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**THE MILESTONES PROJECT: HOW EX-OFFENDERS MAY
COLLECTIVELY NEGOTIATE REENTRY BARRIERS**

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COLLECTIVELY NEGOTIATE REENTRY BARRIERS**

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those who elected to become part of the research project and give so freely of their perspectives on offender reentry. Thanks must also be given to the community collaboration known as the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable who provided me with access to the research population in the first place. Naturally none of this would have been possible without their assistance. I remain eternally grateful.

THE MILESTONES PROJECT: HOW EX-OFFENDERS MAY COLLECTIVELY NEGOTIATE REENTRY BARRIERS

Michael Steven Balliro, PhD.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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The purpose of this project was to explore how ex-offenders collectively leverage personal and community assets to transcend passivity and powerlessness in the face of reentry barriers, as well as to identify the personal milestones that signal social and community re-integration, post-incarceration. A qualitative inquiry utilizing interviews and a support group structure modeled on action research was used to generate two distinct products. The first product concerned a peer-group model that could be employed by ex-offenders as a form of community capacity building. The second product sought to identify reentry milestones utilized in the development of effective support programs to aid ex-offenders in the areas of employment and housing. Data collection points included the narratives elicited from participants during the intake and exit interviews, a grounded theory analysis fostered during each support group session with the intent to identify group curriculum, and the life stories revealed in the reflective journals all participants are asked to maintain. Narrative analysis was employed to understand the meaning participants provide to the work of the support group as well as the volunteer work they are asked to do to illustrate their commitment to community building. The participants utilized a grounded theory analysis to examine transcripts of group discussions in an effort to explicate the most important components of a peer-group model.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	ix
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Research Problem	1
Purpose Statement.....	6
Research Questions.....	8
Research Approach.....	9
Anticipated Outcomes.....	11
Research Assumptions	12
Rationale and Significance	13
Researcher Perspectives.....	16
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	18
Purpose & Rationale	18
Imprisonment	19
Policy	27
Reentry	31
Reentry Demographics.....	34
Disproportionality & Stigma.....	40
Reentry Services	44
Social Capital	47
Civic Engagement.....	50
Peer and Self-Help Groups	55
Participatory Action Research	60
Empowerment	67
Summary	71
Conceptual Framework	74
Reintegrative Shame	75
Epistemic Injustice.....	78
Synthesis	80

Chapter Three: Methods	84
Introduction & Overview	84
Research Sample	86
Overview of Research Design & Data Collection Methods	90
Analysis and Synthesis of Data.....	92
Ethical Considerations	93
Questions of Trustworthiness	95
Limitations of the Study.....	98
Summary	99
Chapter Four: Findings	101
Introduction.....	101
Data Collection	101
Key Findings.....	107
Altruism among and between ex-offenders.....	107
Gendered differences with respect to accessing reentry services.	109
Gendered differences with respect to interpreting the meaning of incarceration.....	113
Diminishing stigma through personal transformation.	125
Chapter Five: Analysis.....	131
Introduction.....	131
Altruism among and between ex-offenders.....	132
Gendered differences with respect to accessing reentry services.	138
Gendered differences in interpreting the meaning of incarceration.....	142
Diminishing stigma through personal transformation.	155
Synthesis and Conclusion	163
Chapter Six: Conclusions.....	167
Introduction.....	167
Conclusion & Discussion.....	168
Method and Design Considerations.....	176
Recommendations.....	182

Peer-directed Support Groups.....	183
Empowerment Projects with Marginalized People.....	185
Implications for Service Access and Policy Discourse.....	187
Potential Significance for Social Work Practice.....	188
Limitations	190
Personal Reflections.....	192
Bibliography	200

List of Figures

Figure One: Participant Demographics	103
Figure Two: First Level Coding - Week Three	105

Chapter One

Introduction

RESEARCH PROBLEM

For five decades spanning the 1920s through the 1960s, the total number of people in the US held in state and federal prisons fluctuated between 150,000 and 200,000 (Mauer, 2006). Neither an economic depression, entrance into the second world war, or an influx in immigration succeed in destabilizing this relatively fixed number of incarcerated persons, leading some theorists to speculate that these numbers might forever remain stable and predictable (Cole, 2009). Other theorists from this same period quite reasonably speculated that we would enter into a period where the prison had outlived its function and the state would find new, less coercive, means of controlling its wayward populace (Foucault, 1995; Rothman, 2008). Speculations such as these, in retrospect, sound quite naive given current circumstances.

The period of time we associate with the beginning of our current carceral binge, the 1970s, corresponds with several emerging policy trends. This period directly follows the widespread availability of new anti-psychotic medications which resulted in the de-institutionalization of those with a diagnosis of severe mental illness. Unfortunately, the community resources required to minister to these clients in the community was not always in place, so some of these individuals were simply transferred from one institutional setting to another (Parenti, 1999). The 1970s was also a period of great political division characterized by highly visible street protests over issues of civil rights and opposition to an increasingly unpopular war. The presidential administration

at this time utilized great rhetorical flourish to characterize the forces of the status quo as “law and order,” standing in opposition to criticisms leveled by youth and something called a “counter-culture,” all of which were assumed to use recreational drugs as well as suffering from a series of other associated vices. This period gave witness to the expansion of several policies of criminalization, especially policies targeting those in possession of, or using, drugs. Law enforcement capabilities were expanded in an effort to stem the use of newly restricted substances, these efforts made under the guise of maintaining law and order (Perlstein, 2008). Lastly, this decade follows the dismantling of Jim Crow laws in the south, suggesting that new mechanisms of control would now be required as the old mechanisms were systematically dismantled by legislative and judicial mandate (Alexander, 2010).

These policy changes parallel equivalent changes in the culture and practice of corrections. Where once the emphasis was to rehabilitate offenders, this ethos would be replaced by a reinvigorated urge to punish individuals as well as remove them from the community for extended periods of time (T. G. Blomberg & Lucken, 2000; Garland, 2001; Travis, 2001). Presently more than 2.3 million persons are incarcerated in the US, a historic number that amounts to between 20 and 25% of the total number of people imprisoned worldwide (Liptak, 2008). This disproportionate and dubious distinction belongs to a nation that contains less than 4% of the world’s population.

With ever increasing numbers sent to prison, it was inevitable this would lead to record numbers of individuals returned to the community. Various studies estimate that either 93% or 95% of the incarcerated are returning home (Austin, 2001; Petersilia, 2003;

Travis, 2005). In 2008, this percentage translated into 700,000 prisoners released, which, at generally acknowledged rates of recidivism, translates into 469,000 who will likely face re-arrest within three years (Cole, 2009). At the same time, new technologies of surveillance and control increase reliance by overburdened parole offices on the use of the technical violation to revoke parole (Austin, 2001; Seiter & Kadela, 2003). As a result of the high rate of recidivism, it would be difficult to end the reliance on imprisonment as a means of social control even if it were possible to cease incarceration for all first time convictions (Kohl, Hoover, McDonald, & Solomon, 2008).

Data collected by the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicate a great deal about who is incarcerated, who is released, and how these demographics have changed through this period of hyper-incarceration. In 1980 parole violators represented 17% of admissions into the prison system. In 2001 the percentage of prison admissions represented by parole violators jumped to 36% (Blumstein & Beck, 2005). While this fact may be remarkable all by itself, it is made even more remarkable by the fact that in 1980 the bulk of parole violators consisted of burglars and robbers, two categories of crime that are associated with high recidivism rates. By 2001, drug offenders represented the category most at risk for recidivism, this due in part to the growth of their overall numbers in the prison population, their particular vulnerability to relapse, but most importantly, to the fact that they generally serve shorter sentences and will thus cycle through the system at faster rates than those sentenced for crimes not drug related. In a relatively short period of time, drug offenders came to achieve dominate percentages not only among convictions, but also for release and re-arrest (Blumstein & Beck, 2005).

The trends among those facing incarceration and eventual release promise a population consisting of those who are increasingly poor, majority ethnic, and overwhelmingly convicted of non-violent offenses. They will also have served longer prison terms than their predecessors, and for the most part, will lack adequate preparation for community release (Justice Policy Institute, 1999; Petersilia, 2005; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Travis & Petersilia, 2001).

In the past three decades, the emphasis on expanding prison capacity has translated into the bulk of criminal justice resources going toward building new prisons, while once vigorous rehabilitation and reentry programs are now underfunded and overextended (Austin, 2001; Petersilia, 2003; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Solomon, Visher, LaVigne, & Osborne, 2006; Travis & Petersilia, 2001).

Research suggest that ex-offenders who are provided material resources such as housing and employment exhibit a decreased tendency to recidivate; and those lucky enough to have social resources (family and community connections) also tend to be more successful at staying out of prison (Flavin, 2004; Martinez, 2006; Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). Many who exit prison lack such resources, especially those from under-resourced communities. If released into the same underserved communities in which they were originally arrested, many ex-offenders discover that instead of receiving support, they experience resentment because they place an added strain on the family and community (Clear, 2007; O. Harris & Miller, 2002; Solomon, et al., 2006; Travis, 2001). Ex-offenders experience an enlarged sense of stigma that depletes what little social capital may have once been available in their communities of return (O. Harris & Miller,

2002; Travis, 2005). Employment opportunities may be scarce, limiting their ability to bring in income. Those convicted of felony drug crimes are in most states ineligible for food assistance. In such cases these ex-felons represent an extra mouth to feed. Their inability to rely on community support, and the enlarged sense of social stigma, are directly related to an increased risk of recidivism (Braithwaite, 1989; Pager, 2007).

The Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that convicted offenders disproportionately come from under resourced communities and return to these same communities following release (Petersilia, 2003). These conditions should not be assumed to cause high recidivism, but are most certainly contributing factors. Given the dearth of resources available to those engaged in community reentry, and especially in those communities ravaged by the imprisonment of so many, there is a need to explore low-cost mechanisms whereby those so afflicted may better articulate their need for support, transcend their social isolation, discover productive ways to engage with their families, and can be of service to the communities in which they live (Solomon, et al., 2006).

Much of the literature on mechanisms of successful reentry focuses on issues of supervision and monitoring as if reentry was nothing more than an exercise in offender management or an extension of one's prison sentence (Visher, LaVigne, & Castro, 2003). While it is necessary to ensure public safety from those convicted of violent crimes, it is unclear how citizens are served by the permanent stigmatization and disenfranchisement of all ex-offenders, especially given more than half of imprisoned today were convicted of non-violent offenses (Petersilia, 2005; Travis & Petersilia, 2001). Formal reentry

programs tend to prioritize satisfying conditions of parole and largely ignore the emotional and social damage that may have been incurred during incarceration (Haney, 2006), or to the harm afforded to families and communities who have experienced disruption when loved ones are imprisoned (Bramen & Wood, 2003).

While there is an entire genre of literature devoted to the personal narratives of those imprisoned (Chevigny, 1999; Santos, 2006), the personal narratives of those engaged in reentry do not achieve the same prominence. It is as if the lived experience of those engaged in reentry fails to count when it comes to policy discourse or the design of interventions aimed to facilitate reentry and ensure future desistance from crime.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this project is to explore how ex-offenders may collectively leverage personal and community assets to transcend passivity and powerlessness in the face of reentry barriers, and to help identify, for themselves and others, what may serve as the personal milestones that signal their social and community re-integration, post-incarceration.

This research study sought to explore dimensions of social re-integration, post-incarceration, that do not appear adequately addressed within the existing formal programs established to attend to ex-offender needs in their communities of return. Some of these missing or inadequately addressed dimensions include the ability to draw on personal experience to make sense of the obstacles they now face, begin to collectively come to terms with the trauma represented by their time in prison, and to confront barriers preventing civic engagement due to the stigma associated with their status as ex-

felons. Identifying these missing dimensions may help reveal the milestones for successful social reintegration, post-incarceration; an idea first proposed by Visher (2003) in an attempt to steer policy and research away from measurements of recidivism or desistance from crime. Tools that measure recidivism are currently the most common utilized in research with this population – tools that reflect a deficit approach to social services and re-enforce the negative stereotypes faced by ex-offenders (Christy A. Visher & Jeremy Travis, 2003). From a deficit perspective, ex-offenders are nothing more than crimes waiting to happen, the clock beginning to tick the moment following the committing of an offense (Maruna, 2001). From a milestones (or strengths based) perspective, ex-offenders can create new narratives that embody passages of successful transition from the prison environment to their communities of return (Christy A. Visher & Jeremy Travis, 2003).

This research sought to collect data utilizing methods that value the lived experience of the research participants and maximize their personal agency with reference to the research process, while remaining entirely transparent with respect to the goals of the project. In short, this research employed methods that mirrored the expected outcomes, methods that are considered consistent with social work norms and values. In this respect this project differs from much of the research conducted on this population, much of which reflects the goal of increasing supervision and control in the assumption that this is the most efficacious way to ensure public safety. This research is also concerned, ultimately, with public safety, but makes different assumptions regarding how this might best be achieved.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions considered by this exploratory research concern the value and meaning research participants place on their ability to give voice to their lived experience in an environment where they need not fear judgment or condemnation. Focus group research conducted previously by this investigator sought to explore the efficacy of the proposed dissertation research. This earlier research illustrated how participants effortlessly turned the focus group into an occasion for sharing resources, much as in a support group. Following these focus groups participants would often thank the researcher for the rare and valuable opportunity to share their perspectives with one another. DeVries (1996) reports that following incidents of major social disruption (in reference to trauma) it is valuable for people to engage in rituals, and be provided the space to carry out such rituals, so that they may reinstitute traditional social relationships.

How might research participants wish to construct a safe meeting space within which to process an understanding of their shared experience? What could be learned about this population's needs should they be allowed to design a model for such interaction? Will the participants find the exercise meaningful or useful, and if so, to what extent and why? Could such a project be sustainable without the direction of the principal investigator? These are the exploratory questions addressed through engagement in this project.

Additionally a series of questions were addressed through an analysis of the data collected for this project, questions which might serve in the construction of new theory with respect to this population. How can social support be effectively nurtured within

highly stigmatized populations? Can interventions designed to do this be effective? What might happen if ex-offenders, along with the families and communities that experience reentry, were able to contribute their perspective to these questions? What methodologies can best be used to uncover this perspective, and do so in a manner that honors the goals of reentry? How might an offender-focused reentry program operate? How might those who successfully negotiate reentry attempt to enlarge a policy discourse that otherwise insists on ignoring, or worse negating, their voices? These are the questions a project of this type provokes. In addressing these questions, this research may contribute to the inclusion of a social work approach in corrections, and possibly even push the boundaries of social work research and practice.

RESEARCH APPROACH

As many of those engaged in reentry are subject to monitoring and control by corrections officials, they will experience a loss of autonomy and privacy (Braithwaite, 1989). For this reason this population will be understandably wary of participating in research projects which appear destined to further contribute to a paradigm of surveillance and control. This investigator's previous research revealed a pervasive sense of cynicism with respect to the provision of services designed to aid in social reintegration following a period of incarceration. The lack of adequate service provision appears consistent with the current penchant for extracting punishment from those who have committed crimes, even after they have already served time for their offense. In addition, society in general and criminal justice authorities in particular foster an ethos of personal responsibility among those just exiting prison. Despite the stigma

and discrimination ex-felons may face following incarceration, society expects each ex-felon to take personal responsibility for assimilating back into their communities of origin while continuing to desist from those behaviors which originally brought them into contact with criminal justice. This ethos diminishes the capacity of ex-offenders to attribute their condition to systemic barriers, no matter how evident these may be; and instead to assume only personal responsibility for their circumstances as a normal condition of their ex-offender status.

For these reasons, it is useful to attempt engagement with ex-offenders in a manner that is entirely transparent and which reveals the researcher's beneficial intent. Transparency is typically required in research as a mandate of informed consent; however, in this case, the investigator sought to transcend simple consent with a model of collaboration that allows participants to self direct some elements of research design. In allowing participants some ownership over the research process, this project transcends the authority granted by informed consent. It is also serves to allay the fears of a population long conditioned to distrust research. Beneficial intent in this research is conveyed by the project goals which are largely participant centered, as opposed to researcher centered. Naturally, research requirements must be met in order for this project to generate material useful for a dissertation, but the research design in this case presumes that research participants can meet their needs while at the same time providing the primary investigator with valuable research material. Beneficial intent is also implicit in a project designed to have possible utility after the researcher has collected the required data and evacuated the scene.

Historically, much research on this population has been done through secondary analysis of data associated with crime statistics (Jenness, 2004). Generally considered as unsympathetic or unreliable narrators, researchers deem this population as inappropriate for qualitative research methods. This research seeks to challenge these assumptions and in this respect may contribute to the re-introduction of a social work (strengths-based) ethos in an area of service that has long been dominated by methods of supervision and control (T. G. Blomberg & Cohen, 2003).

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

This research was expected to reveal much about what ex-felons believe are their most pressing needs upon reentering the community. Current assumptions about this population's needs rarely take into consideration the perspective of those with direct experience, so it was expected that the mere collection of this kind of data can be tremendously useful. This information may assist service providers in designing programs to best meet those needs. It may also facilitate the development of theory with respect to how to best meet the needs of this population, or how to leverage self-interest in creating a context for ex-offenders to build systems to meet reentry needs.

Perhaps participation in a self-help project can prepare individuals to anticipate the barriers to social reintegration, though this research produced little in terms of diminishing or eliminating barriers encountered, particularly with respect to those barriers that are entirely outside participant control. On the other hand, ex-offenders were able to address the perceived limitations of barriers which group discussion revealed are within their control.

It was hoped this project might be self sustaining beyond the period of data collection, and that this might serve as evidence of the utility of such. During this project the principal investigator maintained a record of the participant findings based on a grounded theory analysis of transcripts provided during group proceedings. This record serves to document the work of the group as well as present a template for future peer support work, should the participants desire to continue meeting, expand, or otherwise modify membership. The research participants found little value in the grounded theory exercise and on occasion rejected the results. The principal investigator maintained responsibility for the narrative analysis that identified participant's attitudes toward project participation.

RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

This research rested on the assumption that those reentering the community following incarceration will be the most authoritative source of information regarding their lived experience. This research further assumed that ex-felons are capable of engaging in a reflective analysis of this lived experience and generate valid and valuable narratives in a peer-supported context where others will be prompted to articulate similar stories. A third assumption was that participant's ability to relay these narratives will serve some kind of approbative value, especially when this work is done in a supportive environment intentionally structured to provide safety for the participants. A fourth assumption suggested that the research would yield valuable information even if the peer-support model produced by this project fails to be sustained after the data gathering has ended. A fifth and final assumption pertained to the potential of the methodology

employed to stimulate feelings of empowerment via an increased sense of personal agency in engaging in a project that aims to transcend personal isolation, possible measures of which will be solicited from the narratives provided during the exit interview conducted at the project's conclusion.

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The rationale for this study emanated from the desire to uncover ways in which ex-offenders may meaningfully contribute to their social reintegration, challenge the imposition of disenfranchisement, and experience themselves as productive members of the community in the manner articulated by Braithwaite (1989, 2002) in his theory of reintegrative shame.

The significance of this project can be related to the relatively novel methodological approach taken with this population. Ex-offenders are consumers of social services much as several other disadvantaged communities; however the stigma generally associated with ex-offenders is not remediated by the same social norms that call into question discrimination leveled against communities that enjoy more sympathy, such as those with physical or mental disabilities, gays and lesbians, or people of different ethnicities or religious preferences. In the case of offenders who have been convicted, sentenced and served their time, they maintain the offender role as a 'master status' (Garland, 2001) that suggests they are forever deemed untrustworthy. As such, the perspective of the offender does not have much of an impact on models of service provision, and is often suspect when presented in the course of policy deliberation. This

research attempts to elevate the perspective of the ex-offender by validating their authority with respect to interpreting their lived experience.

Should research participants design a peer-support model that has utility and can be sustained beyond the data collection period, this research would have also achieved significance by contributing to the community a venue for ex-offenders to come together in useful ways to collectively negotiate a successful transition to life in their communities of return. As noted in the research, peer-directed groups can be used to build empathy for stigmatized groups, can re-write personal narratives of identity, and can serve as a link between informal systems and formal systems of care (Mead, Hilton, & L., 2001; Remine, Rice, & Ross, 1984).

As with many projects which operate within a social capital framework, or seeks to facilitate greater empowerment within a particular group, there was also a risk that such undertakings may devolve into a ‘feel good’ enterprise with no aim other than to offer solidarity among the aggrieved (Gutierrez, 1995; M. Mayer, 2003). To prevent this, the researcher took care to not promise more than could be delivered, and to focus on specific and achievable goals. In the case of this project, the goal was to design a peer-group model that other ex-offenders may employ.

There is an inherent risk in all group work that members might attempt to negotiate territory that contributes to discomfort among the participants. Given that one of the aims of this particular group included reflection upon the meaning given to their prison experience, and given that Haney (2003b) has already revealed in his research the trauma inducing potential of imprisonment, it is possible that painful memories may

emerge that are beyond the scope of management by a peer-support group. This possibility was addressed by distributing to all group members at the beginning of the project a resource list of sliding scale or low-cost mental health providers. Group participants were encouraged to avail themselves of these services should the need arise, and to weigh the benefits of group membership against the possible harm that may be exacerbated by further participation. As with all such projects, participants were able to decline further participation at any point.

Lastly, the researcher is aware that the values often associated with social work interventions are not well represented in criminal justice work (where such values may be referred to by the derogatory descriptor; “hug-a-thug,” a term used to distance punitive approaches from rehabilitative strategies). This research sought to explore an expanded role for social workers who embody a strengths-based perspective and are interested in learning about the utility of strength based models among the most marginalized and stigmatized of populations. Additionally the methods employed in this work may contribute to an increased ability to create theoretical models that can enlarge our understanding of service to this community. In this case, few theoretical models benefit offenders caught up in the U.S. criminal justice system. Social work in general also fails to engage in much work that expands upon theory creation. In this respect, the theoretically generative capacity represented by these particular research methodologies could be of great benefit.

RESEARCHER PERSPECTIVES

To make this project a reality, the researcher collaborated with the Austin Travis County Reentry Roundtable, a project of the Community Action Network, dedicated to bringing together key stakeholders in the interest of sharing resources and devising innovative ways to address social problems encountered in our community. In conducting the committee work necessary for moving forward the agenda of the Reentry Roundtable, and in later being invited to sit on the Planning Committee, the investigator was well placed to understand many of the issues ex-offenders face from the perspective of the state agencies tasked with coordinating reentry services, non-profits which fulfill specified needs, and advocates for the formerly incarcerated who desire to expand the availability of services. The Reentry Roundtable also aims to include more voices of the formerly incarcerated in policy discourse, thus echoing the aim of this project to enlarge the voice of the lived experience of reentry.

The Reentry Roundtable supported the preliminary research that explored the efficacy of the current research project. This research found that ex-offenders in the community who self selected for participation in focus groups designed to explore their access to services expressed honor at being asked their opinion, this being rare in their interactions with the criminal justice system, which generally operates coercively by dispensing instructions which must be followed at risk of penalty. Participants reported that they benefit from informal relationships to address common needs such as housing and employment, and that these informal relationships provided more significant support than otherwise acquired from formal sources of assistance. Participants were quick to use

the focus group as an opportunity to share resources, especially when it came to speaking about the availability of jobs within the community. Negotiating formal services was sometimes hampered by parole restrictions, limited access to transportation, and the accumulation of financial debt that occurred while in prison related to fines, restitution, fees for parole transactions, and child support. This investigator's experience in those focus groups greatly shaped the current research.

What constitutes much of the literature review prompted by this project also reflects the investigator's goal of understanding hyper-incarceration and the social consequences of this practice. Naturally, such an investigation requires a critical approach, especially since the punitive trend in corrections appears to generate more social problems than it solves (Stern, 2006). The perverse logic of expanding policies of criminalization also suggests a need to critically examine practice trends with the aim of possibly including the perspective of those so affected by these policies.

Lastly, this researcher's perspective is that qualitative methodologies can accomplish much in the way of enlarging the voice of the research subjects, a population not typically allowed the ability to weigh in critically with respect to the service provided, as are many other clients of social services. When a participatory component is added to qualitative inquiry, the potential to enlist practices that challenge feelings of passivity and powerlessness are also increased (Foucault, 1995), a condition that is magnified in the modern prison, and one that should be challenged if social reintegration is to be successful (Braithwaite, 1989; Uggen, Manza, & Thompson, 2006).

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

PURPOSE & RATIONALE

This chapter explores in greater depth some of the literature referenced in the previous chapter and provides a larger context for the related work. The first section explores the literature which attempts to frame several dimensions of the carceral crisis and posit a possible explanation of this trend in terms of a cultural shift. This literature then gives way to broader historical texts which focus more on policy evolution. The difference between the cultural shift texts and the policy texts is somewhat arbitrary as there is much overlap, but the decision to present the literature in this way is related to an observation that the cultural shift texts tend to focus on political or economic analysis, while the literature that centers on policy considerations are largely historical or anthropological. An important exception to this division would be the Garland (2001) text which clearly is about a shift in culture, though Garland's methods are more ethnographic than historical.

In the sub-sections following the examination of the prison and policy crisis, attention turns toward the population that bears the brunt of the crisis. In understanding the special needs of the reentry population it is necessary to first explore the literature detailing the wages of incarceration so that a better understanding can emerge regarding the impact of imprisonment on those who are about to be released back into the community. Following this is an examination of the literature that specifically concerns itself with understanding the barriers and complications related to successful reentry.

The final sub-sections of this literature review explore the material related to the support of possible interventions that may facilitate successful reentry, relative to the kind of work that is already being done and the fact that this very stigmatized community does not garner much in the way of outside advocacy. These sub-sections speak to social capital and civic engagement, the use of peer or self-help groups, and the use of empowerment and participatory methods.

IMPRISONMENT

The term mass incarceration has been applied to the increase in incarceration rates over the past several decades (Gottschalk, 2006; Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002), but this term has since been critiqued as inaccurate (Loury, Karlan, Shelby, & Wacquant, 2008). There are few documented attempts to sweep up offenders en masse for the purposes of keeping prisons full. The acceleration of carceral trends has more accurately been termed hyper-incarceration (Wacquant, 2005), though naturally there will be those who may take offense at this term and will argue that it is simply rhetorical. The fact remains that the number of persons incarcerated in the United States remained relatively stable (within 50,000) for five decades spanning the 1920s through the 1960s. Only at a particular historical moment starting around 1970 did incarceration rates increase dramatically. In the two decades alone spanning 1987 through 2007 the national prison population rate has nearly tripled (Warren, 2008). This increase occurred even though the United States does not experience a rate of crime higher than other industrialized nations (with the exception of homicides), nor does the United States experience fluctuations in crime rates that are different from other industrialized nations, yet other

nations have not experienced the same increase in rates of incarceration (Wacquant, 2005). The United States has now achieved incarceration levels never before documented in human history (Gottschalk, 2006; Wacquant, 2005; Warren, 2008). If hyper-incarceration were allowed as a relative term, it follows that it may be applied to the circumstances that currently exist in the United States.

The first prisons established in the U.S. were referred to as reformatories, a term which introduces a novel and somewhat disputed rhetorical notion that those so sentenced by courts were to be reformed (Rothman, 2008). The reform concept may be rationalized in terms of the immediate antecedent to the reformatory - the work houses - establishments created explicitly to inculcate individuals with the work ethic demanded during a period of history associated with a shortage of available labor and a fear of vagabonds (T. G. Blomberg & Lucken, 2000). One may argue that the workhouses were also intended to reform, but an added component of reform contributed by those who designed the new institutions included the element of solitude - a design concept not intended to protect the public from the recalcitrant as much as to protect the offender from the evils of society (Foucault, 1995). Under such conditions, the offender might meditate on his or her offense in monkish contemplation until such a time when they might return to society with greater fortitude to resist the temptations which originally gave rise to their incarceration (Foucault, 1995).

The rhetoric of the reformatory has fallen out of fashion and most in the US now refer to these facilities generically as prisons and seclusion within these institutions are commonly rationalized in terms of protecting public safety (Garland, 2003). In truth

'prisons' are those facilities either managed or contracted by the federal government or the individual states and designed for long-term imprisonment (generally greater than one year), while 'jail' is the proper term for either state or local facilities where the intended duration of stay is less than one year (Wacquant, 2005). Those housed in these facilities are known as offenders, or collectively as the incarcerated.

The number of offenders at any given time is a moving target. People move in and out of these institutions on a daily basis. The statistics provided to calculate the number of incarcerated individuals depend upon the collation of data from the several levels of government, each responsible for maintaining an accurate census independent of one another. Generally practice is to aggregate the number of people held in federal prisons with those held in the facilities of each of the 50 states, but it is not uncommon to also attempt a folding in of the number of individuals held in more local facilities. Because of this, it may be possible to describe an overall decrease in number of federal prisoners, while the increase in numbers held by individual states at the same time is increasing (or visa versa). Similarly, one could identify a decrease in the number of people sent to prison, while the actual prison population still continues to rise if the currently committed offenders are serving longer sentences.

The trend in the U.S. since the 1970s has been to dramatically increase the number of people who are sent to prison, largely due to policies of criminalization (Mauer, 2006). They will serve longer sentences than their cohorts in other industrialized countries under conditions that are less accommodating than the global norm for industrialized nations (Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005). There exists a trend indicating an

increase in the number of non-violent offenders held in US prisons, most typically those convicted of drug related offenses (Petersilia, 2003). Poor and ethnic minorities, who have always been proportionally over-represented among the incarcerated, have experienced increased disproportionately as a result of hyper-incarceration (Cole, 1999; Petersilia, 2003; Taxman, Byrne, & Pattavina, 2005). African Americans, of combined genders, amount to 13% of the total US population. At the apex of segregation, in the 1950, the prison population was 30% African American. In the current decade African Americans make-up more than 50% of the prison population, most of these males, accounting for a disparity displayed as an 8-1 ratio, that is, African Americans are eight times more likely to be incarcerated as Whites (Cole, 2009).

Current estimates place the total US prison and jail population at over 2.3 million (Cole, 2009; Liptak, 2008; Warren, 2008). All indications are that dramatic shifts in criminal justice policies, coupled with changing policies related to the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, contributed to the dramatic rise in prison populations (Gottschalk, 2006; Parenti, 1999). The carceral trends cannot be easily explained in terms of increased rates of crime, population expansion, or an increased threat to public safety; but rather are tied to a profound cultural shift directly attributable to a response to political and cultural upheaval of the 1960's (Garland, 2001).

To what do we attribute this profound cultural shift? Several studies investigate the role of for-profit media in sensationalizing elements of crime and thus expanding the fear of crime to an unreasonable extent; thus permitting the Reagan administration, for example, to expand the so-called war on drugs during a period of declining drug use

(Altheide, 2002, 2006; Lee, 2007). Other research focuses more specifically on the ability of politicians to manipulate the fear of crime, or in racializing crime, to serve a particular political agenda; as perhaps best illustrated by the skillful utilization of an image of Willie Horton to defeat Dukakis during the 1988 presidential race (Altheide, 2002, 2006; Parenti, 1999; Perlstein, 2008; Simon, 2007; Stenson & Cowell, 1991). Still others prefer to frame the current carceral crisis as a problem having to do with surplus labor and an economy that is threatened by large numbers of people who are not comfortably accommodated within the current economic system (Gilmore, 2007; Herivel & Wright, 2003; Parenti, 1999). All these texts, while differing in analytic framework, have in common an approach that starts with an examination of either political process or the prison crises itself.

