legible. Therefore, I offer two implications, based on the experiences in this work.

A Seat at the Table

First and foremost, Mainline Mamas experiences are marginalized both by the prison system and even in spaces that push for abolition—often our voices are left out. This dissertation, and the stories of Mainline Mamas, are part of a rarely discussed section of both academic and activist literature on mass incarceration. While those who have been incarcerated or currently incarcerated are rightly at the center of the movement, the nature and network of care work performed by Mainline Mamas necessitates our inclusion in the movement. From my own experience, having to navigate visitation, while managing my children, managing my family, helping to maintain my incarcerated partner's sanity and wellbeing while incarcerated, all while trying to maintain my own sense of self. Mainline Mamas perform the care work underlying the networks of community support that form. The stories of Sunshine, Love, and my own, reveal this network of care work that Mainline Mamas perform becomes the foundation for political activism and resistance. Much like Ruth Wilson Gilmore's work on Mother's ROC revealed the network of mothers agitating for their incarcerated children, Mainline Mamas represent a network of support that connects Black women both because of and in spite of the prison system.

For Mainline Mamas, incorporating our voices means incorporating the experiences of Mainline Mamas in advocacy. We provide unique insights from navigating the prison system on the outside, understanding the system of visitation, while also doing the care work for families, children, and incarcerated loved ones. This means ensuring and requiring space for Mainline Mamas within abolitionist movements by

including Mainline Mamas as a part of the space. The stigmas that affect Mainline Mamas keep us out of the movement—either as an actual ignorance of our experience or mistaking that having incarcerated persons as part of the movement recognizes our stories, or our inclusion is satisfied by including us only in retellings by interlocuters. It is important to have Mainline Mamas speak from our own personal experiences and voice to challenge the network of complications from the prison system, rather than appointing mouthpieces who have not had to personally navigate the prison system. Crucial for me in organizing this work and building the connections is my personal experience as a Mainline Mama. My story is what drew me in to this work. It created the connections with the other women in this study, since we could speak a common language of experience in visiting prisons even if we are different ages or from different places. Including experiences of Mainline Mamas as part of the movement helps focus movement against incarceration as a social movement, not just against a particular prison or institution. Mainline Mamas stories demonstrate the far-reaching effects of incarceration. There is no way to make prison nicer. Prisons inherently promote state violence and trauma. Mainline Mamas show how the incarceration of persons creates far reaching community effects by the existence of the borderlands, and the crossings we must make. Incorporating the voices of Mainline Mamas therefore is about strengthening the message of abolition, indicting the prison state, and eliminating incarceration as a structure in society.

Addressing Networked Traumas of Incarceration

Although Mainline Mamas form extensive networks of care and support, a common thread I found among all my participants was the network of traumas that form from their interactions with the state. Mainline Mamas are forced into a relationship with the state—they must navigate the state in order to maintain relationships, but in those relationship the state exploits and takes their care work as part of the system of rewards and incentives it uses in incarceration. This forced relationship coordinates with the stigmas surrounding Black women in society, as well as the particular stigmas affecting mainline mamas that come with the practical and emotional isolation and shaming that comes from visitation, the state, and even our own families and communities. However, Mainline Mamas are left largely without a support system of their own, other than the other Mainline mamas that they rely on. Part of this is because their voices and experiences are not fully incorporated into conversations on mass incarceration. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy—the feelings of isolation that come from being a Mainline Mama led to a self-imposed isolation, and withdrawal from social life, coupled with an intense fear of the carceral state, drawn from their own experiences and personal knowledge of how the prison system effects people.

Mainline Mamas form critical, important networks of support as we build community, validate each other's experiences, mother, and care for each other in practical ways. However, these networks of support are not the end of the story in providing the type of mental health support that Mainline Mamas need. For some, having other voices to validate and support may be enough, but from my own personal

experiences and the stories of the women I talked to, there are layers of trauma that might only start to be addressed with professional help, and additional resources. For some of us, sometimes it was enough just to have each other. But as Sunshine emphasized, there must be additional community resources available to women who need it. On one level this means having access to therapy financially, typically the only services available covered by insurance are in-patient or extreme high risk when someone is suicidal.