There does not appear to be a consensus in the literature with respect to an explanation of the cultural shift, though the collected works that seek to address this question are often impressive in reach and scope. If there were a re-occurring theme in much of this work it can be said to have been foreshadowed in Rothman's *The Discovery of the Asylum*, first published in 1971 (2008). Rothman was obviously not concerned with hyper-incarceration as this phenomenon was only just unfolding upon the original publication of his book, but he was interested in the larger concept of institutional care, a phenomenon whose development and refinement he credits to the Jacksonian period (though in the preface to a more recent edition he is careful to note that the asylum was not a uniquely American invention) (Rothman, 2008). Rothman's influential thesis was that there emerged a broad consensus toward the increasing use of the asylum to address

a perceived fear of social disorder as the result of a rapidly changing society. The society experiencing disruption was characterized by communities and families changing shape, the accommodation of new immigrants leading to changing social mores, the westward expansion which led to increased dislocation, etc. To put it in simple terms, for Rothman the invention of the asylum was essentially an attempt to maintain social order (Rothman, 2008). Curiously, one may also say that the carceral trend that emerged in the early 1970s can also be ascribed to the perception of disorder in the U.S., circumstances certainly evident and highly exploited in the presidential elections of 1968 and 1972 (Perlstein, 2008).

There are also texts that approach the question via the employment of a philosophical or anthropological approach. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, first published in 1975 and translated into English in 1977, is evidently influential as illustrated by how frequently it is cited. Foucault is credited with introducing a history of the prison in western literature with a mind toward describing a hegemonic form of discipline characterized by an internalized self-regulation, the concept of self-regulation possessing greater meaning for those outside the prison walls than within. Foucault rejects the notion that prisons ever served a rehabilitative function, or that incarceration even serves to reduce crime. He cites historical literature that outlines a critique of prisons from the time of the French monarchy, prisons being a recent import to France from the United States, and points out how that critique in every way parallels the modern critique of the institution – that it fails in every way to produce the stated effect.

Prison culture fosters crime, creates a class of people at greatest risk for recidivism, and fails to assure public safety (Foucault, 1995).

But if the institution fails on those obvious levels then its persistence may better be explained in terms of what it succeeds in doing. In Foucault's thesis the prison, or for that matter all institutions of detention, are presented as a monument of symbolic reference to those who imagine themselves free. They consider themselves free because they are decidedly not like those others who require being caged, monitored, or otherwise controlled. The essential lesson here for all of us who reside outside the prison walls is that if we wish to avoid the fate of such people it is best we learn how to monitor (self-regulate) ourselves (Foucault, 1995).

The sociologist Wacquant refers to both Foucault and Rothman as historical revisionists, attributing to each a naive belief, circa the early 1970s, that states would soon come to replace prisons with other, more discrete, mechanisms of social control (Wacquant, 2005, 2008b). Of course leveling this accusation after the new millennium when mounting evidence suggests otherwise is to confuse foresight with hindsight, but we are never-the-less left to wonder how these scholars could have gotten their prediction so wrong. Wacquant's explanation for our collective rush toward even more punitive measures of criminal sanction rests heavily upon the thesis presented by Piven and Cloward (Wacquant, 2008b). In Regulating the Poor Piven and Cloward frame social welfare and relief programs as mechanisms for regulating those on the periphery of the market economy (Piven & Cloward, 1972). Wacquant takes this thesis one step further by suggesting that prisons offer the poor the choice of either accepting deskilled

employment or being warehoused. He supports this concept by documenting the inverse relationship assumed by budgetary allocations for both corrections and public aid between the years 1980 and 1995. In 1980 spending for both Aid to Families with Dependent Children and food stamps, the two major assistance programs, each outstripped the total state and federal spending for corrections; whereas by 1995 the total spending on corrections almost equaled the combined expenditures for all public assistance programs. Similar trends can be found with reference to educational spending (Wacquant, 2005).

Another one of the more influential texts, also evidenced by the number of times it is cited in later texts on the subject, is Garland's *The Culture of Control*. In this text Garland blames the modern state's expanded reliance on coercion and centralized control for the cultural shift under examination. Garland presents his investigation as an ethnographic study of the culture of crime control and criminal justice in Great Britain and the U.S. for the past thirty years. Much like Foucault, Garland distances himself from concerns about what causes crime, preferring instead to achieve some kind of understanding of what causes a particular response to crime. His alarming thesis is that the expanded role of the state with respect to monitoring and control comes at the expense of civil society and democratic participation. He also accuses the state of seeking to magnify threats to security in order to rationalize undemocratic actions (Garland, 2001). That concluding sentiment since loudly echoed by those who wish to critically examine state actions in response to threats of terrorism (Altheide, 2006; "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions," 2010; Williams, 2006).

POLICY

A history of penology appeared in 2000 which attempted to catalog the approaches toward crime that were prevalent in the United States during various periods dating back to the colonial era. Blomberg and Lucken's exhaustive review of criminal justice practices did not attempt to characterize an overall American approach, but instead closely examined how the practices of one era may have been a response to the era that immediately preceded it, and so on. As labor was an important resource to the new colonists, work houses made more sense than prisons, and shame and flogging were by far the most preferred methods of sanction. Post revolutionary America turned away from corporal punishment in favor of levying fines and shame fell out of fashion as the small, tightly knit communities started to give way to communities of a size where direct accountability began to loose value. As with Rothman, Blomberg and Lucken also identified an increased need for social order during a period of increased immigration and westward expansion. This led to the creation of the first municipal police forces and the construction of penitentiaries that would garner much attention from criminologists from Europe. An increasing reliance upon incarceration during the progressive era was accompanied by a strong belief in the power of rehabilitation, as might be appropriate for that period; but as we moved into the modern era the religion-inspired concept of rehabilitation began to take on an aura of scientific management. During this time there was an increasing belief that via correct scientific management we could eliminate the causes of crime. Finally, Blomberg and Lucken, much like Rothman and Foucault before them, foretold that we would soon lose interest in incarceration as we began to recognize

it did not serve our desire to curb crime and was prohibitively expensive as well (T. G. Blomberg & Lucken, 2000). As this book was published prior to the events of September, 2001, the writers could not have anticipated the renewed interest in national security that would result in a loss of civil liberties, a sustained demonization of the other, and an increased support for punitive measures (Stern, 2006; Williams, 2006).

Following on Foucault's assertion regarding the futility of incarceration, Stern asserts that the policies which marginalize poor or ethnic communities in fact replicate conditions that create criminals. Stern's work is international in scope as her analysis encompasses the global economic context. Stern's critique of criminal justice policy rests upon the observation that market forces exert undue influence over criminal justice policies, often at the expense of the state's interest in promoting more just outcomes. In Stern's conclusion she suggests that it is civil society itself that needs to be reformed through the creation of social policies that are not against criminals as much as they are against crime. Stern asserts the need for more policies that seek to enlarge social capacity over the expansion of the security state (Stern, 2006).

While each of these analytical approaches attempts to explain policy trends that lead to hyper-incarceration, few provide a clear pathway toward a new policy agenda that is capable of diminishing public fear about risk and safety, or challenges the political discourse which employs a rhetoric that demonizes criminals. The most helpful tests are those which recognize the complexity of policy discourse and tend toward an analysis of multiple policy dimensions that offer a more nuanced explanation of the crisis.

Gottschalk (2006) frames policy trends in terms of an accidental confluence of competing political ideologies. This research suggests, for example, that the increased visibility accorded ‘victims rights,’ as articulated by feminists, dovetailed perfectly with the punishment oriented ‘just desserts’ sentiments promoted by right wing factions. In another example of advocacy resulting in a peculiar confluence of political factions nominally thought to be in opposition, liberal concerns about reactionary judges prone to metering out punishment met conservative concerns over judges who were perceived as too lenient or soft on criminals, resulting in an end to judicial discretion in sentencing and implementation of mandatory minimum sentencing. Independent of Gottschalk, Wacquant also weighs in on the peculiar convergence of left and right perspectives that contributed to the development of mandatory minimum sentencing, a perhaps well intentioned reform that ultimately resulted in expanded sentences, prison overcrowding, and led to an abandonment of the rehabilitative ideal (Wacquant, 2005).

A common theme in much of the literature related to policies of criminalization emphasizes the unintended consequences which exacerbate the conditions these policies were designed to address (Clear, 1994). The most frequent example of this would be the assertion that prisons encourage crime - a principle component of several major texts (Foucault, 1995; Stern, 2006; Travis, 2001; Wacquant, 2005). Another example of criminal justice policies that appear to be at cross purposes concerns the court ordered release of those confined in overcrowded prisons in the mid-1990s, an event that coincided with the passage of the 1995 No Frills Prison Act which at the same time mandated that those sent to prison be compelled to at least serve 85% of their prison time

before being considered for parole (T. G. Blomberg & Lucken, 2000; Wacquant, 2005).

One could interpret this example as evidence of a dispute between the legislative arm of government (the congress) and the interpretive arm of government (the courts), but the result is that instead of shaping policy these two segments only managed to cancel one another out.

Stone (2002) refers to examples such as these as the “policy paradox,” where two policies appear to be at cross-purposes or where policy makers continue to promote strategies that empirical research warns will have negative consequences. While this might appear irrational on its face, Stone explains that this is not a contradiction, only a misinterpretation, of the idea that research and political ends must always meet, as if governance were always rational. The paradox is further explicated in the understanding that the primary goal of the politician is to achieve reelection, and this goal must only appear to serve public needs; while the goal of the policy analyst is to promote public policy that meets social needs first, and political needs second, if at all.

We would be hard pressed to find evidence of policy decisions that flow directly from available scientific research. In most cases scientific research, or some equivalent mechanism of persuasive leverage, are merely tools employed to mediate discourses that precipitate policy decisions. The historical evidence suggests strongly that the products of scientific research are by no means the only persuasive mechanisms deployed in policy discourse.

REENTRY

By some accounts, 95% of those in prison will eventually be released into the community (Austin, 2001; Petersilia, 2003). A more conservative account places this percentage at 93% (Travis, 2005). There is agreement that due to the increased resources applied to the building and maintenance of new prisons, fewer resources are generally available for reentry programs (Solomon, et al., 2006; Travis & Petersilia, 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003).

Offender reentry is the term used to describe the process of social reintegration engaged in by convicted offenders upon their release from prison (Travis & Visher, 2005). The goal of the reentry process is to assure that adjustment to a non-prison environment is successful, success here as understood by overcoming patterns of learned helplessness fostered by the prison environment and functioning in society in a manner that avoids further entanglements with the criminal justice system (Travis, 2005).

Speaking in the aggregate of the condition of offenders released from prison is complicated because these conditions will vary significantly between release from federal institutions, state, or local institutions (Travis, et al., 2001). In addition, each of the fifty states has its own rules with regard to prisoner release (Travis, et al., 2001). Often release is conditional with respect to expectations mandated by a state parole board, with the understanding that the offender will be able to maintain good citizenship, a term defined at the discretion of the parole officers to whom the offenders are released (T. G. Blomberg & Lucken, 2000; Travis, et al., 2001).

Access to formal reentry programs will vary from state to state, and from locality to locality, but for the most part will be limited to those who are paroled before the end of their sentence. Parole as understood as conditional release that requires the supervision and monitoring by a parole officer to determine if the conditions of release are being met. People on parole may find themselves processed in the same system that also monitors probationers, the difference being that those on probation will not have served time in prison, though they may possibly have served time in jail while awaiting trial and sentencing. A parolee who fails to meet the conditions of parole will be issued a violation and is subject to re-incarceration. As with probationers who fail to satisfy to satisfy their conditional deferment from prison, this is called a revocation.

Should an offender serve the entirety of his or her sentence, we speak of this as having “termed out.” This may also be referred to as a “flat discharge.” When this occurs there are generally few formal services available to the individual as most services are tied to conditional release. Certainly more research is needed regarding the needs of those given a flat discharge, but if Haney’s research is correct in suggesting that aggressive behavior exhibited in prison may relegate one to serve the remainder of his or her sentence in administrative segregation (and hence, unavailable for reentry preparation), then some of these individuals may have the highest need for reentry services, and are arguably those most in need for supervision when released into the community (Haney, 2003a).

References to rates of recidivism appear in the literature of criminology since at least 1870 when the American Correctional Association (known as the American Prison

Association prior to 1954) first met in an attempt to codify this language. When an ex-offender reoffends and is returned to jail for any reason, we say that he or she has recidivated. There is not agreement regarding what level of offense constitutes actual recidivism. Some measure recidivism as simple arrest, others tie recidivism to conviction, and still others believe that the conviction must result in a jail sentence before it can be said a person has recidivated. An examination of recidivism as a measure of successful reentry reveals the term is again inconsistently applied because there is no agreement as to how much time must pass before it can be determined if social reintegration is successful. For example, an application issued by the Justice Department for the purpose of applying for Second Chance Act funds (a Bush era legislative initiative that expanded reentry services available to ex-offenders and their families), suggested applicants must report rates of recidivism by tracking re-arrest rates for a single year. More commonly in the literature comparing recidivism rates between offenders is a reference to three years.

There is also a question of the utility of recidivism rates when they vary so much among categories of crime. For some offenses, such as murder or sex crimes, recidivism at any point is considered intolerable because the crimes are so odious. In fact, the recidivism rates for “crimes of passion” such as murder tend to be very low, especially when compared to crimes such as property, theft or drug offenses, where rates of recidivism are inordinately high (Christy Ann Visher & Jeremy Travis, 2003). Because of the disparity of rates of recidivism among different offenders, it is not accurate to speak of recidivism rates in the aggregate without reference to the crime convicted,

though it is done all the time in the literature. In a report published in 2003 by The Urban Institute, the aggregate rate of recidivism within three years was noted to be 68% for males, 58% for females (Visher & Travis, 2003). Another researcher isolated statistics for recidivism among those released from supervision and found an aggregate of 42% within three years (Maruna & LeBel, 2003).

REENTRY DEMOGRAPHICS

As of 1999 the average age of inmates upon release from state prisons was established as 34 years of age and these parolees were overwhelmingly male (90.1%). As to their ethnic make up, 47.3% were African American, 35.4% were White, and 16.1% were Hispanic. The majority of them, 50.8%, had yet to finish high school, while 42.2% had acquired either a GED or were high school graduates. Fully 7% report having completed at least some college (Petersilia, 2003).

Over half (55%) of state prisoners report being the parent of at least one child, though among female inmates the rate is 65%. Fully 45.3% report they were living with their children at the time of their admission. Less than 25% of the incarcerated parents report they are married, yet 85% reported that their child currently resides with the other parent. Incarcerated fathers were more likely to be serving time for violent offenses (46%), while the mothers were more likely to be serving time for drug offenses (35%). About 85% overall report some drug use while a quarter of all incarcerated parents were determined to be alcohol dependent. All were serving an average of 12 years in sentence length (Travis & Waul, 2003).

Overall those reentering the community self-report a history of drug or alcohol abuse at a rate of 74%, with 59% reporting having used substances a month prior to their arrest and 34% reporting use at the time of their arrest (Petersilia, 2003). These findings suggest that releasing offenders back into the community without some kind of treatment option may be self defeating, particularly when we take into consideration that 40% of first time offenders' exhibit substance abuse concerns and this percentage doubles to 80% for those with five or more convictions. Less than 15% of either State or Federal prisoners receive treatment while incarcerated for drug or alcohol abuse (Petersilia, 2003). Clearly the cost effectiveness of treatment over incarceration without treatment need be considered.

In 1980 parole violators represented 17% of admissions into the prison system. As an indication of how much the system had changed, in 2001 the percentage of prison admissions represented by parole violators jumped to 36% (Blumstein & Beck, 2005). While this fact may be remarkable all by itself, it is made even more remarkable when we acknowledge that in 1980 the bulk of parole violators consisted of burglars and robbers, two types of crime that are associated with high recidivism rates. By 2001 it was drug offenders who were placing first in the recidivism sweepstakes, this due in part to the growth of their overall numbers in the prison population, their particular vulnerability to relapse, but most importantly, to the fact that they generally serve shorter sentences than those convicted of other crimes and would cycle through the system at faster rates than their criminal cohort. In a short period of time drug offenders came to achieve dominate

percentages not only among convictions, but also for release and re-arrest, thus earning the triple crown if awards were given for such statistics (Blumstein & Beck, 2005).

The expanded number of drug offenders sent to prison changes the overall composition of the prison community, and consequently the composition of the reentry population. In 1980 the bulk of state prison inmates were convicted of violent offenses. By 2000 the violent offenders amounted to 45% of the total representing the first time since the Bureau of Justice Statistics started keeping records that non-violent offenders outnumber violent offenders. During this same period of time those convicted of drug convictions increased 546% - far more than any other category of offense. Similarly, of the total increase among Federal prisoners, those convicted for drug offenses accounted for 65% of the overall increase in population between 1980 and 2000 (Mauer, 2006).

Demographic trends for those with mental illness are more difficult to track longitudinally as the justice system has not always been consistent with respect to screening for mental illness either for those who enter, or those who exit, the system. Currently thirty one percent of all state inmates and 23% of federal inmates are said to possess physical or mental conditions including learning, speech, hearing, vision, or conditions of mental illness (Petersilia, 2003). Of those with a lifetime prevalence of mental health conditions, between 2.3 and 3.9% of state prisoners have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, this compared to .8% in the general U.S. population. Between 2 – 4% of state prisoners receive treatment while incarcerated for bipolar disorder, as compared to a prevalence of 1.5% in the general population. While only 7% of the

general population are said to experience posttraumatic stress disorder, between 6 and 12% of state prisoners experience these symptoms while incarcerated (Petersilia, 2003).

Prison was never designed as a holding place for those with mental illness and luckily only those few who exhibit hostile or aggressive behavior come to the attention of law enforcement. Still, it is clear that the prison environment may not be the most beneficial place to house such offenders. Those with mental disorders at least receive appropriate medication while incarcerated, but the hostile or aggressive behavior that brought them to the attention of law enforcement in the first place will most likely amount to segregation or long term isolation while in prison, conditions which are shown to produce symptoms of mental illness even among those thought to be stable upon entering (Haney, 2003a, 2003b, 2006; Petersilia, 2003).

Physically contagious diseases are also a concern among those passing through state and federal correctional facilities as there is a risk overcrowded prisons are a disease vector (Farmer, 2005). Data collected in 1997 estimated that those released from state and federal prisons account for between 20 and 26% of the total HIV/AIDS cases in the U.S. The estimated number of people released with Hepatitis B infection amount to 12-16% of the total U.S. population similarly infected, while those released with Hepatitis C are 29-32% of the total population infected. Finally, in 1997 it was estimated that of the 32,000 U.S. residents infected with tuberculosis, fully 12,000 of these (38%) were people released from state or federal prisons (Petersilia, 2003).

Exposure to contagious diseases is but one of the dangers experienced by the incarcerated. As a result of the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 the Bureau of

Justice Statistics was required to document the prevalence of prison rape each calendar year. Beginning in 2007 the first report was written regarding survey results from 23,398 inmates across 146 sampled prisons. In addition another 40,419 jail inmates were surveyed and these results were reported separately. Although the survey was administered in an anonymous fashion researchers still believe that incidences of sexual assault were under-reported. The results indicated that 3.2% of jail inmates and 4.5% of prison inmates experienced one or more instances of sexual victimization. Overall rates of victimization for youth in custody were far higher (12.1%). In all cases corrections staff were responsible for the majority of the victimization (Beck & Harrison, 2008; Kaiser & Stannow, 2010a, 2010b).

These reports are interesting for revealing that the prevalence of prison rape varies widely from institution to institution, and that within each institution a minority of inmates may account for repeated instances of victimization. For example, while the national prevalence in jails was 3.2%, 18 jail facilities reported no instances of sexual victimization. At the other end of the spectrum a jail in Torrance County, New Mexico, reported a high of 13.4% of victimization (Beck & Harrison, 2008). In the first year of the survey it was discovered that inadvertent undercounts resulted from a multiple choice question which asked respondents to identify the number of times they were assaulted but only provided possible responses of 1, 2, 3-10, and 11 or more, presuming that those assaulted more than eleven times would constitute a single, undifferentiated category. This question was corrected in subsequent surveys. Importantly, when corrected this

question revealed a small number of inmates who are repeatedly violated account for much of the sexual victimization that occurs within prison (Kaiser & Stannow, 2010a).

There is ample evidence to indicate that these crimes go largely unreported outside of anonymous surveys. In the instance of prisoner on prisoner victimization there is a reluctance to report assault either because of fear of retribution, or of being marked as a victim among one's prisoner cohort, thus placing the prisoner at greater risk in the future. In the case of victimization committed by corrections staff there is also a fear of retribution, coupled with a lack of confidence that anything will be done about the issue. A by now infamous report issued by the Texas Youth Commission in 2005 found that in a single institution there were 750 complaints over a six year period, amounting to one complaint every 2.9 days, yet not a single staff member had been disciplined or fired because of sexual misconduct by staff (Kaiser & Stannow, 2010a).

As of 1999 the average age of state parolees was 34, an increase of three years over the average age of those released in 1990 (Petersilia, 2003). This slight increase over a nine year period does not indicate that offenders are getting older, for these statistics hold relatively constant; rather it is an indication that those committed to prison are staying longer than they once did. Overall, men aged 50 and older are the fastest growing age cohort in prison. By 2030 it is estimated that those over 50 will constitute fully one-third of the nation's incarcerated population. Providing health care for this population dramatically increases the cost of imprisonment up to three times (approximately \$70,000 per year) as this population generally has more chronic conditions than their equivalent outside of prison (Smyer & Burbank, 2009).

DISPROPORTIONALITY & STIGMA

Reentering offenders also carry with them a multi-layered identity of stigma related to having been convicted of a crime, having been incarcerated, etc. (Goffman, 1963; Shoham, 1970) Stigma associated with one's offender status may be further complicated if an offender enters prison without financial resources as it is likely when exiting prison these offenders will face an impoverishment that is very difficult to transcend (S. T. Harris & Keller, 2005; Martinez, 2006; Pager, 2007). Since prison populations also disproportionately represent people of color, there may also be a racialized element of the stigma associated with the returning offender (Cole, 1999; Fiske, 1999; O. Harris & Miller, 2002; Loury, et al., 2008).

A large body of literature is devoted to exploring the undesirable outcomes of criminal justice policy, namely disproportionality and stigma. The chief concern of much of this literature explores the disproportionate effect of policy on the poor and racial minorities. Disproportional over representation of ethnic minorities at every level of criminal justice intervention has been documented by several researchers and empirically disputed by none (Cole, 1999; Petersilia, 2003; Taxman, et al., 2005; Thompson, 2008; Travis & Waul, 2003; Wacquant, 2008a). The same researchers acknowledge also that this trend in disproportionality has been exacerbated during this period of hyper-incarceration (Taxman, et al., 2005). Several of these are the work of legal scholars whose interest lies in the failings of specific legal mechanisms (Cole, 1999; Morgan & Smith, 2008; Thompson, 2008). Others reverse engineer this process and seek to

examine disproportionality through the lens of the aggrieved communities (O. Harris & Miller, 2002; Rios, 2006).

While disproportional representation of ethnic minority Americans has been apparent since at least reconstruction, and while it might be reasonable to expect this pattern to continue throughout a period of hyper-incarceration, in truth disproportionality has increased. Cole explains that in part this can be attributed to the many decision points that must be engaged as one enters the criminal justice system. These points include, but are not limited to, arrest, conviction and sentencing. While some people exercise an advantage that may possibly be leveraged to positive effect at each of these possible intersections, those who are disadvantaged may experience discrimination at each of these points, thus worsening their overall chances to avoid incarceration. These multiple points of intersection with the criminal justice system have a multiplier effect upon disproportionality, and this in part explains why African Americans now represent over 50% of the prison population, a rate that translates into a risk of incarceration eight times higher than Whites (Cole, 2009).

A more critical analysis of disproportionality can be seen in literature that asserts disproportionality is not an accident of racist policy application, but reflects the racist intent of policy makers (Rodríguez, 2003). The bulk of the literature does not go so far as to ascribe racial intent, but does suggest this is an expected outcome of policies that are part of our collective transformation from a welfare state to a national security state (Baum, 1996; Clear, 2007; Herivel & Wright, 2003; Irwin, 1985; Klein, 2007; Pager,

2007; Parenti, 1999; Pettit & Western, 2004; Reiman, 1998; Simon, 2007; Stern, 2006; Wacquant, 2005, 2008a, 2008b).

Peterisilia points out that unlike violent or property crimes which require a reactive response from law enforcement, drug crimes represent one of the few areas of crime that are largely addressed proactively (Petersilia, 2003). Mauer continues that this characteristic has had devastating consequences for some African American communities and/or poor communities in general where drug sales and use may assume a more public character than in wealthier and more ethnically homogeneous communities (2006).

Mauer indicates that patterns of drug use do not differ significantly between White, Hispanic, or African Americans, yet African Americans represent the largest percentage of those entering into the criminal justice system for drug related offenses, even as they represent only 13% of the general population (2006). For Alexander, the public character of drug sales and use in poor urban communities does not adequately explain disproportionality of race in felony drug convictions; she believes that drug laws simply provide a pretense of colorblindness for a system that targets the control of African American men (Alexander, 2010).

Lest there exist a risk of muddling the disparity issue with the claim that patterns of drug use are essentially the same across ethnic identities, it should be acknowledged that where there may be difference in usage, these differences have been exploited. The most infamous example of this is the crack cocaine/powder cocaine sentencing disparity that only in recent years has begun to be rectified. In this instance sentencing for possession of crack cocaine, the cheaper form favored by addicts short on economic

resources, was at one time 100 times greater than the types of sentences earned for possession of an equal amount of powdered cocaine, the form of the drug considered a status symbol among those with plentiful economic resources (Baum, 1996; Drug Policy Alliance, 2007). For those who may wish to argue that use, abuse, sale and distribution are not the same thing and that there might be unmeasured differences across ethnic populations, we may note that in the year 2008 four out of every five drug arrests was for simple possession, while only one of those arrests concerned distribution. Moreover, fully half of the drug arrests in 2008 concerned marijuana (Cole, 2009). White teenagers experimenting with marijuana in a suburban basement are simply safer from the eyes of law enforcement than their inner-city African American counterparts.

Ethnic disproportionality is important to this work because it implies that many of those touched by the criminal justice system will have also experienced racial stigma. To this stigma will be added an additional layer associated with one's status as a convicted offender. Concern regarding how to prevent stigma among offenders was a prominent feature of US criminal justice policies in the 1960s when labeling theory (the idea that identity could be determined by labels ascribed by those with the authority to classify) was prominent, but disappeared as an issue the following decade (T. G. Blomberg & Cohen, 2003). Garland refers to the offender status as a master status that assumes prominence over all other identities (2001). Garland attributes the master status of offenders to a victim/offender duality, a cultural attribute that insists these roles are impervious to change (2001). Gottschalk makes reference to a victim's rights movement which sought to solidify the legitimacy of victimhood for women who experienced

assault during a period when such crimes were easily dismissed by law enforcement and suggests that this movement inadvertently contributed to a victim/offender duality (Gottschalk, 2006). Discourse that insists upon this duality limits empathy for offenders who may be victimized by the criminal justice system, and consequently limits the role of the offender in consideration of policy implications (Garland, 2001)

REENTRY SERVICES

Knowledge of prison conditions inform an understanding of the adjustment required of ex-offenders upon release (Visher, et al., 2003). While some states have experimented with programs designed to prepare soon-to-be released offenders for life on the outside, these programs compete for funding against the already considerable funding needs of the remainder of the prison industry, and, as a result, such programs frequently come up short (Travis & Petersilia, 2001; Travis & Visher, 2005). As prison authorities are not held accountable for the rehabilitation of prisoners in their care, the responsibility for assuring successful social reintegration then falls upon the local communities into which offenders are released; and often this responsibility will rest most heavily upon the non-profit sector (Travis & Petersilia, 2001; Travis & Visher, 2005).

Private, often non-profit, reentry programs are concentrated primarily in urban areas (Solomon, et al., 2006). There is tremendous variability with respect to access to social services with some poor urban areas containing the bulk of available services, while in rural areas there may be few, if any, services (Travis & Petersilia, 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003). This at least in part explains the concentration of the ex-offender population in already underserved and over-extended communities.

Access to non-profit reentry programs usually occurs through a referral by state parole authorities, but several other informal types of assistance may be available in communities where returning offenders tend to congregate. These communities tend to be the same urban poor communities where offenders had been arrested (Travis, et al., 2001). The literature suggests that the bulk of community programs that exist to aid in offender reentry tend to focus on issues of housing and employment, as these are considered primary (Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005; Seiter & Kadel, 2003; Travis & Visher, 2005). Treatment options for those in need of mental health or substance abuse counseling comprise the next largest area of support, followed by programs designed to address familial support (Seiter & Kadel, 2003). Programs that explicitly address stigma or concerns about the environmental transition from a rigidly controlled environment in prison where daily needs are met by the institution, to the non-prison environment where ex-offenders are expected to fend for themselves, are not well represented either in the literature regarding reentry barriers or assistance programs.

As the prison environment is carefully controlled and designed to limit the offenders personal autonomy, prisoners become conditioned to an existence that does not require the same kinds of responsibilities that are anticipated in life outside of prison, and as a result may find adjustment to outside life impeded by their prison experience (Haney, 2003b). Depending in part upon how much prior experience the offender may have had in negotiating life outside of prison, or in how long the offender has been removed from a community environment, adjustment to the demands of the outside world can be complicated and fraught with potential pitfalls such as the inability to locate

productive employment (S. T. Harris & Keller, 2005; Pager, 2007; Shivy et al., 2007), secure housing (Flavin, 2004), or maintain satisfactory relationships with estranged family members (Flavin, 2004; O. Harris & Miller, 2002; Visher, et al., 2003).

Those ex-offenders with strong ties to a supportive family or community of return tend to fare better with respect to social re-integration than those who lack these ties (Travis, et al., 2001). It cannot be assumed though that all those with strong family ties will automatically achieve success. Much depends on the nature of the crime for which the offender was convicted, the proximity of the offense to the family, or the sense of loss experienced by the family while the offender was incarcerated (Martinez, 2006; Pennsylvania University, 2001). Some offenders will also face concerns regarding family support (O. Harris & Miller, 2002; Martinez, 2006). The stigma associated with incarceration and poverty can just as easily recast the family as a potential barrier to social integration (Flavin, 2004; O. Harris & Miller, 2002).

An examination of 1997 Bureau of Justice Statistics data found that about two-thirds of those behind bars have children. The offspring of incarcerated fathers alone amount to 1.2 million children and although only 44% lived with their children prior to prison, most contributed income, child care and support. If child support was demanded by the courts, this could accumulate during a period of incarceration (Travis, et al., 2001). Understandably, the parent/child relationship is compromised after a prolonged period of incarceration (Travis, 2005). Frequently the return of the parent under these conditions is at the very least stressful, and often manifest as a disruption that some families simply cannot cope with without assistance (Travis & Waul, 2003).

The scarcity of employment and housing options for reentering offenders poses a serious barrier to successful reentry, particularly as stable housing and employment are often considered conditions of parole, violations of which may result in re-incarceration (Martinez, 2006; Shivy, et al., 2007; Visher, Debus, & Yahner, 2008). Securing housing and employment are generally recognized as key to successful reentry as those offenders who are able to secure housing and employment are statistically less likely to recidivate (Flavin, 2004; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005; Pennsylvania University, 2001; Solomon, et al., 2006; Visher, et al., 2008). Studies that underscore the importance of housing and employment often fail to recognize that offenders are typically returned to communities where, under the best of circumstances, housing may be scarce and employment opportunities slim (O. Harris & Miller, 2002; S. T. Harris & Keller, 2005; Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002; Travis, et al., 2001).

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Offenders frequently come from and are returned to communities that are characterized by diminished social capital. Communities that exhibit diminished social capital were first conceptualized in the work of Wilson (1987, 1996). Wilson identified a social and political dynamic exhibited by certain ethnic communities of concentrated poverty when during a period of post-segregation those with resources gained access to housing in non-ghettoized communities. Wilson explains that as upper and middle class African Americans enlarged their capacity to move out of once segregated communities (“ghettos” in the parlance of the times), they inadvertently assured that the impoverished population remaining behind would experience an intensification of the consequences of

poverty. This can be understood quantifiably, by means of measuring the lack of material wealth. What is implied is that even the poorest of the poor may have benefited from the availability of social capital when a greater breadth of social class persists in those communities. When poverty is isolated and concentrated, the conditions associated with a lack of social capital are then magnified (W. J. Wilson, 1987, 1996).

It is important to note that even though Wilson provided an early discussion of social capital, or, more accurately, the lack of social capital, he did not employ the phrase in his early work. Wilson was simply identifying the effects of concentrated poverty. He may be forgiven then if later scholars call into question the concept that all communities that exhibit characteristics of concentrated poverty also exhibit low levels of social capital. Mario Luis Small, in his ethnographic study of an isolated group of Puerto Ricans living in Boston's South Side, provided rich examples of social cohesion which contributed to enlarged social capital in an otherwise impoverished area (Small, 2004). In the liner notes to this book, Villa Victoria, Wilson acknowledges Small's contribution to the field, in particular his observation that poverty by itself does not determine low rates of social capital.

As a consequence of Wilson's important work, there is a tendency to think of social cohesion as a phenomenon exhibiting primarily positive qualities. In truth it is possible to conceive of greater social cohesion occurring in a context which, though it might serve the needs of a minority of individuals, may not necessarily provide benefits for the larger community. Social capital is largely neutral in value until the context for social engagement is fully explored and understood (Small, 2009).

There are several models for conceptualizing social capital. One aide for understanding the operation of social capital concerns the use of sub-types of social capital. One set of sub-types especially important to this work are the theoretical sub-types of bonding and bridging capital. Bonding and bridging social capital are popularly associated with Putnam (Halpern, 2005), but is actually a conceptualization that Putnam credits to Gittell and Vidal (R. D. Putnam, 2000). Bonding capital refers to the kind of cohesion that may exist within a homogeneous grouping. Bridging capital refers to the kind of cohesion that occurs across larger social networks.

The importance of this distinction is understood in terms of a peculiar characteristic of bonding capital. As useful and necessary as bonding may be, it retains a potential to reinforce exclusive identities. In other words, reliance on the bonding sub-type alone may generate negative consequences not typically attributed to an enlargement of social capital. An example of boding social capital associated with negative consequences to the larger community can be found in vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan or in criminal networks that manifest as gangs or organized crime. Bridging capital, on the other hand, is always associated with only the most positive characteristics of social capital (Halpern, 2005; R. D. Putnam, 2001). Small offers yet another perspective regarding the deployment of sub-types to explain social capital by suggesting that all elements of social capital must be contextualized in order for us to truly understand their utility (Small, 2009).

The importance in this work of the sub-types of bonding and bridging capital are aptly illustrated when applied to the population under consideration. Within the prison

environment, bonding social capital is generally the only type available to the imprisoned. When engaged in reentry, stigma and isolation make it likely that again, bonding capital is the most accessible variety available to this population. Bonding social capital is precisely what is required in order to facilitate the growth of a criminal network. When bonding social capital is not coupled with other forms of social capital, it can exacerbate dependence upon the homogeneous group, and complicate access to the kinds of resources available from more heterogeneous groupings. The exclusive reliance on the bonding sub-type is interrupted when we introduce greater access to bridging capital. This suggests that mechanisms that enlarge access to bridging capital can be of special value to those engaged in a reentry process.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement can be understood as any individual or collective actions that contribute to a public end. A wide spectrum of activities may constitute engagement, including voluntary activities on one end, to more formally activities such as voting. Putnam referred to civic engagement as an essential component of a vibrant democracy and lamented its decline as a threat to democracy (R. D. Putnam, 2000). Most definitions of social capital refer to a civic engagement dimension. This is a primary theme in Putnam's *Democracies in Flux* where measures of civic engagement stand in as a partial measure of social capital (R. Putnam, 2002). When framed as volunteering and ascribed economic value, some suggest this could be taken into consideration in calculating the GDP (P. Mayer, 2003).

Some who have written about the social integration of ex-offenders make specific reference to the value of civic engagement (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004; Uggen, et al., 2006). This element of social capital is particularly relevant to this work precisely because convicted offenders are at great risk for disenfranchisement. Disenfranchisement refers to the deprivation of civil privileges such as voting, but may also refer to other elements of civil participation. As civil participation is linked to active and engaged membership in the community, those who are unable to participate will have lost an important avenue of civic inclusion.

In thirteen states those convicted of a felony will lose for life their right to vote in an election. Forty-eight states now deny those incarcerated the right to vote while in prison, while 36 states extend these restrictions to those on parole or probation (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002). Policies of permanent felony disenfranchisement are in sharp contrast to the notion that once their sentence is served, offenders have paid their debt to society.

Lister identifies a decreased sense of civic engagement as one of several relational and symbolic aspects of impoverishment (2004). Other aspects include shame and stigma, denial of human rights, powerlessness, disrespect, and an assault on dignity and self-esteem (Lister, 2004). These aspects are the rim of a wheel of poverty in which lack of material resources are at the hub (Lister, 2004). These relational and symbolic aspects of poverty describe perfectly the expected attributes of those released from prison. They are not characteristics consistent with expectations of success upon release. They may in fact also describe why so many offenders repeatedly cycle through the

prison system. Several have described this as a system designed to fail at rehabilitation (Reiman, 1998; Stern, 2006).

One's propensity for civic engagement is certainly associated with the perceived utility of social action. In social arenas where action is perceived of little or no consequences, distrust grows and a variety of social passivity sets in (Uslaner, 1999). In this respect, civic engagement is related to a sense of autonomy and inter-personal agency in that they frequently co-exist. The same holds true, in large part, to a sense of community identity. This is not to say that one necessarily causes the other to come into existence, but that there is some reciprocal relationship that allows each to flourish given the proper conditions.

Social capital theory meets the principles of restorative justice in the arena of civic engagement. According to Braithwaite, successful social integration requires the fostering of a community identity - a sense of connection that manifests as accountability to others (Braithwaite, 1989). Bazemore and Stinchcomb echo these themes in offering a civic engagement model of reentry that rests upon identity and capacity building to encourage pro-social behavior (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004). In this particular model civic engagement is equated with a variety of community service that encourages the ex-offender to give something back to the community and contribute to the common good (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004).

Bazemore and Stinchcomb spell out both this model and the possible benefit that can come from civic engagement with a conceptual model considering differential levels of stakeholder involvement. In this model, the greater the stakeholder involvement, the

greater the restorative and capacity building power offered by the variety of civic participation. Community work designed to simply occupy the participant's time represents minimal stakeholder input while service work that aims to benefit individual needs might represent greater input. Work in service to the community that specifically seeks to better the community might represent maximal input and yield the greatest result. Conceptualizing a continuum of community service is important because it resists reducing the theoretical framework to a causal association, but focuses instead on the quality of the process that is being engaged.

Mayer (2003) speaks of volunteerism as having a multiplier effect to social capital. The multiplier effect can be best understood with reference to Small's insistence that elements of social capital should not be considered in isolation, but can best be understood with reference to the context in which they emerge (Small, 2004, 2009). This would suggest that seeking a causal relationship between just two variables might not yield results as fruitful as those studies that take into consideration multiple variables. Similarly, an early text on action science, a precursor to participant action research; (and curiously a text co-authored by Putnam when a Harvard graduate student), asserts that research which relies on testing hypothesized relationships between a few variables is at risk for becoming distant from practice (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985).

M. Mayer (2003) strikes a cautionary note regarding the use of social capital as a framework for research projects aimed toward advocacy and social change. Though she acknowledges the attractiveness of social capital projects in offering low-cost solutions to social problems, she also warns that such initiatives are often introduced in under-

resourced communities in order to facilitate the ability of the community to “get by” without the addition of new social services. There exists the potential of such projects, echoing the rhetoric of social capital enthusiasts, to conflate an increase in available social capital with an increase in available economic capital. While it is true that much of the social capital literature promotes a relationship between social and economic capital, such literature focuses on the increased capacity, or potential, for a reciprocal development (Small, 2009).

Mayer further critiques the equation of social and economic capital in noting that all such relationships depend in part upon the responsiveness of local government and policy makers, as well as presuming the elimination of any systemic barriers. She asserts that social capital cannot compensate for gross disparities in the availability of financial capital and cautions that social capital projects may actually mask inequality to the extent they normalize economic disparity as the result of objective, inevitable developments. To the extent that social capital projects echo the neoliberal ethos, poor people are asked to marshal the only resource they have at their disposal – social capital – with the promise that this will somehow place them on an equal footing with the world's wealthiest citizens, neglecting to acknowledge that such citizens have historically exercised inordinate power with respect to decisions regarding the division of material resources. Mayer concludes that the immediate goal of social capital projects should focus on empowerment and inclusion, not the resolution of economic inequality (M. Mayer, 2003). To succumb to a market-oriented framing of social capital projects is to place the initiative at risk for becoming nothing more than a “feel good” exercise.

PEER AND SELF-HELP GROUPS

Peer or self-help groups have been recognized in the empowerment literature as a vehicle for promoting a process of empowerment. The group itself may also represent a way to begin enlarging social capital, a critical assessment of which can be guided to stimulate the more productive sub-types, more of which will be written later.

Wasserman and Danforth assert that support groups fell out of favor in the 1950s when they were subsumed by groups featuring professional guidance, but were later rediscovered by social workers in the late 1980s (Wasserman & Danforth, 1988). Such groups recognized the value of shared experience as an aid in normalizing otherwise stigmatizing conditions, or in acquiring support in achieving common goals (Katz, 1993).

At the same time of Wasserman and Danforth's assertion regarding the re-discovery of support groups, Gottlieb would present a model for support groups that rested upon professional intervention (1988). An example of a peer group model from Gottlieb features an assembly of low-income mothers gathered so that they might be taught effective parenting skills (Gottlieb, 1988). Such examples, still beholden to a deficit approach in human services, ignores the emergence of an alternate model, credited to John McKnight in a text four years earlier which examined self-help groups in a social service context (Remine, et al., 1984). While the deficit approach required expertise to be imported into the group, the emerging strength-based approach (characterized as such even though Saleebey had yet to publish his work) focused on fostering the expertise that already existed in a peer-group context. Additionally, peer-directed groups can be used to build empathy for stigmatized groups, can re-write personal narratives of identity, and

can serve as a link between informal systems and formal systems of care (Mead, et al., 2001; Remine, et al., 1984).

Of special note to the reentry population, though such populations were not expressly identified in the work, peer group models may appear especially attractive to those individuals for whom casework is undesirable or has negative connotations (Remine, et al., 1984; Sullivan, Mesbur, Lang, Goodman, & Mitchell, 2000).

Katz attempted to create order out of various models for support groups. Katz may have been the first to formally consider a phenomenon that had spontaneously arose over several decades and had presumed ubiquity in certain quarters - the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. They had grown in popularity since their inception in the 1930s to become the largest autonomously run mutual aid enterprise in the world (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006). While mutual aid groups have obviously preceded the creation of Alcoholics Anonymous, few have become as common as to be easily recognized by its acronym alone (AA). Somewhat later other mutual aid groups arose, perhaps in response to the growing use of group work in a therapeutic context (Katz, 1993). These new groups offered participants the ability to seek comfort within a group of people with like experiences or goals, without necessarily requiring professional guidance.

Katz's text focused specifically on self-help groups to the exclusion of support groups conceptualized as requiring professional guidance, thus solidifying the distinction between those who believed professional expertise needed to be brought in to the group process, and those who believed groups were capable of mining their own expertise. Among the mutual aid groups he further distinguished between groups that maintained an

inner focus, which he characterized as twelve step groups, versus groups that wished to cultivate an outer focus, which for lack of an available term he called non-twelve step groups (Katz, 1993). The most critical distinction between the two groups, in terms of expected outcomes, is that the twelve step groups generally accept powerlessness and deny political action, while the non-twelve step groups seek empowerment and are receptive to the idea of engagement leading to political action (Katz, 1993).

The distinctions Katz identified are particularly relevant to an exploration of the use of peer-support groups among those engaged in reentry. On the one hand, the reentry population, owing to the predominance of substance abuse, is likely familiar with the twelve step model. On the other hand, the alternate model, being more outer directed, is one that allows for increased civic engagement of the type that may counter disenfranchisement.

Katz is also responsible for spelling out the tensions that made the use of self-help appear controversial during this period, and possibly to the present day. The first tension alluded to above, references the priority and value ascribed to professional versus experiential knowledge. The second tension relates to the concept of control versus autonomy. The third tension concerns involvement over objectivity. The forth tension was articulated as superficial versus real change, where real change is assumed to flow only from a treatment modality. Lastly, there is a tension associated with the romanticizing of the other, represented as a belief among some professionals who lionize the lay person and critique the trend toward specialization and professionalization (Katz, 1993).

More recent literature adds to Katz's analysis by pointing out that self-help groups for individuals with a perceived medical condition are more tolerated than groups for people with conditions that are more easily stigmatized (Mead, et al., 2001; Sullivan, et al., 2000). The distinction here rests upon the perception of those doing the tolerating and their ability to appreciate whether the precipitating condition is within the individual's control, or not. Medical conditions, in this context, elicit sympathy; while a group formed in support of anomalous behavior may give rise to condemnation (Katz, 1993).

The dichotomies, alluded to above, with reference to the placement of expertise, are not the only dichotomies that arise within the self-help movement. Two books of more recent publication explore these themes; themes that are of special value with respect to the use of self-help models among ex-offenders.

The first book, *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life*, is an ethnographic exploration of the gendered qualities of the self-help movement (McGee, 2005). McGee read and categorized the variety of self-help literature available in the US since the mid 1800's in an attempt to create a literary genealogy that may explain how the themes represented in this literature reflect trends in American culture (McGee, 2005). While originally this literature was targeted at a masculine audience, it more recently has assumed gendered elements as more women entered into the workforce and traditional notions of the feminine were challenged (McGee, 2005). The gendered analysis here is important in that it places a potentially damaging element of the self-help movement into greater relief - that of blaming the individual for shortcomings that prevent one from

"having it all" (McGee, 2005). Self-help literature, suggests McGee, promotes the idea that on the one hand you can indeed have it all, but on the other hand, should you fail to achieve it all, this can only be seen as your own fault (McGee, 2005). The literature either ignores or suppresses the perspective that human systems have any role to play in personal limitations. Understandably, such limitations may be important to those who face real discrimination or other systematic barriers. In the case of the formerly incarcerated who face legal discrimination in employment, failure, from a self-help perspective, translates into an individual problem. The tendency to self blame can in turn be isolating, possibly defeating any kind of benefit that may be derived from peer-directed support groups.

A more critical analysis of the same phenomenon is offered by Ehrenreich (2009). She employs a journalistic style that rests upon personal narrative more than McGee's more scholarly approach. Ehrenreich's focus on the personal is of course gendered, but not intentionally so as with McGee. She begins with her own breast cancer treatment and her interactions with those who treated her diagnosis as if it were caused by negative thinking, the antidote to which would be positive thinking. This framing, Ehrenreich suggests, allows the cancer victim to presume greater control over a diagnosis which may otherwise be overwhelming. This personal experience leads to a critical examination of positive thinking and the movement that supports the phenomenon. Ehrenreich notes the self-help literature that promotes positive thinking achieves greater sales when there are downward trends in the economy, suggesting that utilizing a belief in the power of the self is an antidote to the sense of helplessness and powerlessness that stem from being

victimized by economic downturns. As with a cancer diagnosis, the actual causes of a failing economy may be too vast for many to easily comprehend, and at any rate, what can middle-class people actually do in response? This helplessness has a negative side-effect however, because blaming one's self for poor material conditions results in a failure to perceive the systemic reasons for economic failure, thus citizens in effect remain politically powerless to promote social change (Ehrenreich, 2009).

While Ehrenreich's text seems to echo the McGee text, it also represents an elaboration of the theme that self-help, as practiced in the United States, is something of a double-edged sword. With reference to the reentry population, a tendency to retreat into a sense of powerlessness is not conducive to the kind of social integration envisioned by those who wish to cultivate a greater sense of community engagement, belonging, and accountability. If the only power one is allowed is the power to change the self, then of what use is community involvement? A critical understanding of the potential of self-help groups is required so that such initiatives may avoid the risk of becoming nothing more than a "feel good" project.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Participatory action research (PAR) is an approach to research that acknowledges the impact research has upon the community and seeks to ensure that the research impact be both positive and consistent with the goals of the research agenda. There is an implicit understanding that PAR needs to disrupt a dependence on modes of scientific inquiry that rest upon the idea of discovery (Longino, 1993). In PAR, the population formerly

considered research subjects, may assume the role of co-researcher, as in the case of Fields et al (2008), or as collaborators in analysis and interpretation (Lassiter, 2005).

Participant action research is the equivalent to the term action science, a phrase that may currently be losing favor. An early text on action science from the 1980s suggested that action science was the preferred term over action research because it was believed that action research had been separated from theory building and testing, and that action science was more inclined to employ methodologies that did not question the status quo (Argyris, et al., 1985). From this we may appreciate that action science was always conceptualized as a challenge to traditional methods of scientific inquiry, challenging the notion of presumed objectivity associated with rigidly positivist approaches to knowledge production (Fals-Borda, 2001). The epistemological objection to objectivity rests upon the notion that it is a “view from nowhere” (also known as the “God trick”), an improbable perspective dismissed by those who believe that scientific inquiry can (or even should) acknowledge a point of view and that the researcher need be responsible for making this both known and transparent (Code, 1993; Harding, 1993). Transparency in this context is called positionality. It is considered good form to articulate one’s positionality in writing research findings, particularly when employing those methodologies that call the concept of objectivity into question (Longino, 1993).

A participatory research approach attempts to address the pitfalls of empowerment projects conducted in an arena where structural barriers may threaten the viability of such projects. In this sense participatory research avoids the trap of “feel good” empowerment projects criticized for merely accommodating individuals to

circumstances beyond their control. How participatory research achieves this goal is related to the dialogic process that is necessarily engaged when human subjects are enlisted as co-researchers. A leveling of the relationship between the researcher and the research subject aims to limit the researcher's ability to assert authority over the subjects, and release the subject's potential to reveal the full extent of their knowledge regarding research goals.

The literature that begins to articulate participant action research flows from the disciplines of education and anthropology. From education we can credit the influence of Paulo Freire whose influential text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* continues to inform many generations since its publication in 1970, subsequently published in his native Brazil four years later (Mackie, 1980). Freire introduced the concept of conscientization, a term that refers to the development of a critical consciousness, an important component of his critique of traditional pedagogy and his promotion of an alternate: critical pedagogy, or what would later be called popular education (Freire, 1970; Mackie, 1980). A central element of critical education requires the replacement of the teacher-student dichotomy with a relationship of reciprocity, just as participant action research seeks to replace the researcher-subject dichotomy with a process that Freire would have termed dialogic (Freire, 1970; Somekh, 2006).

Within the field of anthropology the movement toward more collaborative modes of ethnographic research was largely due to the perceived need to come to terms with the discipline's colonial legacy – an earlier period when anthropology was deployed as a mechanism in support of colonial authority, legitimizing the presumed superiority of the

colonizers over the subjugated (Koro-Ljungberg, Gemignani, Chaplin, Hayes, & Haoyin Hsieh, 2009). While the capacity to utilize science in the service of subjugation can be generalized as a problem relevant to all social science, those who practice ethnography as a singular method of scientific inquiry experience a particular need for reform in order to retain the validity of the method (Lassiter, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

In the 1990s the anti-colonialist critique of anthropology met the feminist critique of positivist epistemology to produce literature that sought methods of scientific inquiry that were consistent with the expected outcomes of social science research and more explicit about incorporating the perspective of subaltern people (Grosz, 1993; Longino, 1993; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). These trends ultimately lead toward greater utilization of methods that at the very least were collaborative (Lassiter, 2005), and at times would embrace the production of dual projects where one output would support the needs of the academic superstructure, while another product was explicitly created to support a project that met the needs of the subaltern (Hale, 2007).

With reference to participant action research dedicated to those who come into contact with the criminal justice system there are three research examples in the literature that illustrate the utility of this approach.

The first concerns a project at a women's prison undertaken by Fields, et al. (2008). The project enlisted the support of an interdisciplinary band of researchers from San Francisco State to work with incarcerated women to design an HIV curriculum specifically targeting at-risk women (Fields, Gonzalez, Hentz, Rhee, & White, 2008). The incarcerated women were first invited to critique an example of an HIV curriculum

that attempted to address the special needs of the most at-risk population, in this case understood to be women who were either substance users, prostitutes, or both (Fields, et al., 2008). From this critique a workshop was created to discuss likely curriculum components (Fields, et al., 2008). These workshop discussions were audio taped, transcribed, and brought back to the resident co-researchers the following week so that the most relevant themes could be further explored utilizing an analytical method known as grounded theory (Fields, et al., 2008).

Though the incarcerated women who collaborated in this research acknowledged the primacy of the incentive and the opportunity to pass their time in jail engaged in an activity more interesting than what is typically offered to those imprisoned, the women also came to report that their participation produced an opportunity to develop personal and social resources, as well as providing a humanizing experience in an environmental context not known to foster humanness (Fields, et al., 2008). To this extent utilization of PAR facilitated conditions that were in many ways consistent with the hoped for research outcomes. Fields reports that in the course of developing an effective HIV curriculum, the women acquired knowledge and skills that allowed them to presume the role of health educators in their given communities (Fields, et al., 2008). Many of the women, after release, sought opportunities to remain attached to the project, and some even became students at San Francisco State University (Fields, et al., 2008).

The second example of how PAR may be used, in this case again with incarcerated women, draws from a project conducted in New York. Inmate researchers were employed using both qualitative and quantitative measures to determine the impact

of inmate participation in a college program designed for incarcerated women. A total of 274 participants were evaluated. Researchers found that those women who participated in college while in prison experienced a 7.7% return to custody rate, as compared to a 29.9% rate for those women who did not participate in the program. This difference amounts to a four-fold increase in return to custody among the non-college participating women. Additionally, the non-college women were twice as likely to be committed to prison for a new offense, and 18 times more likely to violate parole (Fine et al., 2003).

The use of incarcerated women in this research was found particularly useful when it came to the interpretation of the collected qualitative data. Incarcerated women offered perspectives on interpretation not easily available to “non-indigenous” researchers and this tension revealed several dimensions of the insider-outsider dilemma, discussion of which ultimately made the findings more significant. In addition, the women who participated as co-researchers were able to bring a degree of socially responsible and critical analysis to the project that at times was required to keep romantic instincts of the outside researchers in check (Fine, et al., 2003).

A third example of the utilization of PAR in a criminal justice context concerns the evaluation of a juvenile justice project in upstate New York. In this case a researcher employed by the project to conduct an evaluation of the services provided to clients chose the unorthodox method of directly asking the clients their perception of service acquisition (Price, 2008). Two “peer researchers” (clients about to finish their court mandated participation in the program) were recruited and trained to conduct interviews with program participants and staff, administer questionnaires, as well as help facilitate

focus groups of clients all in order to identify experiences, expectations and concerns about how the program operates (Price, 2008). As with the Fields et al research, Price begins with the assumption that program participants, both clients and staff, possess knowledge and the ability to interpret their experiences for the benefit of others (Price, 2008). All the collected data was presumed relevant, though not interpreted uncritically, all research collaborators being encouraged to provide a context for observations which appeared to fall outside the norm (Price, 2008).

Among some of the findings produced by the evaluation research were several observations that long waiting times to attend mandatory meetings with case managers were considered by clients to be both gratuitous and demeaning, possibly contributing to an unwillingness to conform with other program demands. Such findings were considered by the researchers to be of great potential value to the organization because these concerns were easily remediated and once remediated had the potential to greatly improve service (Price, 2008).

Upon presentation of the findings in an initial briefing for senior staff, the researchers were surprised to discover the pride they took in this project was not reciprocated. Senior staff attributed sole authorship to the only member of the research staff with a PhD, even as it was made clear the entire collective of researchers presumed equal credit. The research was criticized as unsuitable for presentation to the project funders, discredited for providing authority to young felons, and dismissed for being both interpretive and unscientific in nature. Price concluded that senior staff was more interested in simple measurement of quantifiable program outputs than a qualitative

assessment of service quality and he chalked up these differences to a clash of ideological paradigms where on the one hand the administrators sought to manage, rather than transform, those mandated to their care, while on the other hand researchers mistakenly believed that the role of assessment should be to improve service delivery (Price, 2008).

What Price eventually wrote with reference to this clash of paradigms in action at the program for which he was employed dovetails nicely with Fricker's description of epistemic injustice. Fricker was concerned with the systematic devaluing of testimony gathered from those assumed to be marginal, irrelevant, and ultimately, discreditable (Fricker, 2007). Such positions perpetuate an unexamined ideology which purports supremacy over non-hegemonic interpretations of reality. Often such positions are assumed to be upheld by scientific rigor. When challenged, they are simply labeled unscientific as a method of dismissing further discussion (Price, 2008). Within such a paradigm, personal and direct experience can have no authority without first being subject to interpretation by outside, "objective," experts. Within a PAR modality this notion of expertise is challenged by lending priority to the knowledge expressed by those whose experience is under scientific scrutiny. This is consistent with social work practice that seeks to start "where the client is at" and interpret social problems through the lens of those with direct experience of the problem (Saleebey, 1992).

EMPOWERMENT

In her book on poverty, Lister suggests that poor people who acknowledge a pervasive sense of powerlessness are susceptible to those who imagine that an empowerment project will be just what poor people need in order to pick themselves up

(Lister, 2004). Lister cautions that empowerment is not something that can be provided to people, but facilitated by fostering conditions that allow a sense of empowerment to emerge. Too often, however, empowerment projects manifest as top-down approaches that seek to help the powerless adjust to the structural conditions of which they are subject, without challenging the underlying structures that rob them of power in the first place (Lister, 2004). In other words, without an understanding of the context of disempowerment, we can hardly hope to do more than assist the powerless to simply feel good about their condition.

Gutierrez (1995) breaks down the mystery of empowerment by grounding our understanding of it within a context of collective action, but even more so, collective action with an element of consciousness added. In other works, she borrows Freire's term conscientization (literally "critical consciousness") to refer to the need to understand oppressive elements (or structural barriers) before one may take action against them (Gutierrez, Parsons, & Cox, 1997). This understanding is necessarily dialogic and so will require engagement with others, typically in a group context (Adams, 2003; Sullivan, et al., 2000)

Parsons (1991) asserts that empowerment is critical to effective social work practice and lays out what she believes to be the three essential ingredients: collectivity, education, and competency assessment. In her framework, collectivity refers to the ability to provide support, mutual aid, and avenues for collective action; education refers to the development of critical thinking skills acquired through interaction and dialogue; while the competency assessment underscores the importance in social work of assuming

our clients are capable of choosing for themselves adequate solutions to their problems (Parsons, 1991).

Much as Farmer conceptualizes an understanding of structural violence, Kubiak, Siefert and Boyd (2004) assert that empowerment should not be assessed without considering the individual's historical, social, or political context. In so doing we may better understand possible structural limitations to empowerment and avoid the pitfalls of empowerment projects that seek "feel good" aims over a social change agenda that inadvertently supports the status quo. The example from the Kubiak, Siefert and Boyd article concerns women who found themselves subject to Section 115 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, wherein women convicted of drug felonies were subsequently denied welfare benefits. These women were at higher risk for depression, PTSD, domestic violence and faced other serious barriers to economic self-sufficiency (Kubiak, et al., 2004). These circumstances suggest an empowerment project might have greater success if applied at the level of social policy rather than individual mastery.

The themes of the work above are well articulated in Hancock's 2004 ethnography of welfare recipients called *The Politics of Disgust: the Public Identity of the Welfare Queen*. Hancock was especially interested in not just structural barriers to empowerment, but also how cultural stereotypes of the welfare queen played into policy discourse clearly designed to limit the input of those who experience a need for social services. She argues that those who do not need assistance are unable to empathize with those in need of welfare assistance due to the deployment of rhetoric that seeks to

enshrine the welfare recipient as other and minimizes real human needs via a veil of disgust. But just as oppression cannot be reduced to a singular dynamic, so too resistance to that oppression must operate on several different levels simultaneously. Hancock might argue that empowerment in this context must also seek a collective or policy dimension so as to resist being reduced to the achievement of personal goals only (Hancock, 2004).

The idea that oppression cannot be reduced to a singular dynamic is precisely Sil Lee Sohang's (1997) point when she frames empowerment research as both critical and post-modern. Empowerment as an idea could not have been conceptualized without the critical context supplied by Marxism, feminism, environmentalism, etc. These ideas allowed theorists to conceptualize power differentials that might occur in a specific context; for Marxists this would be class, for feminists this would translate into gender, and for environmentalists this would refer to the ability of human kind to alter the natural environment. But considered alone, these constructs all exhibit a potential to be essentializing, i.e. being reduced to a singular dimension of possible interactions. A post-modern embrace of empowerment resists the essentializing potential of critical thought by acknowledging oppression as a non-linear, multi-faceted construct requiring intervention at multiple points of resistance (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2009; Sandoval, 2000; Sil Lee Sohang, 1997).

Exploring empowerment in narratives of those who struggle for access to social services is transferable to those returning to the community from prison. They too will require access to services if they are to succeed at social reintegration, unless they are

lucky enough to already possess resources that will allow for a smooth transition from prison to society (as may be the case, for example, for some white collar criminals who are able to return to relative privilege and wealth when released from prison). Ex-offenders also carry with them stigma every bit as damaging as the disgust heaped upon welfare recipients. Most of those engaged in reentry will likely face structural barriers to their success such as difficulty in securing housing or finding employment. All these suggest empowerment projects conducted with this population must carefully negotiate mastery over the social environment in ways that will produce beneficial outcomes, or they will be at risk for being nothing more than feel good projects that ultimately only frustrate participants. Empowerment in this context must seek engagement on multiple dimensions to resist being limited to merely personal goals.