Providing resources, such as therapy, is a crucial step but must be made in connection with having those resources available in proximity geographically to Mainline Mamas where they live and stay, having the types of mental health and support resources embedded within the community is important to improving health outcomes and creating that network of support. Finally, it is important to have therapists and other mental health resources who can understand Mainline Mamas experiences—either from personal experience as a Mainline Mama or those with sufficient empathy, training, and personal connection to assist others. As I found, and as the women in my study presented, Mainline Mamas feel isolated even from those who are usually close to them as friends and family, because of the stigmas and internalized shame that are connected to the traumas inflicted by the state. We need mental health resources that are specifically trained and experienced with addressing the traumas inflicted by the state, to further the mental health of Mainline Mamas, who have been trying to navigate the system of prison or the system of mental health by ourselves for so long.

Everyone Survived but Nobody Survived

My dissertation represents my life. A part of my life I used to hide, be ashamed of, and am only in the past decade talking openly about in public, in my writing in my work. As I look at myself, my friends, women I met along the way, my former partner who was incarcerated. We are all so profoundly affected by prisons, the only way to describe our trauma is the profane: we are fucked up. I wrote this to remind people that we, Mainline Mamas, exist. We may be seen in everyday life, but the traumas and impact of prisons is not always apparent on the outside. I am finishing a dissertation, completing graduate school, and I understand the recognition of my accomplishment. I've had people complement me that "you've survived" when I tell them about my experience. I have survived, but at what cost? What did I lose along the way, and what did I gain? I wrote this dissertation for me, and the women like me. For Mainline Mamas who walk, talk, exist, and survive, but carry a deep-seated trauma and community that we rarely share with outsiders. It is a unique voice and perspective that is an integral part of who I am now, and who I always will be. This dissertation is for everyone who survived, and those who didn't, and those of us who survive in part, in pieces, or just one day at a time. I write this for us to be heard, to be known, and to be respected.

I write about my experience as a Mainline Mama to speak back to the years I spent engaged in care work—caring for my children whose father was incarcerated, caring for my incarcerated partner, caring for my friends and family while I was also trying to navigate the prison system. In writing this dissertation and connecting my experiences with other women engaged in the system of care work, my fellow Mainline

Mamas, I was able to contextualize my care work in the system of exploitation by the prison system. The prison attempts to acknowledge that care work that it exploits and relies on, drawing on the labor of women who are forced into a relationship with the state, by using us Mainline Mamas as an incentive. The relationship with a family is a carrot used to encourage compliance for people who are incarcerated, and to control Mainline Mamas who are engaged in care work because our care for others is now both a benefit to the state. The state also relies on us to do its work. Attempts to incorporate our work into the system, through family councils through any acknowledgement, creates the appearance of concern by the state, while keeping our labor exploited and provides additional work for Mainline Mamas. In order to end the exploitation of Mainline Mamas, and our silencing, the solution is not recognition by the state, or incorporation into the prison system, but an outright abolition of the prison. The only way to stop the exploitation, ignorance, and oppression of Mainline Mamas is to end the prison system.

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APPENDIX A

DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

Mainline Mamas, for the most part, are not a publicly visible group. Finding a group of women willing to discuss their experiences with prisons, particularly in relation to mothering, proved to be difficult. I started convenience sampling from my own social network, women I knew who had some relationship to mothering and prisons. My goal was to interview 10-15 adult Black women, to provide a variety of experiences that would add to the data on Mainline Mamas. As described in chapter 1, I also include myself as a participant in the research using autoethnography, particularly self-interview. I reached out to 4 other women personally to ask them to participate, selected based on personal connections to me and my knowledge of their experiences with mass incarceration. Of the 4 women I initially asked to participate, I asked them to reach out to others they knew who met the criteria (Black woman who has experience with prison and mothering). Through this snowball sampling, I was able to find 3 additional participants. I also sent out calls for participants through social media networks and professional networks via e-mail—again seeking Black women with experience with prison and mothering. No participants came through social media, though I did receive support and interest from non-Black women with similar relationships to prisons and mothering. I did have an initial conversation with one potential participant through a professional network, but ultimately, she declined to participate because she did not want to discuss her experiences.

In total, 6 women agreed to participate in my study, leading to 7 total interviewees including my autoethnographic self-interview. This is an intentional sample of Black women who are formerly incarcerated or have incarcerated loved ones and have become

engaged in work against mass incarceration because of this connection. We all have different experiences of incarceration, education, profession, relationships, etc. which will add unique a perspective on our common experience as Black mothers working against mass incarceration.