SUMMARY

This section began by bringing to light much of the literature that attempts to place the current mode of hyper-incarceration within a cultural, political and historic context. Some of this literature purports to explain the phenomenon of hyper-incarceration, but there is little agreement regarding the precise cause, or a likely solution. There is agreement regarding the harm that can occur when certain populations come into contact with the criminal justice system, and a great deal of evidence to suggest that this effect may be cumulative. Once committed to prison, risk is exacerbated even further. The operational dynamic behind this harm appears to be social isolation and disenfranchisement, elements of a punitive scheme that appears at odds with the hope

that ex-offenders, having finally realized the error of their ways, will seek to rejoin their community and participate in a productive manner conducive to greater social harmony.

A dramatic shift occurs when the formerly incarcerated are eventually released from prison. Exiting an environment where daily needs have been accommodated in a rigidly ordered manner, and then suddenly thrust into an environment where one is expected to assume responsibilities under conditions of scarce access to resources, is startling and abrupt, resulting in tremendous stress among those attempting reentry. Those paroled may receive access to some services, but these services have been de-prioritized over several decades as the bulk of criminal justice resources are allocated to increasing the capacity of the prison industry to house ever larger populations. As no formal entity is charged with the responsibility for rehabilitation or successful social integration, the onus falls upon the non-profit sector or individuals alone.

Incumbent upon those who pass through this system are issues of shame, stigma and civic disenfranchisement which may interfere with the goals of reentry. Securing a sense of place within the larger community can be conceptualized as a critical element of successful social reintegration, yet this is not a dimension easily fostered by a reentry process fraught with stigmatization and subject to parole restrictions. The role of offender or criminal often assumes a master status above other personal identities, a master status being understood as an identity either achieved or ascribed, that trumps all other identities (Garland, 2001).

Upon examining the barriers reentering offenders face as they attempt to create new lives outside of prison, it can be understood why this population might be of

particular interest to social workers. Social capital provides a framework that can help us explore the resources available in support of successful social reintegration, post-incarceration. To the extent access to social capital may be linked to successful reentry, and that greater community cohesion may be linked to a decreased desire to recidivate, a social capital framework would be invaluable to social workers engaged in the reentry arena.

The elements or dimensions that are most useful to a social worker in this area would include increased trust and an enlarged sense of community accountability, both characteristics associated with civic engagement projects. Civic engagement was offered as a specific mechanism of social capital, and one that could be of great use with this population when it comes to addressing issues of disenfranchisement.

Peer and self-help literature was then introduced with the intent to distinguish between categories of such projects. Tensions exist regarding the use of peer-directed groups over groups that receive professional guidance, representing the criminal justice preference for this population. The empowering potential of such groups are mitigated somewhat by a self-defeating tendency within the self-help movement to assume that only individuals (not groups) have the capacity to change, and should they fail only the individuals themselves can be blamed. Such projects also retain great potential to become little more than “feel good” projects, even as the temporary euphoria associated with such projects quickly evaporates when real world systemic barriers manifest.

Models of empowerment and participatory action research are offered as a way to ward off the pitfalls of such projects. The empowerment research appears to support that

effective empowerment projects contain an element of political engagement, especially when conducted in a group context. Similarly, participatory methods are utilized to assure that research means are consistent with expected research outcomes.

Another concept related to both social capital and civic engagement is empowerment. Empowerment was defined as a particularly important component of social work practice, and one commonly facilitated in group work, especially the kind of group work that emphasizes the importance of social action.

Empowerment may also manifest within the context of a peer support group, particularly the types of groups associated with social action. The same holds true for research methods that attempt to be collaborative in design, where research subjects may be transformed into co-researchers and provided with the kind of human agency appropriately associated with an empowerment practice.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Two theoretical concepts support the conceptual framework anticipated to be of the greatest utility to this work. The first is the concept of reintegrative shame as articulated by Braithwaite. The second is the concept of epistemic injustice explicated by Fricker. This section will more fully explore how Braithwaite contributes to the process expectations of this proposal, and Fricker speaks to the methodological implications.

Before this discussion, however, it might be necessary to explain why social capital theory does not deserve mention in the section devoted to the conceptual framework. A social capital framework undergirds most all of this project, and is especially important for understanding Braithwiate's model of reintegrative shame.

Social capital, however, may be too broad a concept to anticipate direct utility as this project unfolds, especially with respect to suggesting thematic categories when sifting through the accumulated data to be produced by this project. Reintegrative shame and epistemic injustice are both concepts of a more narrow and specific scope, and will most certainly achieve prominence during the analytical phase of this project.

REINTEGRATIVE SHAME

The theory of stigma and social deviance suggests, among other things, that individuals are deterred from engaging in unsanctioned (criminal) behavior due to their fear of social stigmatization that would likely result if the individual were caught (Shoham, 1970). Several models have been proposed to illustrate this assertion. Many models predict that arrest, conviction, and appropriate punishment are necessary to maintain the efficacy of criminal sanctions (J. Q. Wilson, 1975). To put this another way, there is an inherent belief in most of these models, that without appropriate sanction, individuals would no longer be bound to avoid unsanctioned activities. Some have suggested that the widespread embrace of this perspective has contributed to a period of mass incarceration in the United States, and a de-emphasis on rehabilitative models designed to help reform imprisoned individuals (Abramsky, 2007; Davis, 2003; Gottschalk, 2006; Stern, 2006).

In retrospect, it is clear that the role of stigma can cut both ways. Within a criminal sub-culture, a shared sense of social stigma can serve as a bond between individuals. The shared sense of identity can foster an increased willingness to transgress societal norms, especially given that those norms are representative of the larger culture

that has already given up on the criminal element (owing to the totalizing effects of stigma). Put another way, after one has already been stigmatized for having broken the law, of what further deterrence can stigma serve?

Social capital theory, described above, suggests that stigma alone may be a uni-dimensional way of applying sanction. In fact this mono-dimensionality can inhibit overall effectiveness. There are a multitude of incentives within a given community that support compliance with societal norms. These other incentives are potentially nullified when we factor in the totalizing effect of stigma (Braithwaite, 1979).

Braithwaite (1989) has proposed that shame, and in particular “reintegrative shame,” may prove to be of more utility than stigma when it comes to deterrence from crime. In the concept of reintegrative shaming, the transgressor maintains accountability to the community (Braithwaite, 2002). Though Braithwaite does not explicitly acknowledge the phenomenon of social capital, it is clear the theory has much resonance for an emerging theory of reintegrative shaming (Halpern, 2005). In essence, Braithwaite is suggesting that increasing the offender’s social connectedness promotes an understanding and appreciation of the impact of his or her crime upon the community and to develop a greater sense of accountability to the community, thus reducing the propensity to re-offend.

A theory of reintegrative shaming that focuses on an individual’s connectedness within a social network, can potentially offer an expanded array of criminal justice interventions designed to encourage greater compliance with the law. As it is, the logical extension of a theory of stigma mandates the imprisonment of large numbers of

individuals, many of which will be so stigmatized by their interaction with the criminal justice system that community integration will be difficult (Petersilia, 2003; Travis & Waul, 2003; Uggen, et al., 2006; Wilkinson & Rhine, 2005).

The concept of reintegrative shame belongs to a larger body of work which is often referred to as restorative justice. A central component of restorative justice is that when a crime is committed, the harm manifest by that crime needs to be healed through the involvement of all those involved – the perpetrator, the immediate victim, and the larger community that bears witness to the crime (Zehr, 2002). Accountability and restitution are major elements of such engagements. While a growing number of agencies that marshal community resources to address or limit the intrusion of the criminal justice system in a given community now embrace the principals of restorative justice, it should be understood how restorative justice approaches may remain at odds with formal systems of criminal justice. In traditional criminal justice systems the state assumes the role of the victim and the role of all the other actors is minimized (T. G. Blomberg & Cohen, 2003). On the other hand, restorative justice models seek to maximize the participation of all the actors and initiate resolutions where the concept of harm is more localized (Zehr, 2002). Such arenas are said to allow for the possibility of mitigation of the effects of crime through a process that facilitates accountability on the part of the perpetrator, forgiveness on the part of the victim, and understanding on the part of the larger community. In this context, the overarching fear of crime is somewhat mitigated, whereas the expansion of state control depend upon exacerbating the fear of crime (Altheide, 2002, 2006).

In many respects the concept of reintegrative shame shares much with the current modality of shame induced via incarceration. In both cases there is the underlying assumption that societal norms can be reinforced through sanction. In the case of incarceration, sanction is imposed by the state. In the case of restorative justice models, the responsibility for sanction flows from the relationship established between the offender and the larger community. In the 1990s this theme of community accountability flourished in the writing of criminologists such as Todd Clear, framed as model for community justice, an idea closely related to restorative justice (Clear & Karp, 1999). If there is a distinction between restorative and community justice it is that restorative justice in the United States is a practice engaged by community advocates borrowing tenants provided from a moral or religious context, while community justice employs the language academics utilize to formally describe a proposed mechanism to elicit greater community involvement in the criminal justice system. In neither case does the formal criminal justice system appear eager to accommodate these new models except in cases where there is strong community advocacy.

EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

The theory of epistemic injustice rests upon a concept that has ramifications for all types of scientific inquiry. Fricker describes epistemic injustice as the devaluation of testimony from public sectors that are systematically marginalized and discredited (testimonial injustice), coupled with a lack of social context to understand a given complaint (hermeneutical injustice). Accordingly, our collective impulse to discount certain testimony over others biases our efforts at knowledge production and perpetuates

injustice on behalf of those whose narratives are discounted. Examples of testimonial injustice rest upon socially constructed notions of prejudice, such as not believing in the innocence of a dark skinned African American (Fricker, 2007). Examples of hermeneutical injustice are characterized by the dearth of interpretive resources, as evidenced when a woman's complaint of sexual harassment goes unrecognized because the social context will not allow sexual harassment to be framed as a problem. These two dimensions of injustice serve to illustrate ethical aspects of two critical epistemic attributes, the first related to our ability to convey knowledge, the second related to our ability to express our social reality (Fricker, 2007).

It is important to understand that Fricker frames her ideas as theory of injustice, as opposed to justice, because she notes that philosophical texts tend to treat injustice as the absence of justice, as if justice were the normal state of affairs (Fricker, 2007). This framing is in itself evidence of epistemic injustice in that it asks the aggrieved (those treated unjustly) to legitimize their concerns through proving a negative. Our very construction of the concept of justice precludes our acknowledgment of many claims of injustice. In shifting the philosophical lens we are better able to appreciate the intersection of ethics and epistemology and possibly understand how the marriage of reason and social power have contributed to limit knowledge production.

Fricker, a feminist philosopher, understandably owes a debt to the second wave feminists who called into question a scientific paradigm that refused to acknowledge that knowledge production always has a sexualized context (Grosz, 1993). Naturally, earlier feminist philosophers were also concerned with the role of subjectivity in scientific

inquiry (Code, 1993) and wrestling with the meaning of objectivity (Harding, 1993).

These texts also had in common a belief in the need for science to operate on behalf of subjugated people (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). In this respect the ideas that support the theory of epistemic injustice did not emerge from whole cloth with no previous foundation. Fricker's contribution to this foundation consists of an explication of the dynamics of prejudice and of situated hermeneutic inequality, both of which work in concert to limit the contributions of the subaltern and marginal to collective knowledge production.

In policy studies the application of epistemic injustice would call into question our tendency to design social policy without taking into consideration the voices of those on the receiving end of the policy under consideration. Typically questions of legitimate authority come to play in policy discourse, as some are presumed to have expertise in policy construction while other voices are situated outside of accepted discourse owing to their obvious subjectivity. In qualitative work in general we may hear the critique that certain voices are not to be trusted as reliable sources of information because the narrators may be unreliable. A theory of epistemic injustice asks us to more closely examine why we assume some narrators more reliable than others, and to question if we are not simply replicating un-interrogated notions of social power.

SYNTHESIS

While much has been written about the material conditions that lend success to the individuals in these circumstances, little is known about the more subjective needs that contribute to successful social integration. It is an assumption of this project that

those with the direct experience of reentry are well placed to articulate those needs that will best provide support for them through the transition from a prison environment to their communities of return. The project design further questions if research conditions can be created that would allow a peek into this world and make greater sense of the meaning participants lend to this dramatic moment of transition. These activities necessarily require of the research participants a willingness to engage in reflective exercise which mandates a close inspection of their daily struggles, and to illustrate these struggles with narrative.

The hope was that these narratives will aid both the participants and the principal investigator in conceptualizing and understanding possible milestones – key life events – that may signal reintegration back into the community after a period of incarceration. Presumably, when identified, these milestones would then be woven into a curriculum that will become the framework of the peer- support group.

It is presumed that many of those who elected to participate in this work will have had some experience with peer-group models, such as AA. As addressed on the official web site of the General Service Office (G.S.O.) of Alcoholics Anonymous, the “serenity prayer,” originally composed by the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and since widely adopted by twelve step practitioners, speaks to a more nuanced relationship to power and powerlessness than is evident in the first step where adherents are compelled to accept powerless over their addiction ("Alcoholics Anonymous : Frequently Asked Questions About A.A.'s History," 2010; "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions," 2010). The prayer asks for the wisdom to distinguish between the things that are within the practitioners'

control, and the things that are not. In this sense the prayer suggests that powerlessness over one's addiction does not translate into a pervasive passivity in general. Alcoholics Anonymous meetings likely support a peer-group context where practitioners may learn to construct narratives of what is possible, and in this manner may support one another in confronting addiction.

An important distinction between an Alcoholics Anonymous model and the model produced through this project may be the decreased emphasis on powerlessness. The Alcoholics Anonymous model accepts powerlessness over addiction as a foundational principal, but for the proposed project this notion is antithetical. The implication of this for the research group will be to make these distinctions apparent in the course of developing a model that best meets their needs. Other distinctions may arise as the group is led to conceptualize a model that will best meet the needs of their peer-led support group. Participants might wish to re-examine the concept of a "higher power" as it is used in AA and question how it may affect inclusivity in the group under development. Perhaps they might compare having a felony record and being physically addicted to drugs or alcohol? Does the medical model applied to drug and alcohol addiction translate to their experience of reentry? Most of these questions are directly related to personal conceptions of power, authority and agency.

The conceptual framework employed in this work will promote a careful scrutiny of narratives that illustrate reintegrative milestones, with special attention paid to evolving narratives of victimization and how these may be best negotiated in the emerging peer-group process. The ability to distinguish between those reentry barriers

that cannot be negotiated, thus provoking narratives of powerlessness and passivity; and those barriers for which effective strategies can be collectively devised, will be a central theme of this project.

Chapter Three

Methods

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

A great deal of statistical data is available regarding who interacts with the criminal justice system and why. It is difficult to infer from such data much about the subjective experiences of the offender. As a result, we cultivate a systems bias when considering the social consequences of hyper-incarceration. This in turn fosters a tendency to seek solutions that only modify the existing criminal justice system, while at the same time diminishing the critical perspectives held by those who have direct experience with the system.

The methods used to extract testimony of personal identity or experience are frequently qualitative; especially those methods which seek to collect this data in a direct fashion, as opposed to indirect mechanisms that distance the researcher from the research subject. Furthermore, when we seek to understand a person's direct experience of civic engagement, peer-directed support groups, or empowerment projects, it is qualitative methods that bring the subjective experience into relief. Such approaches can be especially useful in assessing the needs of the reentry population.

This research employed methodologies that sought to address some of the inequities of past research. The premise is very simple: if we wish to understand what it means to negotiate reentry, let us ask those who are so engaged. Additionally, this research proposed that there is a benefit in gathering this data under conditions that parallel the desired result. In this case, if it is desired that ex-felons become meaningful

members of their communities of return, then let us provide opportunities for them to practice and reflect upon activities that represent greater social integration.

To achieve these aims, participants were recruited into support groups designed to engage the ex-felons in devising a curriculum of sorts thought to have the greatest utility for others in their situation. The participants drew from their personal experience to design this curriculum. They discussed and debated the relevance of individual components. At each successive meeting they were presented with a transcript of the previous week's discussion on the topic. Participants then conducted a grounded theory analysis of the content to identify the most salient themes. They were asked to discuss the possible relationship between the emerging themes, and this discussion served as the basis for the following week's discussion.

Field notes were collected on the above activities and combined with data collected from each participant's intake and exit interviews. The one-on-one interviews were conducted to solicit personal narratives regarding the meaning each participant ascribes to his or her engagement in the project. It was hoped that these narratives would inform the principal investigator regarding how participants conceptualize post-incarceration milestones – life events that signify to each participant successful transition from prison to the community.

The project was conceived as essentially participant action in design, with participants enlisted as co-researchers. Participant action research (PAR) can emerge along a collaborative continuum. On one end of the continuum, research participants provide input on select elements of research design, while on the other end of the

continuum is where every element of the design was subject to negotiation. Naturally, researchers might disagree regarding which research designs along this continuum constitute authentic collaboration. Some believe that any research with a client driven focus may qualify as collaborative in that the research outcome is aligned with client needs (Leith & Phillips, 2005). Will a focus on consumer narratives alone constitute collaboration? An interesting critique suggests an emphasis on consumerism reduces the client to a passive subject role, and clients are obviously more than just consumers of services (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). In other words, we cannot transcend the client/service delivery model unless we are willing to critically examine the conditions which gave rise to the service need in the first place (Sil Lee Sohang, 1997).

As with our understanding of authentic peer-directed groups (as opposed to professionally directed groups), a tension exists regarding where to situate authority and expertise. PAR assumes authority and expertise regarding the social problem rests primarily upon those with the direct experience of the social problem. In such a context, the researcher's expertise may be relegated to management of the research project details and mediating between the research subjects and the project sponsors regarding what kind of outputs will be generated by the research and how these outputs will be employed (Hale, 2007).

RESEARCH SAMPLE

After the researcher obtained IRB approval, a formal search began for potential participants. This researcher asked service providers linked to the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable to assist in referring appropriate participants. Recruitment posters

were created and distributed for the service providers and not intended for general posting. Each service provider was asked to have a personal conversation with potential participants to determine if they met the minimum eligibility criteria, that they had served time in prison and were attempting to negotiate reentry.

Potential participants were screened by this researcher in an in depth, one-on-one interview designed to assess commitment to the project objectives. Active engagement in reentry was self-reported and self-defined. The length of a participant's incarceration or the time that has elapsed since release was not cause for denying participation. The initial (intake) interview served as the introduction to the project as well as to elicit participant expectations regarding their participation in the project. Selection criteria rest upon the participant's expressed desire to help design a peer-directed support group to aid themselves and others during the transition from prison to the community. Consent was obtained prior to collecting any data. Those consenting to participate were asked to engage in some kind of voluntary community activity concurrent with their attendance in the group work to follow.

Potential participants were instructed to attend the informational (intake) interview at the study site. At this interview, participants learned more about the project, were able to ask questions, and if amenable, received instruction regarding the parameters of ethical consent and what it meant to participate in this project. The sample is therefore, one of convenience characterized by their willingness and ability to participate in the project, including their receptivity to volunteering in the community.

The goal was to recruit no more than 24 participants, who would be divided between two groups of 12, ideally segregated by gender if women could be recruited in sufficient number. Ultimately a total of nineteen participants were recruited, of which 14 attended the first group session. These members consisted of seven males and seven females. Group membership was then closed for the duration of data gathering. Attrition was expected with this population as they may experience competing demands upon their time and attention. A high value is placed upon the voluntary nature of participation in the project and it is presumed that those who are able to attend will reflect these values. An incentive of \$20 per session was provided to each participant provided they came on time and stayed through the duration of the session. Each participant signed in at the beginning of the session and signed out when they received their cash incentive.

The plan to meet for ten weeks was reduced to eight weeks when participant recruitment took longer than anticipated and a ten week program would have necessitated weekly meetings through the Christmas and New Years holidays. Initially both groups were gender segregated but chose to come together at week six at their request in order to work on a single peer support group model. Finally, a concluding conference took place following the conclusion of the formal meeting wherein the participants wrapped up their recommendations for continuing the project during the morning part of the conference. Lunch was served to the participants at noon during the day of the concluding conference and community members were invited to hear project participants speak of their intent to keep meeting as members of a project they called “Route 66.”

The site for this project was a local provider of services for people in recovery from alcohol and substance abuse called Communities for Recovery. The executive director offered to host this research after learning that the research principles that support this project consistently dovetail with the principles of the agency (the peer-support and volunteerism components in particular). Communities for Recovery aims to eventually do more outreach to the formerly incarcerated, so in this respect the project might also lend greater visibility of the services provided by this agency. This site serves as a somewhat neutral location within the community as it is not allied with services directly supporting ex-offenders. By having the group work at a site not associated with reentry services, the investigator can avoid the problem of attracting only those participants beholden to a particular mode of service delivery.

At the conclusion of the project the remaining participants were invited to an individual exit interview designed to solicit narratives related to the meaning each individual has attached to their participation in the project.

Each interview and each group meeting lasted approximately an hour, though the 2 group meetings where genders were combined were expanded to 90 minutes so that the entire membership might be heard. The concluding retreat occupied four hours. Only one individual attended every project event to which he was invited. This resulted in a total of fifteen hours of project participation for this individual. This person also earned the maximum total of \$200 in incentives, \$20 for each of the eight group sessions and \$40 for the concluding conference.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH DESIGN & DATA COLLECTION METHODS

A grounded theory analysis was used within groups to identify the significant reoccurring themes found in transcripts of group discussions. Each week group members discussed the themes that arose from the previous week. The group was guided to articulate the possible relationship between these themes, and to understand how these relationships might constitute a working model for the peer directed support group. This emerging model was the topic of discussion and analysis that evolved each successive week. This reiterative process of coding, thematic analysis, and model building is consistent with description of grounded theory as articulated by Charmaz (2006).

A narrative analysis was applied by the primary investigator to all the other data collected within this project, including notes from the intake and exit interviews, as well as process (field) notes collected during group sessions and the concluding conference. Participant narratives regarding engagement in this project were evident during the group sessions, especially as the ability to address such narratives were an important element of understanding the efficacy of the model being built. In narrative theory these are referred to as socially situated interactive performances (Chase, 2008). The process of eliciting narratives from a one-on-one interview depends upon questions the principal investigator designed for this purpose. Narratives derived from one-on-one interviews, as opposed to narratives revealed within the support group, may reveal subtle differences which will need to be weighed differentially in the process of analysis (Chase, 2008).

Demographic information was collected for each participant at the time of the intake interview. These included age, gender, ethnicity, length of incarceration, date of

release and the crime for which the individual had been convicted. Participants were also be asked open ended questions about their ability to commit to the project and their ability to attend a significant portion of the project events, as well as the kind of support resources they were already utilizing. These details were collected in an attempt to understand how these variables may contribute to the individual's ability to persist in the project through the end of the data collection period. For example, transportation may have been a significant impediment for the reentry population. It was important to understand if this variable might play a role in the participant attrition.

The intake interview also provided the principal investigator with information related to the expectations of each participant upon initial engagement. Each individual was asked of their experience or familiarity with other peer-group projects. In an attempt to frame the milestones theme related to the project, each participant was also asked to relate a narrative concerning the meaning of their imprisonment. There was also a "miracle question" related to what each individual might ideally acquire in the near future to assist in his or her reintegration into the community. Themes solicited from these questions were used to guide the development of the group curriculum, until such a time when the group assumed this role independent of guidance from the principal investigator.

In the eight weeks of group work, participants were asked to reflect on the meaning they associated with the required voluntary activity, particularly with respect to what it means to be a productive member of the larger community. Following this activity the group discussed the elements of an ideal peer group model, thus providing

data regarding how the group negotiates the construction of a model for a peer-directed support group - what processes work well, and which do not. Group discussions pertaining specifically to the support group model were audio taped and transcribed for further participant analysis at each successive meeting. The themes emerging from this analysis were incorporated into the emerging model in a reiterative process that continued until the group no longer found the activity as fruitful. Field notes were gathered throughout this process.

Finally, the exit interview was conducted with each individual who was able to keep their appointment, a number that amounted to 5 in total. Participants were asked to ascribe meaning to their participation in the project. Special attention was spent creating a retrospective analysis of how their engagement may have changed them. Again a miracle question was proposed regarding how the participants imagine their hopes for the immediate future. Participants were asked to provide a narrative related to how their engagement in the project may have changed them, and if so, in what ways, and if not, did the project lack any utility?

ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF DATA

Two different analytical modalities were employed in the course of this research – a narrative analysis and a grounded theory analysis.

The first level of analysis took place when the peer groups were underway. Grounded theory was utilized as a method for establishing the most salient themes emerging from group discussions of the evolving peer-group model. At each group session, time was set aside for the group to review transcripts from the previous group

session. The intent to utilize researcher designed software to aid the layperson (someone having no familiarity with grounded theory analysis) through an analytical process was abandoned when it was determined that enough computers could not be accessed to engage the entire group. Additionally, it was determined that adding another layer of technology (the created software) would needlessly complicate what is essentially a manual process (Charmaz, 2006).

A narrative analysis was conducted by the principal investigator with the data collected from both the intake and exit interview. A narrative analysis is more concerned with the meaning participants, rather than the researcher, ascribe to the process with which they are engaged. Both the group work and the concluding conference also provided opportunities for individual participants to speak to their relationship to the overall process.

To the extent possible exit interviews were directed in a fashion that sought reflection regarding the meaning individual participants ascribe to the project. Participants were encouraged to reflect upon what they may have contributed to the project. In this manner the principal investigator was able to ensure that the emerging narrative did not depend solely upon his perspective.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study's emergent and flexible design posed unique ethical considerations acknowledged at the project's onset. Some of these areas of concern included dissemination of the final products, interpretation of the products, protection of the participants from harm, confidentiality, and informed consent.

As with all collaborative research projects conducted with and for community groups, there was a tension between the community needs of the project, and the researcher's need to satisfy academic intent. This tension was somewhat ameliorated by producing two different products. This two product solution is attributed to Hale (2007). It includes the creation of a product specifically to meet the needs of the community researchers. To the greatest extent possible, this product would have input from the community of co-researchers, but as the project unfolded the participant researchers were only willing to member check findings during the course of the group work. The two product solution to this tension represented an attempt to address issues of both dissemination and interpretation.

As to protection from harm, there is an inherent risk in peer-directed groups of dredging up memories that cannot be satisfactorily addressed without professional assistance. Of special concern to this project was the intent to investigate the potentially traumatizing effect of imprisonment (Haney, 2003b, 2006). A list of low-cost or free services was distributed at the first group session. The principal investigator assumed responsibility for facilitating access to such services though this occasion never arose.

Confidentiality and informed consent presented special concerns for this group of co-researchers because they are highly stigmatized and do not desire any undue attention. However, participation in this project was a public exercise in that it is shared with the larger, albeit selected, community. Comments made within the group settings are heard by everyone else in the group. Volunteering outside the group would likely necessitate revealing one's offender status. Participation had consequences that need be carefully

explained at the time of obtaining informed consent. An important ground rule established at the first group session cautioned participants to honor confidentiality within the group. Field notes, to the extent they are shared with others in the course of analysis, did not contain an individual participant's identifying information. The most satisfying way of dealing with these several concerns was to ensure that all the participants were comfortable with the degree of exposure afforded by engagement in the project, were fully cognizant of the potential consequences, and were capable of informed consent.

QUESTIONS OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

As ex-offenders are generally considered unsympathetic or unreliable narrators, this population is frequently deemed inappropriate for qualitative research methods. This research sought to challenge this assumption and in so doing contribute to the re-introduction of a social work (strengths-based) ethos in an area of service provision that has been dominated by methods of supervision and control for the past four decades (Blomberg & Cohen, 2003).

Fricker characterizes the systematic exclusion or diminishment of testimony from the subaltern as epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). When it comes to interpreting the personal meaning ex-offenders apply to their lived experience, they represent an authority on the subject unmatched elsewhere in the community. There is little that could be gained by 'gaming' their response to this research, except in terms of whatever elements of personal identity can be shored up in performing for others. At any rate, since narrative always assumes a point of view, historical truth is not the primary objective

(Riessman, 1993). Research that prioritizes the direct experience of the research subjects may not be as concerned with objectively derived truth as it is with understanding the truth that is “performed” by the research subject. In this respect even Rigoberta Menchu’s discredited biographical testimony contains truth in the sense that it does accurately portray the subjugation of the Guatemalan people (Denzin, 2008). In a similar fashion, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is clearly a work of fiction, yet may accurately inform its readers regarding several truths pertaining to the lived experience of slavery. The performance of personal truth, regardless of possible threats to objectively acquired validity, can still function as a legitimate strategy for critique and empowerment (Denzin, 2008). From a social work perspective, such revelations allow the social worker to understand the client’s perspective, and engage in a manner consistent with how the client constructs his or her identity.

A question far larger than the trustworthiness of the data concerns the finding’s overall utility. Much of the literature derived from research on this population is not as concerned with addressing the needs of this population as it is concerned with protecting past victims of crime, or mollifying those who have been conditioned to fear crime. Those released from prison are rarely questioned regarding what they need in order to ensure the reentry process has efficacy. Ex-offenders, like any other consumers of social services, have the right to weigh in regarding the efficacy of the services offered, or to advocate that greater attention be paid to gaps in service delivery. Current research methods do not provide for much input from those with direct experience, and, therefore, largely lack utility.

The above represents an attempt to make a case for the presumed utility of the findings to trump concerns about the trustworthiness of the data collected. An additional strategy associated with qualitative modes of inquiry request a replacement of the traditional concepts of validity and reliability with the concepts of credibility and dependability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

The credibility criterion depends upon the researcher's ability to engage in the kind of self-reflection necessary to acknowledge the biases brought to this research. This is addressed in frequent journaling and the keeping of field notes. Credibility is further shored up by the researcher's past engagement in this field and the ability to check possible findings with others similarly engaged. Greater credibility is also supported when the researcher triangulates the findings against data collected from three different settings (interviews, group work, and conference participation).

As the participants in this project were considered co-researchers, they were also invited to regularly member check findings as they emerged, and again at the time of the exit interview. Naturally, findings were also triangulated against existing empirical and theoretical literature. Yet another modality of triangulation – researcher triangulation – occurred at the end of the project with an outside expert brought in to check the findings for social and ideological bias. The outside expert, Dr. Jerijean Houchins, Executive Director of the Austin Travis County Reentry Roundtable, has worked with ex-offenders for several decades.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Of necessity the sample size for each group was limited. It was determined that closing the group during the period of data collection would ensure some consistency with the data, and avoid the kind of disruption of the collective narrative that can arise when there is group turnover. Group size at initiation was larger than what is usually considered ideal in anticipation of attrition.

It was hoped that as participants assume increased authority for managing the group, and presume ownership of the model under development, they would also enlarge their ability to challenge the principal investigator, especially where, in the eyes of the project participants, he oversteps his authority or insist upon interpretations of the group's work that are not consistent with the participants' perspectives. Challenges of this sort were encouraged as they were considered to have broadened the credibility of the findings.

Researcher bias may have been a concern for those who believe researchers should not have political motivations woven into their research design. This project of course rejects this notion, but did not reject the concern that researcher bias may still play a part in the interpretation of the findings. The principal investigator addressed this limitation by making the research process as transparent as possible and by collecting critical input on the project as it unfolded. Luckily this project took place in the midst of a supportive yet critical community of service providers, many of whom have expressed interest in following the project, and several of which were specifically solicited for input when questions of interpretation inevitably arose. In the final product the principal

investigator took care to fully explicate positionality with reference to the project in an attempt to lay bare researcher bias.

SUMMARY

Even though a great deal of research has been done *on* offenders, it is striking how much offender research is framed in terms of supervision and control in the presumed interests of public safety. This research dismisses the public safety thesis and asks if an approach that advances the personal agency of individuals engaged in reentry might produce outcomes where participants may assume greater responsibility in the community - responsibility and the incumbent accountability that follows being shown to represent key elements of civic engagement and social integration. The intent of this project is to engage in a research process that is more consistent with the desired outcomes of reentry – an approach which also resonates with an ethos frequently cultivated in social work interventions.

Of great importance to this work are the ideas Fricker presents in her work on epistemic injustice. To systematically negate the testimonial contribution of a particular population is to deny that population access to justice. Add to this the policy context – to ignore the perspective of those who are most directly impacted by social policy is to construct policy that will most certainly lead to the construction of policy of uncertain and likely negative ends. These inequities are evidently the result of stigma imposed upon ex-offenders, a stigma due in part to what Garland (2001) labels the master status incumbent of the victim/offender duality. While this research cannot directly address the power of this duality in society at large, it can help ensure that research participants do

not inadvertently internalize the negative stereotypes or waste personal resources railing against the injustice imposed upon their everyday lives.

Lastly, exploratory projects of this type hold a great deal of potential with respect to the generation of new theory. New theories regarding how those released from prison may most effectively negotiate reentry are rare in the area of criminal justice. As social work frequently defers to other disciplines for theory, this kind of work represents an opportunity for the discipline to assert itself in an area where there is a great need for a novel perspective. It is a premise of this project that all concerned will benefit if social work researchers took a more active role in articulating theories that reflect the most promising elements of social work practice – they manifest great practicality and utility, they utilize methods that enlarge personal and social agency, and they rest firmly upon a social justice perspective.

Chapter Four

Findings

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation project was intended to uncover data related to how ex-offenders engaged in community reentry make sense of their condition, and how this data may inform researchers with respect to client needs, post-incarceration. As the dissertation project was conceived to provide participants access to social support, what would the collected data tell us of how this support may be most effectively nurtured? What might be the barriers or benefits of such a project? And finally, what might engagement in such a project tell us of the goals and expectation those engaged in reentry possess regarding their return to the community? In short, what did the research participants perceive to be the important milestones that signify successful reentry?

DATA COLLECTION

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from the transcripts and recordings from a series of one on one interviews as well as a series of transcriptions from groups of ex-offenders meeting to discuss the design for a peer-directed support group. The individual interviews tended to support a narrative analysis of the data to the extent that long-form narratives could be elicited from the participants. The group work more often supported a grounded theory approach to the data as individual narratives might imply that a participant was dominating the group spotlight, thus taking time away from the other participants.

The individual interviews described above consist of two types, an intake interview and an exit interview. There are 19 intake interviews in total, eight with female participants and eleven from interviews with male participants. In addition to soliciting narratives regarding why individuals wanted to participate in the project or identifying what they hoped to gain from their participation, the intake interviews also included demographic information. Demographics information (see Figure One on the following page) was gathered on all nineteen who participated in an intake interview. This data is aggregated for both the men and the women, for those who attended the first group meeting, and finally for those who attended the concluding conference. Except for gender, there are no participant characteristics that may have signaled probable attrition.

Note that in all cases pseudonyms replace participant's actual names.

Of the nineteen who completed intake interviews only fourteen attended the first day of group meetings. Attrition claimed half of these individuals through the course of the project with only three of those declining further participation having offered a reason for their departure from the project. The greatest attrition followed the merging of the two groups previously segregated by gender during the first six group meetings. Not every participant attending the concluding conference kept their scheduled appointments for an exit interview. Those who missed their appointments took no

Figure One

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

103

										@ intake			@ 1 st group			@ last group		
										age	total months served	education equivalent	age	total months served	education equivalent	age	total months served	education equivalent
MALES																		
pseudonym	ethnicity	conviction type	release date	major interest in project	age	total months served	education equivalent											
*ADAM	Caucasian	theft	Sep-10	help others	57	144	13	57	144	13	57	144	13	57	144	13		
BOYD	Caucasian	theft	Aug-10	help others	39	15	GED	39	15	GED								
CARLOS	African-American	drug	Sep-10	validation	34	14	13	34	14	13								
DAVID	African-American	theft	Jun-02	for ex-offenders	56	120	13	56	120	13								
ERWIN	Caucasian	drug	Mar-10	make a difference	42	24	13	42	24	13	42	24	13					
FRANK	Hispanic	drug	Sep-10	help others	35	15	GED	35	15	GED								
GARY	African-American	forgery	Sep-10	learn something	22	16	GED	22	16	GED								
# 9	African-American	theft	Dec-06	stop recidivism	48	52	14											
# 10	Hispanic	forgery	11-Jul	stop recidivism	49	34	13											
# 11	Hispanic	drug	10-Jul	try anything	50	180	GED											
# 6	Caucasian	DWI	Sep-10	networking	39	1	16											
					Mean	42.8	55.9	13	40.7	49.7	12.8	49.5	84	13				
FEMALES																		
pseudonym	ethnicity	conviction type	release date	major interest in project	age	total months served	education equivalent	age	total months served	education equivalent	age	total months served	education equivalent					
*ALLEY	Caucasian	fraud	Oct-07	help others	40	24	13	40	24	13	45	24	14	45	24	14		
*BETTY	African-American	forgery	Mar-02	break barriers	45	24	14	45	24	14	34	60	13	34	60	13		
*CAITLIN	Caucasian	sex	May-09	find resources	34	60	13	34	60	13	49	6	14	49	6	14		
*DONNA	Caucasian	forgery	Jul-08	help others	49	6	14	49	6	14	45	240	GED	45	240	GED		
ELISHA	African-American	murder	Aug-05	help others	45	240	GED	45	240	GED								
FRAN	Caucasian	Drug	Feb-10	help others	37	21	GED	37	21	GED								
GALE	African-American	theft	Jun-08	help others	59	57	15	59	57	15	59	57	15					
# 5	Caucasian	DWI	Jun-08	help others	44	48	14											
					Mean	44.1	60	13.4	44.1	61.71	13.3	46.4	77.4	13.6				
					Overall Mean	43.4	57.5	13.2	42.3	55.3	12.9	47.6	79.9	13.4				

* = provided exit interviews, GED = counted as the educational equivalent of 12 years

initiative to reschedule. No incentives were offered to encourage participation in the exit interview. Of the exit interviews, four are with female participants and one is with a male, for a total of five interviews.

While the groups met only once weekly for eight weeks total the transcriptions from the group work recordings number fourteen. This is explained because the first six weeks consisted of two groups that was gender segregated, thus producing a total of twelve transcriptions, six stemming from each gender. The last two weeks featured extended meetings of a combined membership resulting in only a single transcription from each of the last two group meetings.

Additionally, group participants were guided in several exercises where they applied a first-level grounded theory analysis to transcriptions of the previous week's discussion. This work may not have been as detailed an analysis the primary investigator would complete outside of the group, but served to support or supplement project findings. An aggregate list of gerunds as of the third week of group work is provided in the table below (Figure Two). Occasionally, as a sort of homework, a list of gerunds compiled from this work were distributed to group participants so that they might further explore the theoretical relationships between some of the most frequently occurring themes. The resulting theoretical models were subject to scrutiny from the remainder of the group members, thus effectively but inadvertently putting to an end interest in further analysis. Group members came to resent work that to them represented "research" as this appeared to them an exercise that came at the expense of time that could be devoted to

support of one another, especially given that our time together each week was limited to an hour.

Figure Two

First Level Coding: Week Three	
Helping, x7	Accepting, x2
Caring, x5	Communicating, x2
Judging, x5	Connecting, x2
Focusing, x4	Contributing, x2
Networking, x4	Criticizing, x2
Searching, x4	Encouraging, x2
Venting, x4	Ignoring, x2
	Labeling, x2
	Learning, x2
	Nurturing, x2
	Persisting, x2
	Questioning, x2
	Relapsing, x2
	Resourcing, x2
	Sharing, x2

The grounded theory analysis that produced the list of gerunds and stimulated a discussion regarding what the research participants wanted to include in their peer-group model did serve to support and confirm the major findings of this project. These themes are considered minor findings however because the resulting peer-group model was intended as an ancillary benefit of the project and a component owned primarily by the participants. It would have been considered intrusive for the primary investigator to impose a narrative of client needs on to the project participants. The intent was that

participants would frame their needs in their own terms, even if the project did not allow enough time for a consensus to emerge.

As an example of how the concepts that emerged from the groups application of a grounded theory analysis of group transcripts were used to build a model for the proposed peer-directed support group, one group participant, Alley, proposed that the resulting group model should contain the following four elements: 1) Unmet Needs, 2) Resource Sharing, 3) Venting and Complaints, and 4) Solutions and Focusing. To inform these four categories Alley first collapsed several similar gerunds into one of four groups, then proposed a theoretical relationship between these groups. She envisioned that the group would open with participants given an opportunity to report to the rest of the group regarding their as yet unmet needs. This would be followed by a period where group participants might brainstorm possible resources to meet those needs, if they are available. As it was anticipated that there would likely remain needs not easily addressed by available resources, a third component suggested that participants might require a period to vent or complain about reentry barriers. But as it seemed to be an important value to the group participants that the model under construction not allow complaining for the sake of complaining, Alley proposed that the group should conclude with a period devoted to possible solutions; specifically a strategy session related to how persistently unmet needs might be addressed over the long-term, group members possibly having to create new resources, if no others were available. The proposed long-term solutions might require project committees devoted to the completion of a particular task.

KEY FINDINGS

Four key findings emerged from this dissertation project. The first findings represent those concepts for which there was a great deal of consensus. The latter findings representing those concepts for which there was some contention among participants in as far as interpretation. For the purposes of this chapter, however, there will be no discussion of interpretation, as this is the subject of the next chapter.

Finding 1: Altruism among and between ex-offenders.

A frequent theme of the intake interviews and later group sessions was the concept that participation in the groups offered something back to the community. During the individual interviews in particular, where each participant was prompted to identify the three most important outcomes anticipated from their involvement in the project, 12 of the 19 initial participants explicitly referenced helping others. Of the 14 participants who attended the first group meeting, all but three explicitly noted in their intake interviews their desire to help others, though of the three who did not, two of them made reference to the value of networking. When the participants later assembled into group they would frequently cite a need to help others as the primary reason for why they kept coming to the group and why the group should persist beyond the research phase. This notion was never challenged in a group context and only once in an exit interview. On this basis it is considered a primary finding.

In anticipation of the group work those strongly identified with the need to be of assistance to the larger reentry community did so in the following ways:

I just want to help. I want to help make it easier. Because you know a lot of the people I did meet while in prison were re-incarcerated. And I know why (Alley).

This is where I want to be, giving back, helping, making some resolutions for people coming out (Gale).

Even if it is not directly helping me, benefiting me, I feel like I can help somebody else. If I can give people resources, send somebody to the right direction, to help somebody else, I feel like that is a good thing. That's what my new goal is, me coming out, is helping other people, putting other people first (Gary).

Once in the group, participants framed their desire to help others often in terms of a calling, or a responsibility, to help other ex-offenders:

And that's what the peer support does. I bring in what I am - all that I am. I lay it on the table, allow the dissecting to come on - where I've gone, where I'm going, and lay it all out there. Here I am. This is [Betty]. Here I am. Now what fits you? Not everything is going to fit everybody. But I know that there is something that I have done, something I said, something I lived, something I experienced, that is going to help somebody else (Betty).

We need to find out the places that do work with ex-felons. That's how we can help the group, help other people. Because even if this group don't help us, per se, it might help some people down the line. It might help somebody else that doesn't know where to go, to find something. That's why I say everything helps. You pick up a flyer off the street, you see something, you heard about something, bring it to the table. That can help somebody (Gary).

I think back about Moses. Moses did something wrong and God put him out in the wilderness for how long? Seven years? And I look back in my life and say I did something wrong and I was punished by the man up above for almost fifteen, twenty years, but I'm back to lead my people. I was reading it and it just tied in so

well because there is a meaning, a purpose. There are so many people that I hung out with, so many people that I dealt with, that are now gone. And you know I should have been gone. I say to myself, God damn, I should have been gone. But no, I shouldn't have been gone because I am here for a purpose. I am fulfilling that purpose now (Gale).

Finding 2: Gendered differences with respect to accessing reentry services.

In the gender segregated groups and in two of the exit interviews, reference to gendered differences with respect to accessing services upon return to the community frequently appeared. This theme did not emerge in sessions where both genders were present (with the exception of the male group facilitator who led the women's groups). Each gender believed the other gender was more privileged when it came to the opportunities available post-incarceration. Sometimes this privilege was attributed to characteristics thought to be inherently gendered, and at other times the apparent disparity was attributed to structural inequities built into service delivery. An example of the later is the repeated reference that most reentry programs seemed to have been designed specifically for men:

You see they pilot everything in the men's stuff, so the women have nothing. We have no units here that are working on pre-exit. But at the men's unit and the state jail, and a couple of actual prison units, they are piloting all these wonderful programs that are pretty successful like CPI and stuff works within the prison and they are piloting these great programs and I'm like "that is so great . . . for the men." But we have more barriers typically because we do have children we got to take care of as soon as we get out. And we can't do a lot of the manual labor and jobs that you guys can do. It needs to be more even. I know for myself I didn't even know I was getting out until seventy-two hours before I got out. All of sudden it was oh shit, I'm about to get out, what? Monday? I didn't have any notice to start preparing for my get out. I was like "uh-oh" you know, and mine was the best of circumstances, and it still caught me off guard. I agree it needs to start before you get out, to get that, what they are calling it, that circle of support.

It needs to start ninety days before your release and to get you a group of people who are going to stay with you through your entire reentry process – you know people from your church, your family, and the system as well, it may be your case worker or whatever (Alley).

In contrast to the men who believed that it is the women who have more opportunity:

They treat them better too like they do get better services, they eat better; they get different meals and everything. Like if you a male and you is in the transit dorm, they be making you get out of there early morning, like seven o'clock. Women don't have to leave. They could stay there all day. You know what I am saying? They could sit there in the dorm all day. They don't have to go do anything, but if you is in the men's dorm you gotta get out (Gary).

They got a lot more opportunity. There is a lot of programs here for women with children (Boyd).

Such sentiments were shored up by casual comments that were not recorded as they occurred outside the group where the facilitator felt it was safer to probe why, for example, it was thought that the other gender had more opportunities in obtaining employment. A male participant reported that women can always waitress or obtain similar low-skilled positions which might require nothing more than “showing some leg.” A female respondent on a completely different occasion reported that men had more day labor available to them due to their upper body strength.

When this issue was probed within the group the facilitator risked provoking a particular response if the questions were perceived as a challenge. Were the group to give in to the perceived perspective of the facilitator, this would represent undue

influence upon the group. Conversely, the group might decide to meet the challenge and rally their voices to counter the facilitator, again producing exaggerated data. Gentle probing may not have provoked a response geared toward either supporting or challenging the facilitator's perspective, but often reveals the gendered essentialism at play:

And they also, men are brought up different than what women are. When I was young, I grew up in a children's home, and the girls were taught to cook clean and be housewives because that is our purpose in life, whereas the men were taught to be the caretakers and the providers and you didn't show emotions and you don't cry and if you have an emotional outburst then you are a big wuss. When you are raised like that, then you get old, then you get to prison, and it's like even more enforced, especially in a men's unit, that [to cry] is unacceptable. I mean you not a man. You got to be gay if you can cry (Caitlin).

The men need the help more; the women get support more than the men because they are women. They get more stuff. They get more resources. Look at it, it's true. From families, from the community, they get more, period. Simple fact. And the men don't want emotional stuff. They need base stuff; they need simple cut and dried stuff. Really, I need to live; I need to get a job, so I can get money so I can pay bills. Simple stuff. Stuff like that. The women just want to drag stuff out, all these nit-picky little things, and this just don't interest men at all. And that is why men don't understand women in the overall world. They think differently (Adam).

It is not that men are not emotional, it is just that the have a tendency to grab into the negative first. And some do, I really know that there are some men who do, I can name you about 20 of them right off the top of my head that do. However, it came hard. It was almost like taking chisels. But the thing about them is that they are so caught up in the media's perspective of what a man should be they have never experienced of what a man is (Betty).

It's about the women though, and we said it is easier for them. If you go outside and put a women on the street, and you go outside and you put a man on the street, the women going to off the street way sooner. Somebody gonna try and pick her up. Ain't nobody gonna try and pick me up. In our society it is just easier for them. A man will take care of a woman. I'm not even in a position to help a woman, but if I see a beautiful woman, she out on the street, I am going to try to help just because I want to help. For every homeless woman you got four or five homeless men (Gary).

At other times, comments about gendered expectations arose in respect to how the model for the peer directed support group might work. Even though the gender segregated groups, independent of one another, all engaged in conversation where gender characteristics were essentialized, participants were unanimous in their agreement that the emerging peer group model be co-ed. While no one appeared willing to challenge the concept of essential differences, at the same time these differences were not as great as to mandate gender segregation. From the women's group came the following:

You can't segregate. I mean you can but the benefit of the group would not be as effective as if it were just men over here and women over there (Caitlin).

Everybody is going to be in a different place and bring something different to the table. We need that. We Need each other. Everybody has got something to offer (Alley).

I agree that you got to be all together and that the group we are doing is together so we can look at both sides (Donna).

Then the men's group echoed:

I think it is time for that. [merge the two groups] We should do that. The reason why I say that is because it will help us, like honestly, it will. Right now (Gary).

You know like AA, NA, they are on the same lines as AA. NA and CA and whatever was built along the same lines. I can guess if they can all work together as one, so can we (Boyd).

Finding 3: Gendered differences with respect to interpreting the meaning of incarceration.

At the fourth group meeting, time was set aside to speak specifically about what the period of incarceration meant in the story of the participants lives. The intent was to generate a life course narrative where the participants might conceptualize life before, and life after, their periods of incarceration. It was thought that the contrast would enable them to later speak about their hopes for staying out of prison this time and be better able to identify what they might need to make this transition successful.

The women, who typically met first each Saturday, were very forthcoming when it came to telling stories of their prison experience. They were the most lively and engaged at this time than at any of the group meetings held prior. This was exhibited by much laughter, frequent shouts of agreement, an oft observed tendency to finish one another's sentences, and the occasional "high five" when one of the group members made a comment that especially resonated with the others.

In contrast, the men appeared to avoid the topic all together. The conversation turned repeatedly to the topic of employment strategies when having to report to a potential employer one's felony history. The group facilitator gently remind participants

that they were straying from the topic and offered permission to continue discussion in accordance to what the group found most useful. Apologetically, some of the men then suggested they would return to the topic of prison but within a short period of time the topic would revert again to the to employment strategies. Others remained uncharacteristically quiet. Toward the end of the session the facilitator once again pointed out that the topic had strayed and this provoked the following response from one of the participants:

What prison meant to me? Lets just take it for what it was - it was punishment for what I did. I mean I knew I was doing wrong. I knew it was wrong to buy dope the way I was buying dope, trying to sell it, trying to feel like I was a drug dealer. I knew it was wrong the whole time. I knew that when I got caught I was going to go do some time. When I did, I got lucky for not doing as much time as I thought I was going to do, and I took it at that. I was locked up for over a year. Did I reflect on stuff? I regretted a lot is what I did. I regretted a lot. Did it help me or anything? I don't think so. Only thing it gave me is what to expect if I ever do decide to commit a crime again. I know that I am going to be surrounded by 50, 60, 80 people. There are going to be homosexuals there. You ain't going to have no privacy. And if that is the kind of life one would want, go for it. Commit as many crimes as you want. You can have it cuz that's where you going. And it can be worse than that, from the stories I heard it can be a lot worse than what I seen. And I'm not going through it again (Frank).

And in the closing moments of the group Frank's sentiment was quietly echoed by Boyd:

What it meant is that while I was living in society I made a bunch of wrong choices and some bad decisions against society that I was living in, is what it meant. What I did with my time is exactly what he did, I stayed in school. I got three vocational certificates. I went to all those behavioral classes, same thing. I didn't waste my time. I took what was offered, but what going to prison meant is that I made some bad decisions. Bad choices against society and I was punished for it. And I did the same thing, I reflected a lot, cuz you got nothing but time to reflect. Why did I make those bad decisions?

While the men tended to focus on the prison experience as “punishment” for “bad choices” within those few comments that stayed on topic, the only element that was consistent with the women’s description of their time inside related to the use of their time while inside to improve on their education. Otherwise the women’s stories tended to focus on more positive themes centering on how prison was perceived to have saved their lives or in some other way provided greater meaning to their lives. These themes are somewhat illustrated by this extended exchange:

Alley: I was listening, listening to all you all. What I pull out of that is so interesting, like, this is the first time that I’ve gotten to associate with ex-offenders. Because when you get out you’re like, I’m going to stay away from all those people. You are trying to focus on new people, places, and things. And it is so different I think, because since this group has started, I think what the difference is, and I think the reason all of us are here giving back is because there are a million people who are ex-offenders that will never be involved in anything like this. That will never go to the legislature. That will never be in a support group. That will never be sharing resources. I think what you just spoke about is the exact reason why each one of us sits here and other people will come to these groups, because we are blessed by our experience in prison. Prison was the best thing that ever happened to me. Even for the few moments that were not so great, the few places I spent time where I was not happy to be there, but in general it was the best thing, by far, that ever happened to me.

Betty: OK, I don’t know about anybody else, but I’m going to say it like this, it saved my life.

Alley: Absolutely. Yeah. [over talk] And I think that is the difference with us sitting here that are giving back, because we recognize that without that we would either be dead, . . .

Elisha: Absolutely.

Alley: . . . or still be in prison, [over talk] I mean I went in pregnant too. I went in freaking out, like get me out of here, I can't do this - I can't do this - I can't do this. Not only could I do it, but I did it right and I came out and said "ah, let's do something different.

Elisha: Exactly.

Betty: You all have to get that word empowered. Because we do have power! We do have authority! And we got to make sure that we using it. Because like you said, there is going to be some that will never come in here [referring to the group], so guess what our duty is?

Gale: Go out there.

Betty: Exactly.

Gale: We need to stay out there and go into, you know, like, people who go into prisons and talk, and those people listen to us. Because they want to hear our stories . . .

Alley: Because we've been there!

Later during the same group meeting a similar conversation explored what could be learned in prison while introducing the novel concept that much fun could be had:

Gale: And go to the bathroom by a bush. You know, "Boss I need to use the restroom." "Then you best find yourself a bush."

Betty: OK, OK, I'm going to say something you all, it's going to be a little crass, but one of the things, remember we said we learned things, OK, now who besides me learned to do it standing up like a guy? Alright? [laughter, slapping of hands]

Caitlin: You don't want to get too close to the ground, you might get bit.

Gale: I learned how to fish with my hands.

Betty: Exactly! And we had fun!

Alley: We had to!

Betty: We picked watermelons and stuff, and every other one we can bust, I'm serious, so we could eat them.

Gale: This is how we planted: you dug a hole with your hand; you had someone behind you put the seed in, and someone behind her put the water on.

Betty: And here is the thing that I'm going to tell everybody, when they tried to put me in the kitchen I told them "no," because I enjoyed it - because I liked being outside. We worked four hours, and two of those hours, one hour was you was being strip searched, and one hour [over talk]. And you understood where you was. And you get off in time to go watch All My Children and [laughter, over talk]. In other words we had fun and a lot of things. And for people who say woe, woe, woe; I'm so sick and tired of people saying woe is me. It is not a woe is me, it saved my life.

Alley: That is right.

Gale: I got a degree. [over talk] I got my first degree!

Resiliency, sometimes explicitly named as above, was a theme that consistently re-occurred, but mostly in the women's group. The concept was sometimes conflated with resistance, as if they two were somehow equated. Below, a woman who used the term resiliency earlier to describe her experience in prison tells what it means in her case. In doing so she prompts a memory from another woman to describe the resources she discovered while in prison to deal with the weight of an overwhelming prison sentence:

Let me tell you something that came to me this week. This week I was praying and I was listening for my answer. And part of what I got was only the strong survives, and because of where we have already been, we have already proven our strength. Because we are strong enough, number one, to be willing to rise above. To find the courage from within to rise above, to be rejected, OK? There are people who are being rejected and taking guns to their heads. There are people who are being rejected and they can't live it without taking a bunch of pills. But because of where we've been, only the strong survives. . . . Only the strong survive. As a Black person, forgive me but I'm black, in case you haven't noticed, only the strongest survived on the boats. Remember, a lot of people died off (Betty).

Resist, I can honestly say that is what got me through. When they told me I had 75 years, and I was only 20 years old, I was like "you have got to be crazy." I cannot even see that far. I was pregnant, and I was raped, and I was protecting myself. I was from a small town, not here in Texas, it was a different state. As a result of that I went to jail. At my trial my granny was there. And with me being pregnant I was anemic. I told the man, I got to sit down, legit. And he was like, "no you are a hardened criminal, you this, you that, you got to take everything that I tell you." And I'm looking at him like I've never been arrested in my life. First time I have ever been arrested. I didn't know how much time I had until they was waking me up telling me I had a visit, after my sentencing. And I had to

ask my grandmother how much time I had. And my grandmother was about 67 years old at the time. The whole time I am incarcerated and doing the appeal thing and I'm thinking, man, I can't do this, I'm twenty years old. I can't do this. But it was the people who had already been there 10 and 12 years and they are like, "You know what? Little girl you are going to get yourself together. You going to do this time, you are not going to let this time do you." And I'm saying do you honestly believe I can do thirty seven and a half years in the penitentiary? I'm not going to survive. But I was like a rough neck when I went in, I hated every body, and I hated everything, because I couldn't understand why I went to jail protecting myself and my unborn child. But during the course of that, you know, after the old timers got ahold of me, cuz after the first two years I was always sick, and they was nurturing me. They was like you're going to go to school, you're going to this. And I'm looking at them like "you all don't know me from a can of paint." They didn't know me, but it's that strength and that resilience, perseverance, that kept me going. Just by the grace of God I didn't have to do it all. [serve the full length of her sentence] I ended up getting out on appeal. When she talks about strength, I am like wow that was just me all over the board because I couldn't have given them twenty years all by myself, there was no way (Elisha).

A final theme emerged from the women when one of them introduced the idea of the prison as a place where one could learn acceptance, as in a family. This theme would be picked up on and expanded at a future group discussion:

Going back to being in prison and what it was, not all of it was bad. For a person who has never been accepted in family, and going into the prison I was so green, you know. When the first person who came to me and stuff, was a mother figure. That was the first thing. To be part of a family, and to learn how to be a family, that was important to learn. The peer group that was within, that was a family. It is a family and not everything is bad. For me to rely that to other people, when you send us to prison, we learn things (Gale).

The above excerpts came from the fourth group meetings. The contrast between how the men and women responded to the same prompt provided the facilitator material to take to the fifth group meeting in order to seek clarification. The women were asked a series of probing questions challenging if prison was really all that fun. In response, the

women reported no shortage of horror stories and were quite specific about which institutions and which periods of time were associated with the most abuse. They were later asked if they could explain the dramatic differences in tone between the women's group and the men's group the previous week. Later the men were asked similar questions.

I think that it is easier for women sometimes to take a negative situation like when we went to prison, or whatever situation we were in that got us to prison, I think that it is easier for us to take that negative situation and put a positive spin or a positive light on it. They always say that women are the more emotional creatures, and I know for me that sometimes I have to make it positive or I'll go insane. Cuz most of the time there is always something positive that comes out of that negative anyway. . . . The men tend to be more closed off than women. So what was a traumatic, negative experience, for them, it is harder for them to make a positive out of that, because it was all about evil or death or whatever, and we have to find the positive to keep going (Caitlin).

One thing I noticed about men, and this is personal, because I'm married to an offender also, is that men have the tendency to do the blame thing. It is much harder for them to understand the timeline. Had you not did this then this would not have happened, and this would not have happened, and this started with you making the decision to do something. I have that issue going on right now in my marriage. My husband does not see where he is the foundation of some of the things that go on, some of the things that don't go on, or whatever, that it has to start with him. He is very slow to accept responsibilities for his actions. And I'm not talking about just my husband. [provides an additional example] And so I see that, that men do not . . . we have taken control of the situation because we deal with us. I made a decision, and from that decision this is what happened. Now I gotta make the best of it (Betty).

. . . being with an ex-offender, in my social life, his experience is completely different. It is more violent, and it's more gang related, and all that other stuff. Their survival in prison is way different than what I experienced. Now the only place I felt any fear was at [name of institution] but otherwise my experience was good. [she is interrupted by another group member who conveys agreement that

the named institution was an especially violent place] I had close people to talk to and to share my ups and downs and all this kind of stuff. I think the women tend to more make it about family, and not about, you know, fighting and gangs and stuff. Not to say it doesn't happen, cuz obviously it does, but that was not my experience. And I moved to five different units, so I think I got a feel of a few different places (Alley).

The theme of recreating family while in prison, introduced the week before, was then expanded upon by the women as they attempted to explain why their experience of prison may have been different than the men's experience of prison.

As I say, women are emotional creatures and we thrive off our families, or whatever, and so what I saw when I was there this time was that we created families. We had the momma, the daddy, the little brother, the sister, Joe Blow over here is my cousin and this girl over here is my aunt; I mean we created our own little world and family community in there. And outsiders were not allowed. When you go in you fit in as part of a specific family (Caitlin).

What people feel about the Crips and the Bloods and that stuff is a total different aspect than what they started. And the original Crips and gangs, those that are in there, they detest what people have turned that into. Just to throw that in there. They was family oriented. They was taking people and trying to do a positive. There was mentorship going on and there was a whole lot of stuff that had nothing to do with guns and violence. But once again gangs and family is the exact same thing, but it's just that gangs sound more macho (Betty).

This last comment introduced the utility of belonging, whether it is in a gang or a family. The same speaker later elaborated on this theme in order to illustrate what she thought was the difference between the prison experiences of men and women.

But once again we go for the positive, because we are willing to reach down for the positive. The men did gangs and we did family. We both did the same thing, getting protection, we just did it differently. Because we are different, and the different emotions, aspects of what rules us, what we need, our needs are

different. Men don't realize they need family. Gangs is family. If you have ever been in a gang, a gang is still family. There is a level of protection, but there is also a belonging. So what does family mean . . . belonging. It is the same thing (Betty).

Later with the men the facilitator reported that the women identified a sense of belonging to be important while within prison and that they attempted to cultivate this by confiding in one another. The facilitator asked if men were able to do this while they were in prison. This prompted the following exchange:

Boyd: You have to make up a new identity sometimes just to deal with the stuff that is going on in there.

Erwin: You just need to learn to adjust to the different situations going on in there.

Boyd: That what I am saying, different personalities for each different thing in there.