The 7 participants all identify as Black women with a direct connection to the prison system, between the ages of 40 and 68. All of these Black women have either had constant contact with prisons through an incarcerated partner, have personally been incarcerated, or both. All of the women have at least 20 years of experience dealing with the prison in some form. All 7 participants self-identify with mothering—some do not have biological children, but see themselves as a mother, which is further discussed in interviews and data in chapter 5.

Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval, Interviews were conducted between May 2018 and March 2020. I had to renew IRB twice to complete interviews, due to a confluence of personal health problems and subject's availability. Each participant was sent the required consent forms and properly anonymized. Each interview was planned around 1.5 hours of conversation from the interview, based on the written interview protocol located in Appendix A. Because all the women in the study are also working professionals, aligning schedules and time for interview varied dramatically. Each interview was therefore scheduled for an hour and a half, but most went longer than the intended time. Interviews were conducted via telephone and recorded on a digital

recorder. The recordings were then organized, made anonymous, and sent to an external transcription service, totaling 137 pages of transcribed interviews.

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTATION

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL INSTRUCTIONS AND TEMPLATE		
NUMBER	DATE	PAGE
HRP-503a	7/2/2021	1 of 4

Instructions and Notes:

- Depending on the nature of what you are doing, some sections may not be applicable to your research. If so, mark as "NA".
- When you write a protocol, keep an electronic copy. You will need a copy if it is necessary to make changes.

1 Protocol Title

Include the full protocol title: Everybody Survived, but Nobody Survived: Black Feminism, Motherhood, and Mass Incarceration

2 Background and Objectives

Provide the scientific or scholarly background for, rationale for, and significance of the research based on the existing literature and how will it add to existing knowledge.

- Describe the purpose of the study.
- Describe any relevant preliminary data or case studies.
- Describe any past studies that are in conjunction to this study.

The purpose of the project is to examine the effects of mass incarceration on mothering, for Black women. Primarily this study focuses on how mothering happens in different spaces and how mothers navigate the prison system while advocating for themselves and their families. This study will draw from personal experience and the experiences of similarly situated Black women. Previous literature predominantly focuses on men, but with a growing body of literature on the experiences of incarcerated Black women. However even these works, like those of Michelle Alexander, Donald Braman and Megan Comfort, rarely do so from the perspectives of Black women who have gone through the process of mothering in context of mass incarceration. My project contributes to the body of literature by presenting conversations among Black women from our own perspectives and our own voices. My goal is to use our personal stories and experiences to contribute to larger theoretical conversations on Black womanhood, mothering, and mass incarceration, from the unique perspectives of Black women without having these conversations mediated, filtered, or reinterpreted by those who have not experienced mothering within the prison industrial complex.

3 Data Use

Describe how the data will be used. Examples include:

- Dissertation, Thesis, Undergraduate honors project
- Publication/journal article, conferences/presentations
- Results released to agency or organization
- Results released to participants/parents
- Results released to employer or school
- Other (describe)

The data will be used for my dissertation.

4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Describe the criteria that define who will be included or excluded in your final study sample. If you are conducting data analysis only describe what is included in the dataset you propose to use.

Indicate specifically whether you will target or exclude each of the following special populations:

- Minors (individuals who are under the age of 18)
- Adults who are unable to consent
- Pregnant women
- Prisoners
- Native Americans
- Undocumented individuals

I have chosen to interview 10-15 adult women. All were selected based on personal connections and experiences with mass incarceration. This is an intentional sample of Black women who are formerly incarcerated or have incarcerated loved ones and have become engaged in work against mass incarceration because of this connection. We all have different experiences of incarceration, education, profession, relationships, etc. which will add unique a perspective on our common experience as Black mothers working against mass incarceration. I exclude all categories that are defined as special populations.

5 Number of Participants
Indicate the total number of participants to be recruited and enrolled: 15

6 Recruitment Methods

- Describe who will be doing the recruitment of participants.
- Describe when, where, and how potential participants will be identified and recruited.
- Describe and attach materials that will be used to recruit participants (attach documents or recruitment script with the application).

I will be doing the recruitment of the participants. The women that have been selected have been identified and recruited at multiple prisons that I have visited the father of my children who is a formerly incarcerated person. I have selected these specific women through personal connections and shared experience that I have established over many years. There is no recruitment script.