Boyd: You might look to your cell mate for something like that. [referencing how the women developed family inside]

Frank: I wouldn't. [reference to the women being able to share things in prison] I'm going to bring up instances about when I was out, but I won't go into specifics with anybody. Like is your wife there for you? Shit I don't want to talk about my wife to you.

Gary: But if I got a good vibe with you, you my cellie, and we just sit up and chop it up, I talk to you everyday, outside in the rec yard we walkin' around, a conversation might come up where you really meet and know people. But just

going around and telling everybody your business is not a good idea. I'm sure everybody at this table shared something personal with someone, like told them a story, or told them about they family or told them they was going through something, cuz anything might happen. Someone might - a family member might die and they was going through it and you like "what's wrong man, you want a cig," and they like I'm going through this. They might not even know you but they going to chop it up with you, break it down with you, just because you came to them cuz they don't have nobody to ask them what's going on, how you doing today, is everything OK with you. They might just look at you and talk to you and tell you everything that is going on.

Erwin: I think that as men we look for maybe that one person we could confide in. We don't trust everyone here say, "Aw man I'm going to tell you all about my business," it is just that person. As women are just more . . .

Adam: Sociable. They are naturally more sociable while men are more guarded. It's just natural.

Boyd: Women share their feeling where we can't.

To keep the conversation going the facilitator asked the men to weigh in on the family/gang dichotomy that was introduced so forcibly by one of the women. Initially the men scoffed at the stereotype of gang affiliation and discounted this as a necessity for surviving in prison.

Erwin: You look for the group you want to fit in though. Like I'm a Christian and the brothers that is reading the bibles, try to stay with them, or I might want to sit with my brother and talk about dope or drugs, it's your decision, what you want to do with it. It's your time.

Adam: Or just be by yourself.

Erwin: Or just be by yourself. You can be a loner.

Adam: I'm me; I'm not that group, I just holding my own.

Frank: You gotta make sure you don't fall in to these little traps too. They talk to you about these people; two or three days later this guy's going to be your friend. Next thing you know you get stuck with these two guys and these guys fight and this other guy going to come back at you.

Adam: It is easy to get labeled if you associate with the wrong crowd or people.

Boyd: You got to be part actor when you get in there. You got so many different personalities from each group and peer group you know, see and you want to talk to them or be sociable with them you gotta act the way they act at that time of conversation. I ain't going to say split personality but you gotta have a lot of personalities.

Adam: Like I said you separate, isolate. You separate.

Gary: Age group is a major factor. Like a younger crowd, they going to be wilder, they going to be louder. The older ones they want a quieter dorm, not all that conflict. They want order, stuff like that.

In the above conversation Adam made clear his penchant for isolation as a strategy for dealing with life on the inside. While Adam's strategy may not have been the norm for the group, the underlying principle, revealed in his exit interview, possibly spoke to the masculine experience of prison:

I keep my emotions on the inside because I feel they are insecurities. So in order for me to get things accomplished I have to put emotions of mine, fear and inability, insecurity, these feelings I have, I have to put them inside. I have to deal with this or they will get in the way of me accomplishing these other things. If I dwell too much on “oh I can’t do this” then I’m not directed, I’m not thinking straight. I’m not directing the power I need to accomplish stuff, or need to do in order to accomplish stuff (Adam).

While another male participant would return repeatedly to his favorite coping strategy – a chameleon-like adaptability, he also revealed the fear that mandated the need for a defensive posture for men while in prison:

You got different personalities. From before judgment, and after judgment is another one, then when you get to jail or prison there is another personality there, and you got to figure out which personality is going to work in the group you are in so you don’t end up somebody’s bitch, or whatever (Boyd).

In the above example, the reference to “bitch” refers to being targeted for sexual victimization should any sign of weakness or outsider-ship be revealed. As potential sexual victimization was embarrassing to talk about in front of the group, no one admitted to the actual experience (they were never directly asked). The concept would rarely emerge and then only in an ancillary manner as when Frank referenced the threat of homosexuality inside of prison; or perhaps in a joking reference as when the facilitator refused to be more forceful with respect to directing the group it was stated he would probably “end up someone’s bitch” were we on the inside.

Finding 4: Diminishing stigma through personal transformation.

A prominent theme in discussions of stigma, indeed the frequent framing of the topic, concerned a conscious effort to avoid being defined by stigmatizing circumstances.

Avoidance was characterized by the intent to recreate one's identity in the face of what others might determine to be stigmatizing. This is illustrated in the following exchange:

Caitlin: You know society doesn't want us here. You know, we're convicts and we need to be in the can. You know they say once you pay your debt to society (laughs), we are always paying that debt.

Gale: You never pay your debt.

Caitlin: You are always paying that debt because you still have that label, always, no matter what you've done, and they can just pull up your record, community viewing, or what ever you call it, anyone can see what you've done.

Betty: I'm not going to say society does not want us. I can't say that because I am society. Regardless of what I have done, I'm still part of society. Unless we grasp that, we are lost. Because it is not about what anybody else feels, it's me. [. . .] And from there, resources didn't come to me, I went to them. When I did that, I became an empowered person. So now the only thing I can do is lay it out there in the hopes that someone else can be empowered. The peer support group can't take away from who I am, because I am society. I can vote. I can vote. I can make changes. My voice can be heard. But I cannot allow my voice to be negative. [. . .] And I am not what they say I am. I don't care what is on paper. I don't care what is on paper. I don't care what my past says. I can do one of two things with that past. I can use it as a stumbling block, or a stepping stone.

As was more typical among the men, discussions of stigma were more often related to employment discrimination. The following discussion regarding how the group may help identify the most useful resources in the community touched upon employment discrimination in the following way:

Frank: Letting each other know which staff agencies really work with ex-offenders. You can go to any staff agency and once they see you have a criminal background, you can tell right then and there they are not going to help you.

Boyd: The biggest barrier, I think, is that question, have you been a felon. Like the city and the county in Austin, they took that question off. It seems to me that they are putting us down, trying to keep us suppressed . . .

Adam: Discriminating.

Boyd: We've served our time already, and when we get out, we are still serving time.

When the men spoke of redefining their identity they may make reference to attending trainings or workshops available to them either in prison or through the parole department. The programs that offer trainings or workshops typically present certificates at completion and these were proudly collected by many in the group as evidence that they are conforming to a rehabilitation program. Additionally, any activity that may indicate self-improvement, no matter how insignificant, was added to their narratives of recreation, post-incarceration. The conversation below is typical:

Boyd: That's something else about just being informative. That little binder that you have made up, of all the things you done, that you accomplished, that's good for your résumé work too.

Erwin: Yeah, the interview.

Boyd: So when they ask you, since you were locked up, what did you do in that amount of space, of time, because it is blank, you can say, "Well, you know, I did this. I entered these programs." It's really starting when you are inside, you start getting into the programs, any self-help groups, any classes they might have. That's basically where you start. So when you start collecting certificates for each group you complete, like anger management, or commitment to change . . .

Adam: Or Changes, it is a good idea to put that in there.

Boyd: And I got the same thing. I got a manila folder with like 12 certificates. You got to keep busy inside, start this inside. You can't just get out and expect to start it because you are going to be so overwhelmed. It's not going to work. You're not going to know where to start at.

Adam: You talking about setting patterns, positive patterns

Boyd: Yeah. Go to your library they have resource guides and stuff like that.

Adam: How many have library cards?

Erwin: Anybody can get a library card.

Adam: You can get a library card but use it.

Erwin: You just got to have a valid ID.

Narratives of personal transformation were also important to the women but were more frequently framed within a larger social context. In the following exchange we can contrast the men's reliance on acts of personal improvement to the women's preferred choice for more civically engaged actions that reveal transformation on a social level:

Betty: But those of us who have the courage to go and stand before the legislature I'm saying we. I can't speak for everybody else, but we learn, we grasp. Those of us who are willing to come out and be productive citizens. We are here. We are not going no where. So you might as well find a place for us. Give us some good jobs and allow us to do what we do. There is something that I might say to some one that stops some body else from going down the path. Because now I've learned.

Caitlin: This is my analogy. We are like little buds. Even when you are on the inside there is some body, or some bodies, that are going to water. By the time you have gone through the process and you have made your rounds, you come back out, and its like, you've blossomed into a beautiful whatever it is, a flower, or butterflies, or whatever. You are like a new creature when you come out.

Gale: And people see the beauty in us.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Gale: They see the change.

Personal transformation, especially for the women, was often framed in terms of maintaining a relentlessly positive attitude. Here Gale relays a narrative of offender

resiliency, speaks about how the resiliency is useful in confronting reentry barriers, and ultimately confirms that staying positive will eventually produce the desired result:

That is why I have to say you have to be ready. When we go out there and tell them "Hey, you got a fight on your hands. Now out in those streets, you were a fighter. You knew how to protect yourself. Now you are going to turn all that negativity around into a positive in a different light. And no matter what happened . . . when somebody robbed you of your drugs you went and got some more some kind of way. So when somebody tells you "no" about a job, well you chalk that up as they who have lost you and you keep on going. Out of ten doors, nine are going to close in your face. But one, and you don't know which one, is going to remain open and allow you to step in. And when they allow you to step in, no matter what type of job it is, do it! And then start on your next step. It's a process. It starts with you inside. We have a hard struggle. Like what I said about the apartment complex. "No, no, no, you have got a record." Everywhere I applied after I left my son, I was fed up with them. Well I'm like, I got a good job. I can get an apartment, but no. But thank goodness, where I work at [names substance abuse program], there are a thousand ex-convicts. Well guess what, "Hey Gale, my apartment will let you in. I got in and I've been there five years." Hey, great. I went and I had to pay a little extra deposit, but it was worth it (Gale).

CONCLUSION

As this chapter was intended only to present the data related to the major findings, this material should be allowed speak for its self. An analysis of this data will appear in the next chapter.

Note that the findings displayed here relate to the data collected in the course of attempting to understand the experience of reentry from the perspective of those so engaged. There is also material related to the possible utility of a peer-directed support group. This material will be addressed in the final chapter. While there is much data to support the utility of a support group, it is not clear that such a group would be practical given the dearth of skills available to the participants.

Chapter Five

Analysis

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter the most compelling data was organized in a series of four general analytic categories. This chapter interprets the reported findings, links them to the literature, and elucidates the important themes that emerged in the findings. To illustrate that the interpretation is not entirely the prerogative of the researcher, this chapter draws upon some data that did not appear in the previous chapter, which now appear relevant for the purpose of adding nuance to the emerging analysis.

The format of this chapter is as follows: each of the analytic categories presented in the earlier chapter will be restated with references to how they address, or failed to address, the original research questions. In either case, they offer an explanation, from the research participants' perspective, of the primary phenomenon under examination. These perspectives are informed by the literature explored in preparation for the dissertation research, and additional literature found to assist in providing a more nuanced understanding of participants' testimony.

After all four of the previous chapter's analytic categories have been processed in accordance with the above format, an analytical synthesis is offered so that the individual findings may be expressed in a holistic manner that supports theory building with respect to understanding reentry. Special consideration will be accorded to theory that is relevant to policy building or informing social work practice with reference to those engaged in reentry.

Lastly, the researcher will offer some commentary with respect to what has been learned from the dissertation research as a whole, especially given that this project contained components that provided opportunities to reflect on more than just the original research questions. This commentary helps provide for the larger context in which the findings emerge, and may also contribute to some theory building with respect to policy and social work practice.

FINDING 1: ALTRUISM AMONG AND BETWEEN EX-OFFENDERS.

During the intake interviews, the researcher found a consensus that the desire to help others, and in particular the desire to help other ex-offenders, loomed large as a motivation for project participation. The way in which the project purpose was framed within the consent form could have influenced participant opinion: “The purpose of this study is to explore how ex-offenders may collectively leverage personal and community assets to transcend passivity and powerlessness in the face of reentry barriers, and to help identify for themselves and others, what may serve as the personal milestones that signal their social and community re-integration, post incarceration.” With respect to the purpose of the study the participants appeared to have a ready response to how they might leverage personal and community assets. They would do so collectively.

This theme was reiterated at the very first peer group meeting when participants were asked by the facilitator to respond to a prompt about disenfranchisement, or, more specifically, “what does it mean to be part of a community?” Some of the responses included:

Being accepted for me, for what I can do, what I can contribute to society (Caitlin).

To me being part of the community is not only helping people out in the community . . . the community is helping everybody in general (James).

I'm kind of enjoying this group because I may hear something to help me, or they may hear something to help, you know, that's what we are now - a community (Alley).

While being in here we are part of a community because we are not hurting the community. In being in here I am going to help myself which is benefitting the community (Erwin).

Among the participants, there were at least three dimensions of possible interpretation related to the need to identify with community in a supportive manner.

These will be more fully detailed below but are broadly outlined here as including:

- 1) asserting the right to community engagement, 2) establishing personal accountability, and 3) proposing a ritual of collective responsibility.

Ned Rollo, an ex-offender, author of several self-help manuals for ex-offenders, and executive director of Open Inc., a consulting and training network dedicated to “offender preparation;” attributes the desire for community engagement among ex-offenders as a natural response to a period of incarceration. Forced removal from society, Ned suggested, reinforces the importance of such engagement. The community “inside” is so dysfunctional as to produce a longing within offenders to re-establish a real connection to the community that can be supportive and validating. Additionally, the

model of disenfranchisement in practice in most states reinforces the desire to assert community connection as a right (Rollo, 2010).

We can hear echoes of Rollo's analysis in Betty's insistent refrain, "I am society." In the context of group discussion it was understood that Betty did not believe she alone represented society, but that she is part of that larger society to which is assumed to seek disenfranchisement. Betty asserts that she, too, is part of that society and as she does not reject the skills she brings to the larger community, then it cannot be the entirety of society that rejects ex-offenders. "I'm not going to say society does not want us. I can't say that. Because I am society. Regardless of what I have done, I'm still part of society. Unless we grasp that, we are lost. Because it is not about what anybody else feels, it's me (Betty)." This is further explicated when Betty explains, "That is their loss. Because I know who I am, I know what I possess, my education and skills and everything."

The embrace of personal responsibility may also be a response to stigma and ostracization ex-offenders experience in their communities of return. It is also a characteristic the criminal justice system and parole officers in particular strongly encourage (Maruna & Mann, 2006). Rollo suggests that many ex-offenders express a need to compensate for feelings of worthlessness incurred as a result of their conviction, or the societally imposed suggestion that they are unworthy; by seeking to establish that they are indeed trustworthy and responsible citizens. Caitlin describes the condition in the following, "Sometimes you get shut down because they have seen you act the fool so many times. You may actually be making an honest effort to change who you are. You never get that chance to show them because they have already shut you down." Gale

responds, “It could be when you decide you want a better life for yourself, and you are going to go that extra mile, then you are going to do whatever it takes . . .”

Doing whatever it takes is required because, as Caitlin suggests, “You know society doesn’t want us here, you know, we’re convicts and we need to be in the can. You know they say once you pay your debt to society [laughs] we are always paying that debt. . . . You are always paying that debt because you still have that label, always, no matter what you’ve done, and they can just pull up your record . . .”

Gary suggested that the antidote to feelings of consistent rejection is accountability: “We got to be held accountable. Everybody should be accountable for something.” Gary could be parroting notions fed to him by his parole officer, but when asked to create a context for accountability from his perspective, Gary traced the genesis of the notion back to his prison experience by citing a commonly used concept in group discussion, that of “keeping it real.” In a casual conversation following this group session, the facilitator asked for a definition of keeping it real. The group offers an analogy from within prison: if there were a group of offenders mandated to meet for group therapy, invariably there would be some participants who contribute to group discussion only to illustrate to the group moderator that they are participating. Such contributions, viewed as disingenuous and self-serving by other offenders, represent the opposite of keeping it real.

The above story also serves to illustrate the context under which such values emerge. Misrepresenting oneself in a group session serves no function other than “playing the game” within prison for the purpose of getting by and passing time. For

other offenders who might presume the group to have some kind of therapeutic value, keeping it real is a way of validating the desire to “go straight,” i.e. desist from further criminality. Keeping it real likely emerges then as an ex-con’s translation of the therapeutic mandate to avoid cognitive distortions (Maruna & Mann, 2006).

A third dimension of this idea that ex-offenders have something to bring to the community manifests in the perceived redemption available to those who assist ex-offenders who are coming out of prison after them. Here Fran describes her role as a “vessel” for others:

For me, being an ex-offender, being a prostitute on the street and using the drugs that I used, I know a lot of people. Especially people, a lot of them are ex-offenders, and some of them are friends who are starting to start their lives over again, that are in recovery. I come in contact with these people everyday, being on the bus and what not. I always try to be a vessel. Encourage people. And sometimes that may just mean me sitting calmly at a bus stop, and not hassling people. Encouraging them (Fran).

Passively helping others by listening is underscored in importance because the participants do not believe ex-offenders are often listened to:

I think support for ex-offenders is, you know because when you are on the inside, people don’t listen to you. When you have something that you need to say or whatever, so I think that us as ex-offenders trying to help others, I think we are probably one of the best listeners, because we actually hear and we can understand what they are trying to say (Caitlin).

Passive listening represents only one side of the helping continuum. On the other extreme would be an example storied in more messianic terms:

I think back about Moses. Moses did something wrong and God put him out in the wilderness for how long? Seven years? And I look back in my life and say I did something wrong and I was punished by the man up above for almost fifteen, twenty years, but I'm back to lead my people. I was reading it and it just tied in so well because there is a meaning, a purpose. There are so many people that I hung out with, so many people that I dealt with, that are now gone. And you know I should have been gone. I say to myself, God damn I should have been gone. But no, I shouldn't have been gone because I am here for a purpose. I am fulfilling that purpose now (Gale).

These framings describing the need to give something back to the community are entirely consistent with Braithwaite's theory of reintegrative shame. One of the underlying assumptions of Braithwaite's work is that people are fundamentally accountable to others in the community precisely because support and validation from others is so important to our personal identity (Braithwaite, 1989). As Donna more concisely suggested at one of the peer-group sessions: "Everyone, regardless of what background they are coming from, want one thing, and that is to be accepted. Everybody. There is no body that does not want to be accepted on some level."

The suggestion then is that ex-offenders may in some instances be more motivated than many in the general population because they have much to overcome with reference to the ostracization they experience due to their status as former offenders. Of course it may also be possible that ex-offenders could respond to perceived ostracization in a contrary manner, that is, if they believe they are going to be ostracized at any rate, why not act accordingly. Such a response would be more in keeping with the tenets of labeling theory (Goffman, 1963)

FINDING 2: GENDERED DIFFERENCES WITH RESPECT TO ACCESSING REENTRY SERVICES.

To address the research question pertaining to how ex-offenders might leverage personal and community assets in support of one another, it is important to recognize why project participants attributed greater access to reentry services to the opposite gender. It is equally valid to frame this observation in terms of why each of the gender segregated groups believed they were particularly victimized by the dearth of services available to them.

The gender segregation experienced by the research participants is not novel to them. Participants also experienced gender segregation throughout the terms of their imprisonment. They made reference to this several times in their peer-directed group work when speaking about their desire to combine the two groups. There was absolute consensus that the eventual model for a peer-directed support group would contain both genders, and occasional resentment exhibited toward the facilitator for the delay. The resentment the participants expressed in gender segregated groups, however, was not expressed in mixed gender settings. This suggests that these resentments would not have been evident to the researcher had the groups been mixed from the beginning of the project.

While the participants could be prompted by the facilitator to speak about structural barriers to the social reintegration of ex-offenders, the resulting conversations were often limited to employment discrimination due to the necessity of ex-offenders having to reveal their felony status. From the research participant's perspective, employment discrimination was particularly odious because it prevented many of them

from achieving economic independence and increased the risk they might turn to illegal activity in order to get by. Housing discrimination was discussed less frequently, banking discrimination precisely once. In general, unless the discrimination was blatantly overt, participants tended to shy away from discussion. The explanation that makes the most sense is that it was easy for the participants to assume self blame for many of the inequities they faced, even for those over which they had no control. Self blame may be preferable to the limited options available to them, for to embrace the enormity of all the barriers before them was to risk feelings of despair and futility. Gale summed up these feelings in the following: “Out of ten doors, nine are going to close in your face. But one, and you don’t know which one, is going to remain open and allow you to step in. And when they allow you to step in, no matter what type of job it is, do it! And then start on your next step. It’s a process. It starts with you inside. We have a hard struggle.”

Gale is speaking to the persistence required of ex-offenders if they are going to make in the community. The participants often repeated that only the most persistent will prevail, meaning in this case to avoid further and unnecessary interaction with the criminal justice system. It is not going to be easy, and these things can’t be rushed, but good things come to those who believe that success is right around the corner. The participants described the support group as a place where this belief would be reinforced, for if you did not believe that success was possible, it would be difficult to persevere. From the outsider’s perspective, sometimes the goals the participants embraced sounded unreasonable given all the barriers they face, but without these goals the alternative may

be a type of despair that makes returning to a life of crime all the more attractive. For example, the easy money that could be made selling drugs, however enticing it might sound, must be resisted if one wished to avoid possible re-arrest. Perhaps an exaggerated sense of what could be accomplished by going straight serves to suppress the memories of easy money.

Maruna (2001) refers to this exaggerated belief in what the ex-offender may be able to accomplish as a cognitive distortion common among those attempting to lead a life of continued desistance from crime. The ex-offender's cognitive distortions while going straight are somehow equated with the cognitive distortions of the offender who rationalizes a life of continued crime, but obviously the motivational influences must be different. The offender requires the distortion so as not to face the harm done to his or her victims; those going straight may require the distortion to avoid succumbing to the lure of crime.

In a different context, Ehrenreich (2009) refers to this phenomenon as magical thinking and associates it with the cultural phenomenon of self-help or positive thinking, as well as the motivational literature that promotes a tautology where failure is equated with self-blame. Echoes of self-help and positive thinking rhetoric are clearly voiced by both parole officers and those whom they monitor. While this rhetoric may provide ex-offenders the motivation required to achieve one's goals, at the same time it also exhibits a tendency for self blame should those goals not be attained. Magical thinking allows the practitioner to deny the importance of systemic or structural barriers. An underlying premise of this cognitive distortion is that all things are possible if one believes strongly

enough, and correspondingly failure can only be attributable to one's lack of belief (Ehrenreich, 2009).

The belief that the opposite gender has more opportunities with reference to reentry services may be a type of cognitive distortion among those experiencing reentry. The available literature regarding cognitive distortions is short on explanation, except to suggest that it may serve as something of a coping mechanism preventing the ex-offender from sinking into despair. An exaggerated sense of the possible represents a narrative that suggests circumstances are within personal control, even as all the objective evidence points to circumstances that are decidedly beyond the individual's control. For ex-offenders it is especially important to avoid narratives of victimization because the criminal justice system views these as an attempt by the criminal to avoid personal responsibility. Obvious and legal discrimination, as in the case of reporting one's felony status while seeking employment, may bear some recognition; but pointing out how discrimination in total weaves a web of structural barriers is not sanctioned. When systemic barriers cannot be named out loud, lateral replacements are safer to voice. An example of such a lateral replacement would include the claim that others receive preferential treatment.

Few concerns raised by either gender with respect to unequal access to reentry resources seem valid. If much of the reentry preparation in prison appears focused on the needs of males, this can be explained by the fact that most of those imprisoned are males. If women are sometimes offered slightly different services, this can be explained by the fact that some women, such as single mothers, actually experience different needs. If

women are perceived as able to easily get unskilled waitress jobs, so too may men avail themselves of the temporary employment offices that feature jobs suitable to those with greater upper body strength. The idea that in our society different genders are treated with different expectations is certainly true, but this fact of socialization alone hardly explains the perceived differential in treatment that preferences one gender over another. It is simply easier to suggest that inequality and discrimination exists with reference to gender, than it is to acknowledge the overwhelming structural barriers all ex-offenders face, regardless of gender. In this sense essentialized notions of gender may be utilized to display narratives of victimization.

FINDING 3: GENDERED DIFFERENCES WITH RESPECT TO INTERPRETING THE MEANING OF INCARCERATION.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, toward the conclusion of the research the men remaining in the project had all exited prison less than a year earlier. In contrast, the women involved with the project had been out for more than a year, several of them having also acquired jobs, housing, and some means of personal transport. The suggestion here is that this disparity with reference to how much time the ex-offenders had with which to attach meaning to their time in prison may account for some of the differences in the findings reported in this section.

As with gendered differences regarding the perception of service access among those negotiating reentry, gendered differences also arose with respect to how ex-offenders narrate the meaning of their prison terms. The examination of prison narratives was originally pursued in the group setting because it was thought that isolating and

narrating this period of time for ex-offenders might serve to support a life cycle perspective: a grand narrative created by the individual wherein he or she compartmentalizes life episodes for the purposes of understanding continuity or change (Bahr, Armstrong, Gibbs, Harris, & Fisher, 2005; O'Rand & Krecker, 1990; Osgood, 2005). Whether or not creating such narratives actually assisted group participants in compartmentalizing their life is debatable, but it is clear that an understanding of the impact of one's prison experience can have a bearing on their socialization and reentry needs in their communities of return. Recent research suggests incarceration may be injurious to one's mental health (Haney, 2006), while earlier research established mental health problems that may bloom in prison also have consequences for reentry (Haney, 2003b). While most services offered to ex-offenders in the community are concerned with material concerns such as housing or employment, it would fall to more informal services, such as peer-directed support groups, to help address the psychological impact of one's imprisonment (Martinez, 2006). Research group participants attempted to use the groups for this very purpose.

It was not expected that the groups separated by gender would produce such dramatically different perspectives on the meaning applied to time spent in prison. Both groups described prison as equally dangerous and oppressive. In contrast to the finding regarding differential access to retry services, group members never suggested that the prison environment offered preferential treatment to either gender. Yet the stories each gender provided to give meaning to their shared experience differed greatly in tone and

affect. To put it in the basest terms, the men were somber and reserved while the women were effusive and near jubilant.

The research design allowed that the differences emerging one week could be probed further the following week. This was done by enlisting the participants in the role of co-researchers and asking them to resolve the apparent contradictions. Eliciting a conversation about gender differences entailed a risk that such differences would again be explained away via essentialized notions of gender, but it also promised to validate that there were not any structural differences regarding conditions of imprisonment.

When questioned about the difference in responses, the women's group remained effusive in their description of life behind bars, but admitted that their time in prison did expose them to trauma, violence, abuse and injustice. When asked to balance the apparent contradiction of trauma and joy it was explained that though horrible things happened in prison, they did not believe these stories need be emphasized. They collectively asserted that it was more fruitful to focus on what they did to survive these experiences and to perhaps find a way to take away lessons more useful to their present day circumstances

When the same question was posed in the men's group, the men also conjured up narratives of survival through adaptation of very harsh circumstances, but remained much more circumspect about stories of resilience and lessons learned. The men were not always inclined to suggest that prison saved their lives, as was the clear consensus among the women. The men were also less apt to attribute any meaning to their prison experience:

Prison, it really means nothing because from our actions in society we were punished for not being the way we were supposed to under the rules of society. They place us in there and they take our meaning away. We are in-between being something and being dead. So we are actually suspended. It just has no meaning whatsoever (Adam).

Perhaps most importantly, the list of coping mechanisms produced by the men was much shorter than the list of similar mechanisms the women offered, and this list did not include the ability to confide with other inmates. The men were specifically asked to compare their circumstances with that of the women who related numerous stories of the succor gained through social networks women relied upon to get through their prison experience. Naturally the comparison elicited commentary regarding the essentialized nature of gender, such as the comment from Adam illustrates: “They are naturally more sociable while men are more guarded. It’s just natural.”

Though a few special circumstances were suggested where it might be possible for men to confide in one another in general, it was generally acknowledged as unsafe to allow others to know your “business.” Concerns about presuming emotional intimacy with other male inmates included the fear that such entanglements might place you at risk should there be a falling out. As Boyd explained it, the fear of unnecessary entanglements could result in getting caught up in disagreements better avoided: “Next thing you know you get stuck with these two guys and these guys fight and this other guy going to come back at ya.”

An additional fear, and one that was difficult for the men to voice directly, was the concern that those who sought solace by confiding with one another risked being

tagged as weak or sensitive, a label that was seen as increasing one's risk of sexual exploitation. In private conversations individuals might spell out this fear without providing details, as when Adam confirmed that any sign of weakness while in prison meant you would end up as "somebody's bitch." The term "bitch" was understood to stand for a person used for sexual gratification. When addressing the fear of sexual exploitation collectively, the men were inclined to use uneasy humor to mask shame that they even knew about such things. No one would admit to having been personally exploited, though all insisted they knew the phenomenon to be very real.

There was an indication that sexual intimacy in the women's units, while perhaps not as stigmatized, was still clearly not something all the women in the group felt comfortable talking about. In comparing their situation to that of the men's, Alley suggested: "I saw fights, but what the difference is, in the female population, it is due to relationships. That's what it is about. You know at [names a women's unit] it was almost required . . ." at which point she was interrupted by Betty who sternly contradicted her. A lot of discussion erupted at that moment that was impossible to transcribe until you hear Alley relent: "I'm not saying required . . . well never mind, that's all I want to say." At this point the discussion was ended.

Similarly, while the women could clearly express an understanding of the dynamic of domination as illustrated by interactions with prison guards or abusive inmates; for the men domination of any type was implied rather than spoken of directly. The men might tell stories suggesting that "everybody knew" about prohibited behavior such as talking back to the guards or stepping out of line, concluding that you simply

“didn’t do that.” The women were more explicit about transgressions and more detailed about the guard’s response when such transgressions occurred. The men did not deny the guards or other inmates committed abuse, but consistently failed to provide details and indicated a great deal of shame and discomfort should they be pressed. The women were more apt to regard the abusiveness as normal given the circumstances and did not shade such incidents with feelings of shame.

To validate these findings and confirm the validity of this particular reading of prison narratives it was necessary to consult the primary texts purporting to reveal the intricacies of prison culture. Sykes’s three year multi-method examination of life in a maximum security prison, *The Society of Captives*, though first published in 1958, remains the most oft cited study (Sykes, 1958; Wright & Miller, 1999). It has been rarely replicated though it did inspire some debate as to the researcher’s ability to attribute characteristics of prison culture to the condition of imprisonment as opposed to the earlier assumptions that prison culture is really a manifestation of an indigenous criminal culture re-located to the prison (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). The core-attribution thesis put forth by Irwin and Cressey (1962) is beside the point for our purposes. While it was likely that if pre-1970 prison populations were relatively homogeneous, consisting largely of those convicted of violent crimes, prison populations were much more diverse by the mid-1990’s when for the first time the majority of inmates where convicted of non-violent crimes (Travis & Visher, 2005). As Irwin and Cressy acknowledge, though it may be naive to assume that criminals do not bring some common cultural values into the prison with them, it is equally absurd to assume they all share a criminological ideology, as if

hegemonic values somehow emerged from attendance at an international convention (Irwin & Cressey, 1962).

The Sykes book is generally referenced with respect to Sykes' typology of inmate roles, which he theorized allowed for homeostasis to arise within the institution where prison authorities ("custodians" in Sykes' parlance) appear to maintain order by enforcing rules backed up in part by the guns they carry and the sanctions they may impose; but also where inmates exercise a balance of power through their numerical superiority and their ability to disrupt the status quo should they be able to act in concert. A distinct prison culture arises naturally from conditions of control, where those so controlled are compelled to seek methods of social organization that resist observation and or disruption. In addition, while those imprisoned enter the institution shorn of status and identity, stripped of civilian clothing and subject to mandatory haircuts, once inside, inmates will utilize every means at their disposal to reestablish an organic social order, with or without the consent of the institutional authorities (prison tattoos, for example). The conditions under which this social order is created and maintained constitute a contained social system with its own values, mores and a distinct language, or argot (Sykes, 1958).

In Sykes' argot, the term "bitch" does not appear. The dynamic of sexual exploitation is explicated in a series of terms that speak volumes about a particular construction of male identity in gender segregated and rigidly controlled environments. The significant terms from Sykes' argot include "wolf," "punk," and "fag." These terms refer, respectively, to the sexual predator, the unwilling victim of such predation, and the

willing participant who forfeits any claim to a masculine or dominant role. In this context the “wolfs” engagement in homosexual acts is not considered a threat to their perceived masculinity, but on the contrary, their masculinity is enhanced. The “fag” in this context lays claim to slightly more status than the “punk” due to the “fag’s” ability to exercise intent, and the “punk’s” failure to resist exploitation. As if these terms might be considered universal Sykes concedes that on the west coast the term “queen” may replace the term “fag” (Sykes, 1958). If the male research participants harbored a similar argot, they did not wish to share this with the lead investigator except to suggest the term “bitch,” evidently the equivalent of the “punk” in Sykes’ argot.

Sykes’ analysis of how these roles inform an understanding of masculinity within prison is at once dated and prescient:

It would appear, therefore, that the inmates of the New Jersey State Prison have changed the criteria by which an individual establishes his claim to the status of male. Shut off from the world of women, the population of prisoners finds itself unable to employ that criterion of maleness which looms so importantly in society at large – namely, the act of heterosexual intercourse itself. Proof of maleness, both for the self and for others, has shifted to other grounds and the display of toughness, in the form of masculine mannerisms and the demonstration of inward stamina, now becomes the major route to manhood. These are used by the society at large, it is true; but the prison, unlike society at large, must rely on them exclusively (Sykes, 1958, p. 95).

It is perfectly reasonable to expect that imprisonment, for males, in addition to representing a loss to one’s dignity with respect to the derogation of individual autonomy, might offer additional slights to one’s masculine identity in an environment where sexual exploitation is acted out so as to include oneself as a possible actor. Just bearing witness

to the proximity of homosexuality, added to the loss of privacy, suggested one participant, was enough to reinforce the desire never to return to prison:

There are going to be homosexuals there. You ain't going to have no privacy. And if that is the kind of life one would want, go for it. Commit as many crimes as you want. You can have it cuz that's where you going. And it can be worse than that. From the stories I heard, it can be a lot worse than what I seen. And I'm not going through it again (Frank).

Such commentaries may give us pause to reconsider the meaning of the concept of deterrence when suggested as a rationale for imprisonment. Deterrence is typically conveyed via images of dreary prison architecture and the loss of the usual comforts or necessities of life. Rarely do we consider the psychological consequences of prolonged gender segregation as much more than an unfortunate side effect of incarceration; or, should we deny its importance, perhaps we consider it just another privation that must necessarily be endured as a condition of one's conviction. In either case these consequences may not be adequately studied or understood; particularly with respect to the possible impact prolonged gender segregation may have upon those engaged in reentry.

More recently Owen has weighed in with an examination of life in a women's prison where she makes frequent reference to Sykes' earlier work while maintaining the possibility of some distinctions. Though many of the core values that characterize a prison sub-culture remain the same within prisons that house only females, Owen appears to suggest that women may have utilized slightly different coping mechanisms to survive

while incarcerated (Owen, 1998). In this respect her findings are entirely consistent with this research.

Owens's chapter on the culture of imprisoned women discusses several characteristics which can be easily recognized within the transcripts featuring the female participants of this project. Consider the theme of "taking someone under your wing" which is aptly reflected in Elisha's narrative of survival after being initially sentenced to 75 years in prison. Inherent within this theme is the idea that all inmates share some responsibility for those who come after, clearly a reflection of the earlier identified finding regarding the need many ex-offenders express to be of assistance to those exiting prison. Owen suggests this altruism is a response to incarceration, while this research found evidence to suggest it continues after prison (Owen, 1998). Sykes mentions no equivalent to taking a new prisoner under one's wing, although men are expected to watch out for their collective interest, a value that likely stems from the condition of perpetual monitoring and control (Sykes, 1958). The male research participants of this project indicate that expressing care for others in prison can be perceived as a sign of weakness.

Owen also suggests that the women in her research indicate a propensity to recognize the value of reciprocity, a value that extends not just to one's inmate cohort but to the prison custodians (Owen, 1998). In sharp contrast Sykes describes the men as having to carefully negotiate their relationship to prison custodians, not simply because of the power and authority they represent, but more importantly because being perceived as too subservient to their authority would suggest them unworthy of status among fellow

inmates. If a male were perceived as being too convivial with prison staff it might be assumed that that the individual was exhibiting subservience (a sign of weakness), or worse, that the individual was a snitch (Sykes, 1958).

Owen explains the above in terms of a gendered differential with respect to interpreting the “convict code,” which is a reference to Sykes’ codification of the informal rules of behavior generally shared by inmates. Specifically Owen refers to the idea that convicts are required to protect the convict interest, a rule that is generally understood to forbid collusion with prison authorities. Owen reports that while “telling,” “ratting,” or “snitching” are severely sanctioned in male prison culture, she found several instances where female prisoners were more willing to present nuanced interpretations of the code, and could do so apparently without damaging their status in the prison community (Owen, 1998).

In other words, while male status demanded rigid conformity to the code, the women allowed the larger context to dictate whether or not breaking with the code equated to a loss of respect. This flexibility is entirely consistent with how the women reported the meaning they applied to their prison experiences. For the women the larger context allowed them to compartmentalize the most abusive components of their incarceration, and focus on the incidents that allowed them to survive with their dignity intact. The men tended to perceive prison conditions as relatively fixed, something that had to be endured, and generally not something where one might create a positive narrative. There might even be some status to be derived for those men who could endure the greatest privations, for this would be an indication of great strength. As for

the women, endurance and strength were not associated with being able to physically withstand punishment, but rested more often on their ability to successfully collaborate with others to ensure their collective survival.

Confirming that the women did indeed witness or experience violence while in prison was the story one participant offered, and confirmed by several others, when the women were asked by the lead investigator why narratives of their prison experience differed so dramatically between the men and the women. Note how Alley concludes her story and attempts to illustrate how she and others coped with the dangers:

Now the only place I felt any fear was at [names unit] but otherwise my experience was good . . . [she is interrupted by another group member who confers agreement that the named unit was an especially violent place]. I had close people to talk to and to share my ups and downs and all this kind of stuff. I think the women tend to more make it about family, and not about, you know, fighting and gangs and stuff. Not to say it doesn't happen, cuz obviously it does, but that was not my experience. And I moved to five different units, so I think I got a feel of a few different places (Alley).

Lastly, the disagreement that arose within the female group when Alley dared to suggest the ubiquity of intimate relationships is partially explained by Owen. In Owen's description of what it means to be within "the mix" she explains that for the vast majority of incarcerated women the mix was considered to represent a continuation of the type of behavior that brought people into contact with the criminal justice system in the first place. In other words, for those who wish to go straight, the mix was to be avoided (Owen, 1998).

The mix is conceptualized as having three major components: the drug mix, the homosexual mix, and the fighting mix. Women who chose to be within the mix were said to be loud, wanted to be seen, cared little should they “lose time” for disruptive behavior. To be in the mix represented adherence to a particular identity, but as with many such group identities it was best described by those who intentionally chose to disassociate. Those who maintained the association were said to be relatively unaware of the reasons (Owen, 1998).

In light of Owen’s analysis, Alley may represent one of those, who while interred at a particularly notorious unit, chose to identify with other women for purposes of ensuring personal safety. Ironically this choice also placed her in closer proximity to fighting, which she acknowledged was primarily due to relationships. This combination puts her squarely in the mix as defined by Owen’s research. The group members who challenged Alley’s assumptions that these choices were “required” included one woman who self-identified as a lesbian, thus lending credibility to the idea that the group’s challenge did not rest upon shame of being identified as having engaged in homosexual acts. The group was in effect challenging Alley’s self-positioning within the mix. Discovering her narrative to be contentious resulted in Alley’s withdrawal of her original comment and abrupt ending of the discussion.

The sexual sub-culture within a women’s prison, while it remained disputed, still reveals vast differences between how men and women may be willing to assign shame to situational homosexuality. If the analysis as borrowed from Owen is correct, Alley’s shame of having engaged in homosexual relationships while in prison owed more to the

tacit admission of her involvement in the mix. Neither Alley (who announced her engagement during the course of the study) nor the other group members saw a need to distance themselves from intimate relationships cultivated while in prison and such relationships posed no threat to their sexuality. On the other hand, the men were explicitly clear that intimate relationships between men, either physical or emotional, were absolutely off the table for discussion. Every indication was that the mere acknowledgment of situational homosexuality was too shameful to be spoken of directly.

FINDING 4: DIMINISHING STIGMA THROUGH PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION.

At the beginning of each group session, research participants who were not otherwise employed were encouraged to speak about volunteer activities in which they engaged during the previous week. Research participants understood from the time they signed the consent form that volunteer activities were a requirement for participation in the group. It was understood that volunteering in the community was a way for even those with the most minimal of social connections to participate in the community and, by extension, increase the social connectedness of the entire group. Participants framed their volunteering as a means of overcoming disfranchisement. No one objected to this requirement and most had already located some kind of volunteer activity prior to the formal commencement of the groups. This ritual served as both check-in and ice breaker and was therefore not recorded or transcribed.

Research participants appeared to use the groups as a place to practice their redemption and to seek civic inclusion, even if only among one another. In this way they act out what they hope to be their personal transformation from an untrusted and always

suspect ex-offender to that of a reformed individual in some ways even more accountable to the community than is typical among everyday citizens. Much of this might possibly stem from interactions with the parole department which encourages ex-offenders to assume responsibility for their past infractions and cautions them against blaming others. Blaming others for one's problems is considered a type of cognitive distortion which characterizes the would be offender (Maruna & Mann, 2006). An unfortunate side-effect of the therapeutic focus on cognitive distortions is to deny the ex-offender an analysis of systemic barriers to reintegration that may be a consequence of having to declare one's ex-offender status and becoming subject to legal discrimination in areas of housing and employment. To acknowledge such legal discrimination may be perceived as evidence one has not fully accepted responsibility for one's past offenses. Failure to succeed under these circumstances, however, places one at risk for self-blame. The antidote to self-blame is personal transformation.

The backbone of personal transformation, as represented by these research participants, is a powerful belief that through the power of positive thinking one can achieve anything. Moreover remaining positive was perceived as necessary to keep despair at bay - to persist no matter how daunting the odds: "Out of ten doors, nine are going to close in your face. But one, and you don't know which one, is going to remain open and allow you to step in (Gale)." Should one persist, the assumption is that eventually one will succeed. The assumption can never be challenged. You are not allowed to fail in this belief system because failure indicated that you stopped short of the

success which is understood as always being down the road for those who persist. The only possible explanation that remains for failure is to blame oneself.

The men's group did attempt discussions where acknowledgment of employment barriers might be possible, but in face of the powerlessness elicited by such an acknowledgement, and an awareness that to blame one's condition solely on structural barriers is neither accepted nor productive, the conversation often came down to employment strategies for dealing with the "box" on employment applications – typically a place where applicants are asked to indicate if they have a felony record. The research participants all believed that checking this box, without being able to provide a context for their criminal history, automatically relegated their application to the wastebasket. As evidence of this, they suggest this is why they have never received an interview. At this point they may acknowledge the importance of not being discouraged, but to persist until finally one of these applications pays off with an interview. Inevitably the conversation would turn toward dealing with the problem of the "box":

Boyd: I have probably said this before, but I'll say it again, it probably shouldn't be on the application, myself, personally. Cuz it feels like you are a condemned man if you got to do that.

Frank: I can understand that, but there are different ways you can go about it, man. You don't have to say I've been convicted this year and that year. You can just say at the time of the interview I can explain what happened. Even though you are not really saying you have not been convicted, or have a felony record, or anything like that. You don't have to tell them right then, you don't have to tell them. That's your right not to tell them, dude. You just put on there I will explain at the time of interview. That is not going to disqualify you from giving that case, what will disqualify you from getting that job is if you say you got convicted of a felony back in blah-blah. That they would throw out. You got to understand too

that when they pull up your record it doesn't show exactly what they said. It doesn't say, hey Frank got popped for 15 grand of meth-amphetamine, and he got 15 years in prison. It doesn't say that. It says dah-dah-dah year, whatever town, drug offense, DWI. It doesn't give specifics on there. It doesn't say that you were running around with three different people, you got stopped and one guy throws it on the floorboard, and everybody got charged for it because nobody wanted to fess up to it. So with the application you can just put on it the way it has it on the background report. You just put on there I can explain it to you at the time of the interview.

It was with a growing sense of irony that the lead researcher took note that the strategy sessions that inevitably emerged from these discussions – sessions where the men would council one another to, for example, write over the box “ask me for details” – would often be framed as expert advice from one ex-con to another, even though none of those in the room yet managed to secure employment and leading one to question the source of their apparent expertise. Often everyone in the room already had knowledge of the “advice,” yet they seemed to never tire of the redundant affirmation of one another. Such conversations prompted the lead investigator to ask, since these conversations did not appear on the surface to serve any obvious utility, what was really being transacted in these circumstances?

One response to the above question is the conjecture that the group members were engaging in a ritual of affirmation and support that could help keep their greatest fear at a safe distance. Their greatest fear is that they will be unable to succeed in the community outside of prison and will resort to hustling in order to make ends meet. Here Alley explains why these feelings must be kept at bay:

But you know what the problem is? It's that with every single rejection, whether it is from a landlord or an employer, a state benefit, with every rejection you are that much closer to going back. It's frustrating. I mean I still get rejected. I can't get a bank account. They don't even want to look at me. And it is like with each rejection you think, maybe not criminal activity, hustling, whatever - you just have to survive, you have to survive. And how am I going to survive? And you don't want it to get to that point. I mean I got to the point where, why don't you just put me back in? I mean, why do you let me out to fail? That's what I felt (Alley).

What Alley is suggesting here is that to fully embrace the magnitude of the barriers facing those attempting reentry is to be tempted by criminal behavior – “hustling” – and to risk being overwhelmed by the impossibility of success. Participants are well aware that three years after leaving prison less than a third of those released will have managed to stay out of the criminal justice system. How can they ensure that they will each be among those few who manage to “go straight?”

A more obvious explanation of the desire to volunteer might appear to somehow compensate for societal expectation that ex-offenders are irredeemable. Volunteerism, in this sense, is suggested to counter the belief that all ex-offenders are unworthy of trust and are unable to contribute benefit to the community at large. Several comments by research participants seem to support the notion that condemnation incurred via conviction is permanent, as in this give and take between Caitlin and Gale”

Caitlin: . . . You know they say once you pay your debt to society, (laughs) we are always paying that debt.

Gale: You never pay your debt.

Caitlin: You are always paying that debt because you still have that label, always, no matter what you've done, and they can just pull up your record, community viewing, or what ever you call it, anyone can see what you've done.

This exchange seems to suggest that the intended audience for the display of volunteerism is one another. Indeed they report that no one else understands the needs of ex-offenders better than those who "have been there (Annette & Alley)."

This finding is somewhat consistent with Braithwaite's theory of reintegrative shame (Braithwaite, 1989) except that Braithwaite believed ex-offenders are held accountable for their actions by a connection to the community as a whole. In this research the ex-offenders display of accountability is primarily for others in the group. It is not entirely clear that the group offers redemption, as Braithwaite would suggest is the purview of the larger community in a restorative justice context. It may however contribute to the ethos of personal responsibility typically demanded by the criminal justice system, as well as feed into the self-help and empowerment ideology nurtured by ex-offenders for the purposes of shoring up a personal belief that it is possible to go straight (Braithwaite, 2002).

When the group would engage in discussion about the power of a peer group model to assist those who are just getting out of prison, two primary themes emerged. The first, primarily echoed by the men, was the idea that the group could act as a clearinghouse for community resources, identifying which services or individuals were most helpful, and alerting others about resources which have been found to be fruitless. The second, primarily promoted by the women, was the idea that the group could offer emotional support for those who find reentry disorienting and difficult. While the men

may have had a difficult time with abstract notions of nurturance, they did at least agree that the group could serve as a place where those feelings could be validated and ex-offenders might be able to reconstruct an identity devoted to staying out of jail.

This idea of the group as a place to remake oneself, though the precise mechanism for doing so was not always easy to pin down, seemed to echo the ideas put forth by Maruna in a recent conceptual article devoted to reentry as a rite of passage. Maruna points out that a good deal of literature is devoted to conceptualizing entry into prison as ritualistic and that much of what occurs at the moment of entry actually echoes typical components of socially constructed ritual – the individual is shorn of past affiliations, his head may be shaved, institutional uniforms are distributed, and gates are opened, then shut behind. But if entering prison can be construed as a rite of passage, what of reentry? There is no equivalent ritual of passage when one returns to the community and no clear identity that is dispensed with the provision of “gate money.” It is entirely up to the individual ex-offender to forge a new identity and very rarely is there community support to do so. For Maruna, the lack of formal or familiar rituals of return may affect prisoner reentry and may even help explain high rates of recidivism (Maruna, 2011).

In a similar fashion, DeVries (1996) also speaks of the need for ritual, as mentioned in chapter one, as a means for dealing with the disruption caused by trauma. To the extent that imprisonment is associated with institutionally induced trauma, perhaps ritual can also serve this population in ways that Maruna had not yet conceptualized. For both these scholars, rituals serve similar purposes. For Maruna, rituals serve to denote a

passage from one modality to another. For DeVries, rituals serve to help reinstitute traditional social relationships.

The peer group work that the research participants were committed to would be successful to the extent that the group could aid personal transformation. This was evidenced by their hopeful description of the group as a catalyst for change:

So to do this peer support thing is totally foreign to me, but at the same time, I know that if I don't say it, if we don't bring about a change in how we feel about ourselves, we will constantly be beaten down by stigma. . . I can make changes. My voice can be heard. But I cannot allow my voice to be negative (Betty).

A lot of people are just going in and out, just going through the motions. But if you really want to change, there is a way. So far I'm working it, just taking it one day at a time (Boyd).

You may actually be making an honest effort to change who you are. You never get that chance to show them because they [society] have already shut you down (Caitlin).

[The group provides me] time to reflect on what got me there. To use the time to the best of my ability, to change, because the prison itself is not going to do it (Erwin).

As you learn, you get meaning to your life. When you have a purpose . . . you see I have a purpose in life, when you have a purpose and meaning to your life, you fulfill it. If you don't have a meaning, some kind of concept of what you want, you're not going to be going anywhere; you are just going to go around and around in a circle. . . If we take the negative, all the bad habits we had done through life, shooting dope, robbing and stealing, and change that into a positive, and do it repetitiously, day after day, it becomes positive (Gale).

And you know what is funny is the important part about this, about what we are doing, is I never have the opportunity to be around other ex-offenders, especially in a positive way, because there are some that you don't want to be with – that you have to stay away from. That's really hard when you go into transitional housing because you are going to be around at least 50% of those who are not going to be ready for that change, that recovery phase, that "things are going to be great" phase, you know, they are going to be like, "well fuck this, I'm going to go back out and dah-dah-dah." That's what I told you all at the very first group meeting, why I was so grateful to be involved in this, because it is really cool to be around other ex-offenders who are on the positive path and who are looking to help others and to do positive things. We do need to be affiliated with each other, and this is why. This is what we need to tell these people who have made that rule [that ex-offenders should not affiliate]. Some of the best things that are happening in reentry are happening because of ex-offenders, not because, no offense, because of some student or somebody who read about it or got a degree in it. The best things that are happening are us (Alley).

SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

A reoccurring theme throughout this research, whether participants were speaking about their time in prison or their current struggle with social reintegration, was the understanding that participants must do whatever is necessary to survive. With stakes so high, this left little energy to consider more abstract notions such as the perceived fairness or justness of their circumstances. Time and time again participants would echo the refrain: "You do what you have to do" in response to how they plan on getting through each day until that time when they might achieve a level of security that might allow them to live a life no longer concerned with everyday survival. But until then.

There is obviously a great deal of danger associated with living a life with such high stakes. When the question on the table is one's survival, the measures that may be taken to ensure that survival may not always include the best interest of all else in the

community. This might perhaps help to explain the continued high rates of recidivism that have historically been experienced by those released from prison. It might also help explain the perceived necessity of adopting a modality of positive thinking which researchers such as Maruna consider a form of cognitive distortion – an exaggerated belief in what may be achieved by sheer force of will (Maruna, 2001). Considering the legal discrimination in employment and housing faced by those engaged in community reentry, added to the limited resources available for the large numbers of people so engaged, we may better understand both the dangers and distortions that may be a necessary response to the stress associated with the transition from prison to “home.”

But we should not lose sight of the positive, to paraphrase some of the research participants. The stress engaged during this period of transition brings into relief that many of those engaged in reentry possess vast reservoirs of resiliency, much of which may remain untapped in the course of typical criminal justice reentry efforts. Participants report that while in prison they quickly learned the “rules of the game” as demanded for their survival while in prison. Prison authorities may see this as evidence of a game playing characteristic of the offender, and an indication that those engaged in game playing are incapable of treating their circumstances seriously. But for the offender, game playing is an indication that their circumstances are indeed very serious. Game playing in this context indicates a tremendous capacity for adaptation.

There is every reason to believe much of the evidenced resiliency and adaptiveness learned in prison has great utility when released back into the community. The research participants were inclined to recognize this in themselves and reinforce this

for one another. In some respects this is how they envisioned the resulting peer-directed support group to function – as a constant reminder that they have the skills to survive on the outside no matter how impossible the odds may seem. Naturally this belief will occasionally be shored up by unrealistic expectations of what may be immediately possible, but here again the group can serve to provide a more realistic context for those expectations - to preach patience and maintain a constant attitude of hope.

The research findings also call into question if we are underestimating the damaging potential of prison induced trauma, and, if so, what measures might be undertaken to address this. Of special interest to this question may be the relevance of a gendered differential with respect to how prison is interpreted and experienced. Curiously, if it turns out that gender segregation is more damaging to men than to women, this could challenge the notion that women are somehow more susceptible to PTSD symptomology than are men. In this study, women were capable of supportive attitudes which appear to mitigate the impact of institutionally induced trauma.

A last hopeful note inspired by this research concerns what Maruna (2011) characterizes as the need for rituals of social integration, post incarceration. Maruna's publication of these ideas, which coincided with the conclusion of data gathering, provided the perfect counterpoint to the struggles of the research participants attempting to come to terms with what would be provided by the peer-directed group model they were designing. In retrospect it now appears obvious that their attempt to create a space where returning ex-cons might be welcomed and emotionally sheltered from the conflicting demands placed upon them by their families, the criminal justice system, and

former peers, was in effect an attempt to forge a ritual of community reintegration. Research participants had several, sometimes competing ways of framing these needs, but to sum it up with Caitlin's expression from the first day of group work: "Everyone, regardless of what background they are coming from, want one thing, and that is to be accepted. Everybody. There is no body that does not want to be accepted on some level."

Chapter Six

Conclusions

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is intended to serve as a place to unpack the larger meaning of the qualitative data collection and analysis presented in the previous two chapters. This will include an overall conclusion that seeks to bind together the specific findings into a coherent whole.

Because of the special consideration the researcher placed upon the methodology and research design of this project, this chapter also presents some reflection on what was learned with respect to methodological and research design considerations. This discussion will follow the conclusions drawn from the key findings.

A section identifying the key recommendations inspired by this work will itemize some possibilities for implementation. This section will focus only on those recommendations which are actionable as a result of this project, and can be reasonably implemented by this or other researchers. This is essentially a discussion of the conclusions with reference to practice and policy implications.

To fully appreciate the implications of this research there must also be a discussion of the limitations inherent to this type research. There were also limitations which became apparent as the research project unfolded. Both of these will be addressed with the intent of informing those who may be considering research along similar lines.

Lastly, the writer will attempt to summarize what was learned through the course of this study in some concluding notes that will take into consideration personal

reflections of the research process and the implications with respect to shaping a research agenda.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

While recruiting participants for this project, the primary researcher was allowed to approach a pool of ex-offenders who were just released from prison the week prior. These individuals were mandated by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to attend a “new arrivals” orientation. The request for research subjects was to occur at the beginning of the orientation slated to begin at 9:00 AM. Entry into the area containing the classroom where this orientation would take place was strictly controlled via a security door requiring a staff person inside to allow entry. The primary researcher was brought into the classroom before ex-offenders were allowed entry and was therefore well situated to witness what would be for most of the attendees the first interaction they would have with probation after being released into the community.

A group of about 40 – 50 men and women (mostly men) were allowed to file in and assume their seats at about five minutes till 9:00 AM. Immediately behind the ex-offenders, and also entering through the back door, was the parole officer I was introduced to earlier who would facilitate the orientation.

I had met this officer on an earlier visit and have always found him to be relaxed and cordial. His boss explained that since this particular officer took a special interest in new arrivals and felt a special calling for the task, he was allowed to assume ownership over the orientation. He allowed the lead researcher to preview the printed material that was passed out during the orientation and view some of the videos that his audience were

required to watch. Among the video components was a ten minute film that instructed the audience to believe anything is possible with the help of a higher power and reminding them that remaining positive was important strategy to face the coming challenges. Among the printed material was a photo-copied list of resources that had been reproduced so many times that the images were off-center, and the lettering washed out and difficult to read. Several weeks later this packet would be brought up in group discussions and referred to as severely out-of-date and close to useless, containing several phone numbers, for example, that were no longer operable.

On this particular morning the normally unflappable officer appeared preoccupied and possibly agitated. As he entered the back of the room, he addressed the back of his audience in a booming and authoritative voice, announcing that certain rules were to be observed in his classroom. Chief among these was that cell-phones must be turned all the way off and put away. As he passed the middle of the classroom an ex-offender could be seen closing his cell phone, likely in response to these instructions. The officer made an example of this individual which prompted the individual to explain defensively that he was just checking on the status of his children. The officer took offense to this explanation and in an even louder voice proclaimed that there were no exceptions to this policy. The offender pleaded that he wasn't asking for an exception and that he was complying with the request by putting the cell phone away. At his point, the officer pointed to the back door and demanded that the ex-offender immediately leave "his" classroom.

The lead researcher, from a vantage point at the front of the classroom, could not help but feel a little embarrassed at this outburst. The officer had not yet introduced himself, said good morning, or made it to the front of the class, before expelling one of the attendees in a loud display of authority. In the next moment the lead researcher was to be introduced to the group to seek their voluntary assistance for an upcoming research project. The anticipated introduction was not expected to go well.

Meanwhile a very curious observation was being made concerning one of the attendees sitting in the front row. This particular attendee was striking in appearance for many reasons, several of which were related to our stereotype of the hardened criminal. He was exceptionally imposing and muscled in a manner that spoke of long hours of weight training. He also had a shaved head revealing tattoos that covered most of his body, some stretching across his skull and even inching their way across his face. He was easily the most intimidating presence in the room who, with every inch of his demeanor suggested he was not to be tousled with. Yet, at the moment the officer entered the room and assumed a commanding voice, and even before he got around to expelling the attendee who was putting away his cell phone, the tattooed gentleman appeared to noticeably straighten up in his chair and fix his eyes straight ahead. He never once turned to face the yelling officer or witness the event as it transpired. At the mere sound of the yelling official the meanest looking guy in the room snapped to attention, remaining stoic and unfazed by what was transpiring. The lead researcher made note of this behavior which suggested that while the outburst may have provoked personal

discomfort on behalf of this observer, it may have had a different meaning for the remainder of the audience.

In the next few moments the lead researcher experienced discomfort having more to do with the transition from a context where the group was positioned in a subservient role in relationship to the parole authorities, to a context where the group might be enlisted to participate in a research project that did not seek their subservience - a project that would only work if they were able to assume some responsibility for the outcomes. When it came time to stand in front of the group after the officer sternly demanded that the audience give the presenter its full and undivided attention, the best the lead researcher could offer as an introduction were the words: "Good morning. Allow me offer my sincerest welcome to all of you in your return to the community. Welcome back. I wish you the best of luck in the coming days as you attempt to adjust to your new circumstances." Each time this presentation was made in front of the new arrivals it would generate at least one research participant.

In his conclusion to *The Society of Captives*, Sykes included a postscript for those who imagine themselves as prison reformers. In this postscript, he reveals his assumption that modern society expects the prison to serve a purpose other than simply warehousing individuals, and that this purpose is expected to somehow "turn men from the path of crime to the path of conformity within the law" (Sykes, 1958, p. 132). He cautions us to remember that the "prison is an authoritarian community and it will remain an authoritarian community no matter how much the fact of the custodians' power may be eased by a greater concern for the inmates' betterment" (Sykes, 1958, p. 133).

This research was not concerned with how prisons function, or their success or failure to reform, except to the extent that a period of imprisonment may be expected to have some impact on ex-offender's social reintegration. While there are several pre-release programs designed to prepare ex-offenders for this eventual occurrence, these tend to focus either on the available resources in a given community, strategies for locating and maximizing support within the community, or clarifying expectations regarding conditions of parole. It is not the pre-release program's intent to address the contradiction Sykes referenced, notably that moving back into the community requires that the ex-offender transition from an authoritarian environment, to an environment where civic engagement may be required in order to satisfy expectations of responsible citizenship. To the extent these modalities remain in conflict, the ex-offender will struggle with a series of contradictions that will complicate successful reentry.

Among the primary interest of criminal justice systems is to ensure public safety. This is reflected in the preponderance of criminal justice literature devoted to mechanisms of monitoring, supervision, and control of the offender and ex-offender (Austin, 2001; T. Blomberg, Yeisley, & Lucken, 1997). It may not be appropriate to critique the criminal justice field for not fostering social work values of autonomy and agency, but it is important to point out how the mandate to ensure public safety is in conflict with the expectation of civic inclusion after the offender has served his or her time and has returned to the community. Those who advocate for public safety do not believe the ex-offender should be excluded from civic engagement. On the contrary, there is clear recognition that in order for the ex-offender to desist from crime, he or she

should become productive (i.e., employed) tax-paying citizens fully immersed in civic culture (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004; Flavin, 2004; Lacey & Zedner, 1995). Yet there remain serious limits to civic inclusion when ex-offenders are legally discriminated against in the job market, or in a majority of states, are excluded by law from voting (Hull, 2006). These circumstances serve to permanently alienate the ex-offender from civic culture participation. The effect of this is arguably counter to the aims of increasing public safety as those alienated from society are to a lesser degree accountable to other members of that society, and the loss of accountability facilitates the rationale for criminal behavior (Braithwaite, 1979).