7 Procedures Involved
Describe all research procedures being performed, who will facilitate the procedures, and when they will be performed. Describe procedures including:

- The duration of time participants will spend in each research activity.
- The period or span of time for the collection of data, and any long term follow up.
- Surveys or questionnaires that will be administered (Attach all surveys, interview questions, scripts, data collection forms, and instructions for participants to the online application).
- Interventions and sessions (Attach supplemental materials to the online application).
- Lab procedures and tests and related instructions to participants.
- Video or audio recordings of participants.
- Previously collected data sets that that will be analyzed and identify the data source (Attach data use agreement(s) to the online application).

I will conduct 2 to 3 interviews with each participant. Each interview will consist of 1-1/2 hours. The data collection will span over 2 months with room for follow up, if needed. I will use audio recording of each participant with their consent. Sample interview questions are attached. Because interviews are semi-structured, some interview questions will occur spontaneously to follow up on themes or ideas that emerge from the interview process. Additional questions in subsequent interviews may build upon questions or themes that emerge from other participants, these questions will be noted and a modification will be submitted if necessary.

8 Compensation or Credit

- Describe the amount and timing of any compensation or credit to participants.
- Identify the source of the funds to compensate participants
- Justify that the amount given to participants is reasonable.
- If participants are receiving course credit for participating in research, alternative assignments need to be put in place to avoid coercion.

N/A

9 Risk to Participants
List the reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences related to participation in the research. Consider physical, psychological, social, legal, and economic risks.

The foreseeable risk and/or discomfort that might be related to this project are psychological. I am asking questions that for some are centered on a difficult time in their life. Therefore, there may be some discomfort talking about mass incarceration and its effects on mothering.

10 Potential Benefits to Participants

Realistically describe the potential benefits that individual participants may experience from taking part in the research. Indicate if there is no direct benefit. Do **not** include benefits to society or others.

No direct benefits

11 Privacy and Confidentiality

Describe the steps that will be taken to protect subjects' privacy interests. "Privacy interest" refers to a person's desire to place limits on with whom they interact or to whom they provide personal information. Click here for additional guidance on ASU Data Storage Guidelines.

Describe the following measures to ensure the confidentiality of data:

- Who will have access to the data?
- Where and how data will be stored (e.g. ASU secure server, ASU cloud storage, filing cabinets, etc.)?
- How long the data will be stored?
- Describe the steps that will be taken to secure the data during storage, use, and transmission. (e.g., training, authorization of access, password protection, encryption, physical controls, certificates of confidentiality, and separation of identifiers and data, etc.).
- If applicable, how will audio or video recordings will be managed and secured. Add the duration of time these recordings will be kept.
- If applicable, how will the consent, assent, and/or parental permission forms be secured. These forms should separate from the rest of the study data. Add the duration of time these forms will be kept.
- If applicable, describe how data will be linked or tracked (e.g. masterlist, contact list, reproducible participant ID, randomized ID, etc.).

If your study has previously collected data sets, describe who will be responsible for data security and monitoring.

Data and audio recordings will be stored on password protected personal computer. I will be the only person that has access to the data. Data will be stored until the completion of the dissertation and publication. The consent forms will be keep in a separate file on my personal password protected computer. Data will be organized in a master list spreadsheet on my computer which will list the pseudonym, date of interview, means of interview (skype, In person, etc.), file name of recording, and file name of transcript.

12 Consent Process

Describe the process and procedures process you will use to obtain consent. Include a description of:

- Who will be responsible for consenting participants?
- Where will the consent process take place?
- How will consent be obtained?
- If participants who do not speak English will be enrolled, describe the process to ensure that the oral and/or written information provided to those participants will be in that language. Indicate the language that will be used by those obtaining consent. Translated consent forms should be submitted after the English is approved.

I will be the sole person responsible for the consenting participants. Consent will take place before the interview starts. I am requesting a waiver of signed consent and the signature on the consent form has been removed. Explicit instructions will be given to all participants to refrain from using their real name during the interview process. For those participants who do use their real name in any part of the interview, their name will be deleted from the audio recordings. There are not any participants in this project that do not speak English.

13 Training

Provide the date(s) the members of the research team have completed the CITI training for human participants. This training must be taken within the last 4 years. Additional information can be found at: Training.