Suggesting there is a contradiction between how we as a society process those returning to the community after a period of incarceration, and the expectation that after having exited prison these same people should become productive and responsible citizens, may be of some use in framing policy recommendations. This suggestion may on the other hand fall flat if it turns out that this analysis rest upon a series of false assumptions. It is assumed we expect prison to reform offenders. It is assumed that after incarceration we want ex-offenders to assume responsible lives within the community. But what if these assumptions are incorrect? The findings from this research appear to cast some doubt that they are.

According to the ethos of the public safety mandate, the primary function of the prison is to safely segregate and control the offender population. In an authoritarian system, the social roles are understood as rigidly hierarchical. The incarcerated offender is at the bottom of this hierarchy as far as the prison authorities are concerned. Among

fellow inmates a sub-order may be constructed that tends to reflect and maintain the rigid hierarchy of the first order. These hierarchies rest almost entirely on domination and control. This may be the chief lesson of incarceration – the subordinate must submit to authority. Upon release it is not clear that this lesson decreases in value, especially when the former offender is released into another environment where the social order appears to still be maintained via domination and control.

This research produced data that suggested when released, the prisoner's offender code (Sykes, 1958) is still very much in evidence and reveals itself on the outside as a desire to maintain fidelity toward other offenders. On the outside, a horizontal critique of service access is much easier to maintain than an acknowledgement of systemic barriers to resources such as employment and housing. Gendered differences with respect to interpreting one's prison experience reveals much about how different genders may adapt to patterns of domination within the prison, and indirectly reveals how much damage is done to those who lack the ability to tolerate domination without a loss to their dignity. How ex-offenders acknowledge stigma, or more correctly, mitigate the impact of stigma on their lives also reveals something about the lessons and consequences of using imprisonment as a means to maintain social order and control.

For ex-offenders returning to the community, the dream of a normal life is forever held out as simultaneously unobtainable yet something one must constantly strive to attain. An impossible ethic of the possible is cultivated to mitigate this contradiction: one must maintain a belief that for every nine doors that shut in your face, a tenth will open. If a door has not opened yet, you must keep trying. Failure is not allowed but only serves

as evidence that you are not yet done trying. It is widely acknowledged that about a third will make it on the outside, but still, some do. You must maintain a positive attitude if you wish to be among them.

Seen in a negative light, the ex-offender's life may appear to be one of delusion, for as Maruna suggests, this exaggerated belief in what one can accomplish despite all the socially imposed barriers amounts to a form of cognitive distortion (Maruna, 2001). But such a conclusion is not supported by this research, and it would be a disservice to ex-offenders to assume that failure to socially integrate amounts to nothing more than a personal problem. Resiliency is frequently mentioned as highly valued in this population, often framed as the ability to adapt and survive under harsh conditions. While it may be important to not underestimate the damage of prison induced trauma and how this may carry into reentry, it is also important to recognize how these experiences have also contributed to a deep resilience that can be utilized in reentry efforts. What this research can contribute to a discussion of reentry is an exploration of how these vast reservoirs of resilience can best be accessed.

Similarly the "game playing" that has been documented as a survival mechanism while in prison, and commonly reviled by those who condemn the practice as not "keeping it real," may also serve the ex-offender in negotiating the contradictions of reentry. At the same time the protestations of those who wish to "keep it real" are equally valuable in that they represent a quest for authenticity. In either case, the ability to be flexible and adapt to new environments, quite likely a condition learned while in

prison, is a suitable skill for life on the outside considering the various demands placed upon those having to negotiate reentry.

To the extent that ex-offenders desire and are given opportunity to do so, assembling in peer support groups appears promising according to the data gathered during this research. Group participants spoke of a kind of validation that they do not receive elsewhere as emerging from such groups. They also report that the ability to assist others provides a variety of meaningful engagement not easily obtained otherwise. While there was great disagreement regarding the precise value of emotional support, this mostly along gendered lines, some of the men reluctantly admitted they still might have much to learn from the women. Considering that their prison experience may have in part conditioned former offenders to distrust one another, using the group as a means to cultivate new models of trust seems very valuable. Lastly, but an observation that belongs to the lead researcher alone, it looks like commitment to a peer group could serve as a reality check that can help keep an ex-offender's most imaginative excesses in check, at least to the extent that ex-offenders are willing and able to collectively forge realistic expectations of what can be attained given the tremendous stigma and barriers they each face.

METHOD AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

It can not be underscored enough that the focus group study that precipitated this dissertation research provided invaluable information without which this research would not have been possible. In the first place, the preliminary study established that there are willing research participants in the community who believed this might be a valuable

project with which to engage. Secondly, the preliminary research suggested that the lead researcher would have access to this population. Lastly, the focus group research uncovered a plethora of resources that could be utilized during the dissertation research, not least of all an appropriate and stable location for the proposed group work. In short, projects of this nature should probably not be considered without some kind of preliminary research that establishes the efficacy of such a study and uncovers possible resources without which the study would not be possible.

There are serious limitations to empowerment projects with nominally marginalized populations that were not addressed in the research design. As this project was considered participatory there was a desire to enlist research participants as empowered co-researchers, yet this was not always clearly understood or appreciated by the research participants. This was in part expressed when the participants rebelled against assigned “research” activities and instead wished to engage in activities that more closely resembled peer support. This concern also materialized toward the end of the project when research participants were expected to assume increasing autonomy over the group process but voiced resentment that the lead researcher appeared to be pulling back from a leadership role.

If a major part of this project was about promoting an autonomously run support group at the project’s conclusion, then facilitation skills among the participants should have been more thoroughly addressed during group meetings. It was not enough to assume that participants would learn group facilitation skills through modeling alone, and understandably there may have been some resentment when the lead researcher began to

relinquish authority to the group without first having sufficiently cultivated leadership skills among the group participants. Some of this resentment may have manifest as increased attrition as the group sought to reach consensus regarding the peer group model and it became apparent they had not developed decision making skills and the project was soon to come to an end.

From this experience, it was learned that researchers must continuously seek to be explicit with respect to the intention of sharing authority over project considerations. Sharing authority is not the norm for research projects, and this population in particular may have been conditioned to expect that others generally expect to maintain control over process and engagement. Also, time and effort must be specifically committed to develop skills necessary so that project elements can be assured continuity past the period of data collection; especially if this is a stated goal of this project, as it was in this case. The idea here is always to balance elements of training and skills development against the simultaneous desire to relinquish or share authority. To accomplish this, perhaps more group or participant leadership roles could have been developed and shared or rotated by the participants from the very beginning of the project. This might have required more time and money devoted to the research project but would surely pay dividends in project results by ensuring that the group members had sufficient skills to run an autonomous group and teach others who would come in their wake.

Increased attrition could also be partially attributed to the merging of the two groups, previously segregated by gender, in anticipation that they needed to forge a single peer group model before the project came to an end. The idea to merge the two groups

organically arose from the group membership. It was the original understanding that the two groups were to independently generate possible models that would eventually be merged at the group convergence on the last day everyone was to meet, and later that same afternoon present the new model to assembled community members for feedback and/or support. The lead researcher could not stop cross-pollination from occurring during the transition period, nominally 30 minutes, between when the women's group dispersed and the men's group started to assemble. By the fifth meeting the gender segregated groups had requested that they be merged. Permission was acquired from the dissertation committee overseeing the project and by the 6th group meeting both men and women gathered around a single table for an hour and a half as opposed to the regular hour long meetings.

It could have been anticipated that the effect of combining the two groups was to essentially push the reset button on the group development thus far cultivated within each group. By this point, members of the two groups had cultivated a great deal of comfort with one another. The women's group in particular exhibited a tremendous amount of camaraderie. When combined, it was as if the familiarity garnered from the previous meetings had to start anew. With only two more group meetings left and important issues now placed on the table, tensions that had not materialized earlier suddenly came to the fore. Attrition, which at this point was always relatively minor, accelerated. While earlier instances of attrition came with explanation for the departure, the later attrition occurred without any notice whatsoever. As it was it was established when group ground rules were created that participants could miss up to two meetings for personal reasons, in

most cases no attempt was made to follow-up with those who failed to return. By the time it was apparent that the missing had no intent to return to the group, the project had come to a conclusion.

Many of the above lessons garnered from deployment of a participatory research model suggest an underlying theme: researchers must remain flexible and build into their research design the capacity for flexibility if the research is to be successful. This is especially important with respect to the needs of marginalized people and the expectation that they should be able to participate in the research project with the same degree of confidence exhibited by the lead researcher. Empowerment may indeed flow from participant participation, but the research design must take into consideration that empowerment is not a given simply because the research design increases opportunity for participatory action. The capacity for empowerment rests upon small successes which can then be bootstrapped to provide even larger opportunities for engagement. Conversely, empowerment projects are placed at risk should participant's face a series of frustrations that only serve to reinforce their internalized expectation of powerlessness.

Researchers may not be able to anticipate opportunities for bootstrapping when designing a project so sufficient time must be allowed for these opportunities to arise. Additional time may also allow for skill building to occur, especially if the need for such was not anticipated during project design. As this particular project was somewhat inflexible with respect to time, and as the limited time did not allow for more skills building when the need arose, this seriously limited the success of the project. As but one example of this failure with respect to this project was the inability to recognize, as

mentioned above, the need to develop greater group facilitation skills among the participants. Had these skills been developed across the entire group this would have helped mitigate resentment, infighting, and power struggles with respect to group leadership. These issues could have possibly been addressed during the course of research had there been more funding and more time, thus allowing greater flexibility in addressing these concerns as they developed.

Of the clear benefits to research design that values highly the lived experience of those directly engaging with the social phenomenon under scrutiny, in this case reentry, are three inter-related dimensions of knowledge construction: 1) research of this type disrupts our notions of epistemic authority, 2) it questions the authority of traditional experts, and 3) it can possibly offer new perspectives on old social concerns.

The idea that those with the lived experience of a social concern should not be allowed to offer testimony regarding their condition because they exhibit an obvious subjectivity bias is potentially quite damaging to the social sciences. It suggests that valued knowledge predominantly arises from objective sources safely removed from the social concern. At the same time this practice denies the human agency of those directly affected. This is what Friker refers to as epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). Research that does not challenge these notions is at risk for perpetuating this injustice. Participatory models are but one way to address this concern.

Very much related to Friker's concept of epistemic injustice is the notion that situational authority stems solely from experts who have been endowed with the knowledge of the phenomenon in question through years of intensive study. Expert

authority is often provided greater privilege than the lived experience of marginalized people, again depriving agency of those with direct experience. While epistemic injustice refers to how we create knowledge, the concern related to situational authority is how we act upon that knowledge. Experts are relied upon to provide testimony with respect to public policy creation, while the opinions of those who must live in accordance with those policies are generally not given equal weight in the court of public opinion.

Lastly, qualitative research that seeks to understand social concerns through the lens of those with direct experience of the social phenomenon is capable of producing new models for understanding old problems, in part because of the neglected history implied in the above, but also because these methodologies are especially useful in theory creation. Removed from contexts that encourage the reproduction of already established theories, new theories can emerge that may suggest novel solutions, possibly transcending earlier conceptualizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations informed by this research fall into four general categories: 1) the utility of self-directed peer-groups for ex-offenders, 2) lessons regarding the use of empowerment projects with marginalized people, 3) the implications for service access and policy discourse, and 4) the significance for social work practice. Several of these recommendations have multiple components. They will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Peer-directed Support Groups

As the research participants all brought with them stories about their experience with other support groups, they were asked to reflect upon what worked for them within these groups and what did not. Many harbored strong opinions about the utility of mandated support groups, but were not entirely dismissive of the value of support groups in general (it is likely individuals entirely dismissive of support groups would not have self-selected to participate in the project). Through the course of the group work many came to identify specific components of the support group that could be particularly useful for those experiencing reentry. The following list is not exhaustive as participants may yet discover new uses for support group work as they seek to implement the peer group model they designed. The short list of useful components consists of those items considered valuable to the participants and likely not otherwise available elsewhere. Excluding the obvious potential to share resources, these components include validation, reality check and civic engagement.

Within a group composed of their peers they may be allowed to seek validation regarding their frustrating circumstances. As parole officers strongly encourage those in their charge to assume responsibility for their actions, it is not always easy for ex-offenders to acknowledge the difficulty of systemic barriers to reentry, but they can support one another in the desire to transcend their circumstances. Within this context of validation it may also be possible to mitigate their experience of social stigma.

As mentioned earlier, and confirmed by Maruna's research on cognitive distortions for those attempting to "go straight," those engaged in reentry have the

potential to exaggerate their likelihood of success in their communities of return. In this research, there was an attempt to connect the inflated sense of what may be possible to a variety of self-help and positive thinking attitudes that are both helpful yet potentially damaging - a double-edged sword of sorts. On the one hand, they encourage the individual to keep trying against daunting odds, but on the other hand they suggest that failure is always personal (never due to very real systemic barriers). Within the group there might be a tendency for these attitudes to be reinforced when ex-offenders gather to share their concerns, but there is also the possibility that group discussion can serve as a reality check for those whose personal analysis of their circumstances strays too far from the norm or begins to appear damaging to continued reentry success. The suggestion here is that the most damaging effects of cognitive distortions have the potential to be somewhat corrected in the context of a support group committed to the success of each individual.

The capacity to share resources is an expected outcome of the support group which is so obvious it need not be further discussed at this point. Closely related to this expanded capacity is the equivalent potential to enlarge opportunities for civic engagement. Ex-offenders appear to exhibit a desire for increased engagement but are often stymied when they discover that certain volunteer run organizations do not welcome ex-offenders as volunteers. Rather than risk rejection, some ex-offenders may choose to shun volunteering altogether, thus furthering their social isolation. But as the support group is designed to break down social isolation, those participants who have found welcoming opportunities for community engagement will serve as a model for

those at risk for isolation. Within this research, it was found this was especially true where community engagement was tied to service-related or policy considerations. The workforce planning project connected to Criminal Justice Planning utilized several volunteers before the research collection component of the project came to a close. When a participant announced she had the opportunity to provide testimony at a public hearing several other participants showed up in the audience to offer support. Lastly, a small group of participants stayed after the group meeting one day so that they could strategize regarding how to increase their collective visibility at the churches they attend.

Empowerment Projects with Marginalized People

Some of this project work was inspired by what Mayer (2003) refers to as “social capital projects” in her critique such projects that take place in poorly resourced communities. This critique was further informed by Green’s (2010) theorizing regarding the paradox of self-determination among marginalized individuals. Mayer warns us on the one hand that social capital projects – projects that seek capacity building by facilitating increased social cohesion - may be attractive to those doing work in under-resourced communities precisely because they do not require vast reservoirs of economic capital. By the same token such projects risk becoming little more than commiseration parties that allow participants to feel better about their disadvantaged social status for no other reason than finding others who share similar circumstances. Mayer argues that ending isolation is but one aspect of empowerment, but alone may not satisfy the criteria for having produced empowerment (M. Mayer, 2003). On the other hand Green worries that marginalized people, due to their under-resourced circumstances, and having little

ability to exercise options that are a given for the more privileged, may experience a narrowing of capacity which could result in fatalistic behaviors or sinking into desperate measures (Green, 2010).

The lead researcher in this project incorrectly assumed that given the opportunity illustrated by participation in the project, all participants would naturally come to discover the same capacity for self determination typically experienced by the relatively privileged researcher. This was not to be the case. As mentioned above, group participants did not have an easy time adopting the group facilitation skills modeled by the lead researcher. This is not to suggest that these individuals lacked a skills capacity, but rather, as Green suggests: “The process of marginalization has a funneling effect, resulting in decreased resources and a truncated collaborative and networking capacity – hence making options more diluted and limited” (Green, 2010, p. 172).

The self-directed peer support group that emerged from this project was populated with individuals who, due to their very marginalization, illustrated a diminished capacity for self-determination. This was somewhat offset by the collaboration of the group, which collectively contained a potential for capacity building equal to the sum total of the participants. But even given this collaboration the group contained no inherent ability to transcend the limitations of the collective, although their capacity would certainly be increased if linkages to resources outside the group could somehow be assured.

The lead researcher attempted to do this at the concluding conference by inviting, with participant permission, community members who were in a position to support the ongoing work of the support group in a consultative manner. The lead researcher, due to

limitations of the Institutional Review Board mandate, was unable to personally facilitate introductions between research participants and community members, but could ethically facilitate conditions within which such introductions may occur. In this manner a trajectory for greater community participation and involvement was created, by which group participants may choose to enlarge group capacity by including the skills and resources represented by those individuals who volunteered further assistance to the on-going project.

Implications for Service Access and Policy Discourse

The trajectory for greater community involvement, described above as the desired outcome of inviting community members to provide witness at the concluding conference, serves to illustrate an important recommendation that flowed from this project's unfolding. As participants talk with one another about their experiences in negotiating reentry, they will naturally begin to adopt a more critical perspective with respect to their relationship to reentry service providers. As they adopt a more critical perspective regarding access to reentry services, they increase their capacity to engage with service providers as consumers of these services, rather than merely beneficiaries of service hand-outs. Their relationship to services will eventually come to reflect a less passive attitude as they assume greater self-determination. This is a trajectory that must be encouraged in all such projects of this nature.

Additionally, as was seen in this project, greater self-determination, coupled with a growing critical awareness of their relationship to the larger community, will likely increase potential for self-advocacy in areas beyond service provision. To the extent

group participants find appropriate opportunities they may be able to contribute to social policy discourse. The project participants had extensive opportunities here in the state capital and were also lucky in that the project took place during a year when the state legislature was scheduled to meet. But such potential need not rest solely upon the ability to influence state politics, research participants also found the opportunity to provide testimony at a local hearing to determine the viability of an affordable housing initiative that could potentially provide permanent supportive housing for those determined to be at the greatest risk for homelessness.

Potential Significance for Social Work Practice

The meanings that can be extracted from this work for the purpose of informing social work practice flows from the original rationale work borrowed from Simon's critique of actuarial practices in criminal justice. Simon was concerned that the over-reliance on actuarial practices as a means of social control diminishes our collective capacity to evoke political change:

Social policy is inevitably ideological not only in its substantive goals, but in the techniques through which it is realized; every way of organizing and managing people produces representations of who they are. But to represent does not automatically mean to constitute (Simon, 1988, p. 798).

For Simon, the abstract statistical analysis utilized in criminal justice research serves to place beyond argument the desire for supervision and control, essentially suspending political rights via the exercise of seemingly mundane technical decisions. Personal identity not only becomes lost in the actuarial abstraction, but serves the

additional purpose of shielding the actuarial authority of any challenge or political engagement that may threaten its mandate for control and supervision.

Social work practices that value an understanding of a social phenomenon through the lens of those with direct, lived experience, goes a long way to restore the humanity of the actuarial subjects. Furthermore, service access and social policy informed by the lived experience of those who utilize the service or are otherwise subject to the policies, have the potential to be far more effective than policies constructed without end-user input. To the extent that social work practice simply mimics the institutional need of the employing entity, it may not always be able to produce the humanizing effect theorized to stem from deployment of a client-centered, strengths-based perspective, long thought to be central to social work values. But to the extent that social workers can deploy these values in the interests of their clients, they will retain the potential to counter or mitigate the potentially damaging effects of client interaction based on supervision and control.

The most striking lesson here for social workers is to understand how traditional social work values may operate contrary to the values of other disciplines, such as criminal justice; and to seek ways to practice social work values in a manner that do not evoke contest. In practice, the client-centered approach of social work may not compete well in the court of public opinion against the public safety rationale of criminal justice. In some parts of the criminal justice community the traditional social work perspective may be identified as “soft on crime,” and the practitioner of such practices are known derogatorily and dismissively as “hug-a-thugs,” as this researcher was often reminded in discussion with career criminal justice personal.

Social work must continually strive to present evidence that client-centered approaches can achieve more effective outcomes than policies of criminalization and control. Practices which only serve to further marginalize ex-offenders are at cross purposes with respect to shaping functional citizens who have accountability to the community at large and who will remain resistant to behavior which bring them into contact with the criminal justice system. The oft-repeated assertion that the criminal justice system acts as a sort of trap – that once an offender is tagged by the system it is difficult to escape - should give us pause to consider what degree such a system may offer protection for some, but permanent stigmatization for others.

Precisely who are these others? As numerous scholars have pointed out, the criminal justice system is far from just with respect to who are targeted. The statistical evidence informs us that the over-representation of poor and ethnic minorities in the criminal justice system have persisted for several decades and show little signs of abating anytime soon (Alexander, 2010; Clear, 2007; Cole, 1999; Hallett, 2002; Wacquant, 2008a). This alone should alert us that the critical perspective social work can provide is very much needed.

LIMITATIONS

This being a research project with the intent to gather qualitative data, the results are obviously not generalizable. This is traditionally listed as a primary limitation of the research as if all research should seek generalizable conclusions. In this case the conclusions were based on re-occurring observations, or large groupings of observations that could collectively be interpreted in a similar manner. Analysis of these observations

was conducted with reference to existing literature which examined the same or similar phenomenon until meaningful patterns could be interpreted from the collected data. From these meaningful patterns may emerge a theoretical model of the relationship between the re-occurring themes. These theories can then be tested in future research.

Some limitations of this project were addressed earlier in this chapter. While this project potentially generated some capacity building simply by bringing the research participants together, serious limits remain as to the potential for capacity building given the limited time and money allocated for this project. A primary limitation concerns the failure of the lead researcher to build into the group work additional opportunities for leadership, group facilitation, and decision making skills. It was incorrectly assumed that these skills would be more in evidence than was revealed in the short time line of this project. By the time these deficiencies were understood, the project was near an end.

Similarly, there needed to be a more nuanced understanding of the role the lead researcher played with respect to project authority. It was assumed that the lead researcher could simply share authority with the assembled research participants, and that the participants' share of project authority would expand over the project's duration. In fact, the notion of project authority was always in contest in ways the participants eventually found frustrating. Future research of this type needs to be explicitly clear about where authority rests. If the researcher's intent is that authority be shared, then specific roles for the participants need to be built into the project that allows them to assume greater authority through the course of the project. A balance must be struck surrounding the inclusion of educational or skill building modules (as described in the

above paragraph) and the desire for participants to assume greater autonomy over project direction. What are the contingency plans should research participants reject the roles assigned to them? What if they were more comfortable with the lead researcher assuming responsibility for the project outcome?

The entire notion of lead researcher is problematic in projects that are truly participatory in design. Some of these complications were built into the nature of a dissertation project where project approval must be acquired by the dissertation committee and the Institutional Review board prior to the project's commencement. At the other end of the participatory continuum, project design may be done in collaboration with the community to be served by the research. The parameters of data collection would also be collaboratively decided. Finally, analysis of the collected data would also be a collaborative process. Despite this researcher's intention to include a research element thought to be in service to the community, the fact remains that most of the project parameters were decided beforehand, could not be changed, and thus limited the amount of project authority that could be handed over to the co-researchers, notwithstanding the fact that they may not have wanted this authority to begin with.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

It was not possible for the lead researcher to fully anticipate what would have been learned throughout the course of this project. As knowledge of the issues related to those engaged in reentry deepened, so too did an understanding of what it means to engage in scholarship, to seek with a spirit of adventure, if not necessarily discovery, for

discovery implies ownership when in this case new understanding unfolds as a kind of gift from those so kind as to share their perspectives.

A primary lesson in this research is that each individual engaged in reentry is more than simply an ex-offender. True, they may in some ways have been shaped by their common experiences of the criminal justice system, but they remain very individual with respect to how they may cope with this fact. Perhaps many who interact with the criminal justice system share some common characteristics, but this was possibly more true prior to the 1970's – before our current experiment in hyper-incarceration. Prison populations were possibly more homogeneous prior to 1970. We know for example that less than 10% of those imprisoned were convicted of non-violent crimes. Today more than half of those in prison were convicted of non-violent crimes (Travis et al., 2001). Certainly today's prisoners are more diverse, at least in terms of the crimes for which they are convicted.

Through the course of this research the lead researcher began to imagine that it was not the offender's characteristics of that was being studied, but the characteristics of people pushed to the margins of society. While the intent of this research remained to better understand reentry from the experience of those who live it, the literature that informed an analysis of this perspective owes more to poverty studies than it does to criminal justice. The experiential commonalities expressed by many in this research, such as their experience of stigmatization, is similar to that of all stigmatized people forced to eke a living on the margins of society. This begs the question; can this research be better understood as a study in marginalization?

At some point during this research the lead researcher began to realize that the methodologies employed here defied viewing reentry as solely a personal issue. Much of criminal justice literature, to the extent that it does not treat the offender as an aggregate, tends to focus on the individual offender and how they must be made to accept the consequences of their crime if there is to be any hope of properly adjusting their failure to respect law and order. The underlying premise of such a perspective is that the offender is defective and the criminal justice system must consistently seek to fix or amend this defect. An odd side effect of such a perspective is to assume the responsibility for the fix rests less with the criminal justice system, than with the offender. When we ask those who work in criminal justice how they explain service failures, they are often apt to blame the client. The client is unmotivated, the client does not want to change, or the client is not ready to assume responsibility. But what is the responsibility of the criminal justice systems?

By turning our lens slightly we may engage in research that in addition to trying to understand the ex-offender's needs, may also seek to understand the criminal justice system itself and to determine what role it plays in aiding or complicating successful reentry. From the client perspective, reentry consists of handing the ex-offender a list of out-dated resources and essentially throwing them into the community pool to sink or swim. That a third of them manage to stay away from the criminal justice system thereafter is a testament to their remarkable adaptability and resiliency. That about two thirds return to prison within three years should not surprise us too much. It is disappointing, yes, but not entirely surprising.

If we wish to better understand the trajectory of how some first time criminals get ensnared by the criminal justice system, and how others manage to avoid further entanglement, a longitudinal series of interviews might be conducted with first-time offenders, either adults or juveniles. These individuals could thereafter be contacted at regular intervals to see if we can gain an understanding of what it means to be identified as a criminal. Such research might either support the speculation that criminal justice systems work like a trap, or put the speculation to rest as a bias promoted by those who only feel targeted by the criminal justice system.

This research focused on the other end of the spectrum by trying to establish what offenders might use, post-incarceration, to support their desire to cease further interaction with the criminal justice system. Had this population garnered more empathy, such research would be more common than it is today. Were we to exist in a society less interested in individual accountability rather than social responsibility toward all our fellow citizens, regardless of their status, the kinds of questions being raised here might appear moot. If we as a culture were not so accommodating of policies of criminalization that seek to warehouse large numbers of people in prisons instead of directly dealing with social problems such as drug use, poverty, and mental illness, then these questions need not be asked at all. But the fact remains we have all collectively helped build this prison through our inaction, as if it were normal to lock up as many as we do here in the United States. We thus bear the social consequences of hyper-incarceration. Our peculiar blindness as to our collective responsibility to better address social problems such as drug

use, poverty and mental illness, provokes a preference to blame these problems on individuals so marginalized that their personal choices appear exceptionally limited.

This is not to excuse illegal behavior or to justify it, only to suggest that we all have a role to play in limiting the attractiveness of crime or better assisting those who fall prey to such temptations. There is a larger social context that explains our cultural penchant for hyper-incarceration better than any empty claims of increased crime rates. Even a cursory glance tells us that it is not the rate of crime we must concern ourselves with, but an exaggerated fear of crime, or our fear of social disruption that is implied by crime. How else can we explain that for five decades (between the 1920s and the 1960s) the rate of incarceration remained relatively stable, hovering between 150,000 and 200,000 mostly violent offenders; but within a few short decades we would have started to incarcerate over 2 million offenders and by the mid-1990s, for the first time in our nation's history, more than half of these would have been convicted of non-violent offenses (Mauer, 2006; Travis, et al., 2001)?

It is time that our experiment with hyper-incarceration becomes subject to further rigorous and critical scrutiny. If it is true that we are creating more social problems than are solved by warehousing so many behind bars, then we have the responsibility to examine this phenomenon with an eye for proposing solutions. The will for such change can be stimulated by focusing our attention on the human impact of policies of criminalization – the effect these policies have had on not just the offenders, but on the families and communities who by extension are also harmed. By allowing those so affected the ability to give voice to their circumstances, it may become more difficult to

dismiss their perspective. By humanizing these individuals, the tendency to scapegoat and stereotype can be minimized. By helping to ensure that those so affected are given a greater voice in policy construction, we may hope for the development of new policies more responsive to human need, and in so doing, possibly help conceptualize more effective ways to minimize the harm caused by crime itself. In short, we may discover that the most effective way to deal with crime is to first seek to address human needs.

POSTSCRIPT

This dissertation sought to identify factors that are considered essential to help insure a successful transition from the strictures of imprisonment. These factors are termed milestones. In the research literature, housing and employment are the primary milestones thought essential to successful reentry. This dissertation research suggests that successful reentry of ex-offenders also requires a community with which to identify, a place to reconstruct their identity, and a productive social structure to which they might belong. Understandably the latter milestones are less tangible than housing and employment, and so they are easily neglected. How might we measure their acquisition if we allowed their importance?

This research also suggests that an ex-offender support group can help meet many of the less tangible milestones, and that the benefits of such a group can be magnified if ex-offenders were allowed to direct this group independent of the criminal justice system. There is a caveat here, however. While much evidence supports the utility of a peer-directed group, there is equal evidence to suggest that such a group is not practical without the availability of extensive planning and resources. For example, the

participants in this dissertation study lacked the preparation to manage and engage in such a group of their own volition. The participants were hampered by an absence of personal transportation to get to meetings, money to pay for public transportation, and lingering issues of mistrust that could impair their ability to share in a group setting.

A serious limitation to this study is that the researcher was unable to determine the feasibility of a peer-to-peer support group, even as the utility of such a group seems theoretically sound. The extent to which peer-to-peer support is feasible must be determined by future research supported by adequate funding.

The findings from this study support a critique of coercion as a means to construct a responsible and accountable citizenry. This coercion could be in the form of the conditions of parole many of those released from prison are subject, or this coercion could weigh as heavily as the fear of violence and sexual domination that many were exposed to while in prison. If one's experience of the criminal justice system amounts to behavioral conditioning that strips one of personal autonomy, then those reentering the community after a period of imprisonment may be in need of much more than such milestones as housing and employment to insure their success. Ex-offenders may require several additional milestones that allow the psychological transition from an environment based on domination and control, to an environment where self-determination is presumed to be the norm.

Coercion theory assumes that all offenders are able to respond in a rational way toward the threat of incarceration, and that once convicted they will soon learn the error of their ways and "go straight." In fact, within three years about two thirds of those

released will return to prison, suggesting that coercion theory falsely assumes that all those caught up in the criminal justice system are rational actors, or worse, that a turn toward crime can sometimes be seen as a more rational act than the threat of possible arrest. The participants in this study, for example, made frequent reference to the lure of crime when it became difficult to make ends meet. Having once been to prison they were all fully aware of the potential consequences (these were not an abstraction), yet the thought of “easy money” still persist.

Such temptations are easy to ascribe to the amoral, and clearly many of those sent to prison may be certifiably immoral, but unless we have experienced a rash of immorality these past three decades, the prison population has grown to include many who were not previously characterized as criminals. Many of these people are poor. Many exist on the margins of society. For these reasons, this research claims to be as much about the criminal justice system as it is about poverty and marginalization, for with adequate personal resources many are able to escape further interaction with the criminal justice system upon release from prison, but less so those who are without resources. In this respect prisons really do represent a warehouse for the disenfranchised; a place to safely store society’s unwanted.

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