Consent Form

Everybody Survived, but Nobody Survived:
Black Feminism, Motherhood and Mass Incarceration

My name is Keeonna Harris, I am a doctoral student under the direction of Professor H.L.T
Quan in the Justice Studies Department/School of Social Transformation/College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to examine the effects of mass incarceration on mothering, for Black women. Primarily this study focuses on how mothering happens in different spaces and how mothers navigate the prison system while advocating for themselves and their families. This study will draw from personal experience and the experiences of similarly situated Black women. My project contributes to the body of literature by presenting conversations among Black women from our own perspectives and our own voices. My goal is to use our personal stories and experiences to contribute to larger theoretical conversations on Black womanhood, mothering, and mass incarceration, from the unique perspectives of Black women without having these conversations mediated, filtered, or reinterpreted by those who have not experienced mothering within the prison industrial complex.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve 2-3 in-person or skype interviews.
Each interview will consist of 1-1/2 hours and will take place between May and September of 2018. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time. I plan to record the audio of each interview, but the interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there is no penalty or negative consequence.

By participating in this interview, you acknowledge you are 18 years or older, and give your consent to be interviewed and have that interview used in my dissertation research, which will be made available to you upon completion. In addition, please refrain from using your real name during any part of the interview process.

Although there is no direct benefit to you, possible benefits of your participation reach beyond the academy. This research opens broader conversations on

mothering in movements for justice as a tool for organizing, but also as tools for living for women, families and communities facing similar circumstances.

However, because this is a personal project for myself and you, as a participant, there are potential risks of discomfort because I am asking questions that for some are centered on a difficult time in your life. You may refuse to answer a question or to end the interview if you do not feel comfortable continuing.

Any personal identifying information (your name, children's names, etc.) will be kept confidential. Your personal information, interview, and responses, all of which will be stored on a password protected folder on my computer. Your responses will be confidential, and we will agree on a pseudonym before publication.

The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will always be kept confidential. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be given a copy of the consent form so you can contact me with any questions regarding the process or outcomes of this study and your interview.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me: Keeonna Harris at 626-485-2088 or kharris7@msn.com. My dissertation chair, Dr. H.L.T. Quan, is listed with the university as the Principle Investigator (P.I.). Please contact me with any and all inquiries, but you may also reach Dr. Quan at hq@asu.edu if you have remaining questions.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 9656788.

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

APPROVAL: EXPEDITED REVIEW

H.L.T. Quan
Social Transformation, School of (SST) 480/727-8461 h.q@asu.edu

Dear H.L.T. Quan:

On 5/23/2018 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Everybody Survived, but Nobody Survived: Black Feminism, Motherhood, and Mass Incarceration
Investigator:	H.L.T. Quan
IRB ID:	STUDY00008252
Category of review:	(6) Voice, video, digital, or image recordings, (7)(b) Social science methods, (7)(a) Behavioral research
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• IRB Protocol, Category: IRB Protocol; • Interview Questions, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Dissertation Consent Form, Category: Consent Form;

The IRB approved the protocol from 5/23/2018 to 5/22/2019 inclusive. Three weeks before 5/22/2019 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 5/22/2019 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the
INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Keeonna Harris
Keeonna Harris

Interview Protocol

Preliminary

Age:

Number of Children (biological, adopted, or other):

Who do you consider to be part of your family?

As a mother, specifically?

How often do/did you visit your incarcerated parent/relative/etc.?

How much time does/did it take to travel to the prison?

How much would you guess it costs, per visit?

What expenses go into a visit?

Is visiting a financial strain?

In-depth

What resources do you wish you had to help with your current situation?

Who do you look for emotional, physical, mental, and financial support?

What does motherhood mean to you?

With whom do you share your experiences, especially as a mother?

Do you feel that being a mother has affected your relationship with your incarcerated loved one?

How has raising children with an incarcerated parent affected your relationship with your children?

What is your relationship to prison?

How does having an incarcerated loved one affect how you see yourself?

Have you become involved in any kind of “activist” work because of an incarcerated loved one? (voting, organizing, etc.)

Did you have any expectations of what it would be like to raise children with an incarcerated person? /Did you have any expectations of what it would be like to raise children while incarcerated?

What was the most important thing you learned?

What do you wish someone had told you at the beginning?

If you could tell your younger self something about raising children with an incarcerated person, what would it be? If you could tell your younger self something about raising children while incarcerated, what would it be?

Did you form any kind of community with the other women, either visiting or incarcerated?

> How did you come to that community, or how did you learn to trust and befriend each other?

How did you support each other? What was the most important part of that community you shared?

How do feel about the responsibilities of caring for children with an incarcerated loved one?

How do you cope with being a mother behind bars?

Who takes care of your children?

How did being incarcerated affect your relationship with your children?

How often do your children visit you?

Is visiting a financial strain?

How does being an incarcerated mother affect how you see yourself?