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FROM PRISON TO HOME: WOMEN'S PATHWAYS IN AND OUT OF

CRIME

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A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School for partial completion of the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy degree, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri - St. Louis

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ABSTRACT

A great deal of research has been amassed on recidivism and desistance. However, most studies have been conducted on male offenders or have included only small samples of women and fewer have considered whether the reentry experience differs between Black and white women. Thus, my goal in this dissertation is to bring women and race to the forefront by investigating the reentry and desistance process among Black and white females released from prison. Drawing from primary in-depth and survey interviews and an examination of official records, the current research examines the reentry experiences of a matched sample of women ex-offenders in the process of desistance with incarcerated female recidivists. Specifically, this study provides a nuanced analysis of the pathways women take into crime, the challenges they face post-release, the strategies females use to successfully or unsuccessfully reintegrate into the community, the reasons for recidivating, the motivators and methods used to desist from crime, as well as to capture the meanings of their experiences. This study highlights the importance of an intra-gender, theoretical understanding of reentry for women offenders and has direct implications for correctional policies and practices. Drawing from my study findings, I conclude by providing recommendations to help women reintegrate into society as responsible and productive citizens and to improve their reentry outcome by reducing the risk of recidivism.

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

The "imprisonment binge" (Austin and Irwin, 2001) of the last two decades has led to an increasing number of adults released from prison. Each year nearly 700,000 inmates – approximately 1,900 per day – are released from state and federal prison to return home (Harrison and Beck, 2006). The stark reality is that the vast majority of individuals sent to prison will inevitably experience reentry – the process of leaving prison and returning to society. The reentry period, however, offers many pressing challenges for returning prisoners to reintegrate, which include finding housing, securing employment, receiving treatment, and complying with conditions of parole supervision. In many states, convicted offenders may lose the right to vote and to hold public office. They also encounter restrictions in obtaining government assistance, professional licenses, and education loans, as well as retaining parental rights, and serving on a jury. Jeremy Travis (2002: 16) refers to these legal restrictions as "invisible punishment:"

> Over the same period of time that prisons and criminal justice supervision have increased significantly, the laws and regulations that serve to diminish the rights and privileges of those convicted of crimes have also expanded. Yet, we cannot adequately measure the reach of these expressions of the social inclination to punish. Consequently, we cannot evaluate their effectiveness, impact, or even "implementation" through the myriad of private and public entities that are expected to enforce these new rules. Because these laws operate largely beyond public view, yet have very serious, adverse consequences for the individuals affected, I refer to them, collectively, as "invisible punishment."

This "invisible punishment" makes it increasingly difficult for returning prisoners to gain a foothold in society. Consequently, the inability of ex-offenders to adjust and reintegrate successfully can increase an ex-offender's likelihood of recidivating. A national study of recidivism suggests that two-thirds of released inmates are rearrested, 47 percent are reconvicted, and roughly half are returned to prison in the three years

following release (Langan and Levin, 2002). Recidivism is particularly high within the first year after release from prison, as 44 percent of released inmates will be rearrested during that period (Langan and Levin, 2002). An emerging body of literature has explored the correlates of recidivism. These studies document that offenders who are young, minorities, and male are more likely to recidivate (Spohn and Holleran, 2002; Benedict et al., 1998; Hepburn and Albonetti, 1994). In addition, offenders who have prior offenses, have a substance abuse history, and little education have been found to recidivate more (Ulmer, 2001; MacKenzie et al., 1999; Benedict and Huff-Corzine, 1997).

While a great deal of research on recidivism has been amassed, the study of desistance from crime has recently received an increasing amount of attention as well (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Giordano et al., 2002). Previous work identifies specific causal factors of desistance from crime, drawn primarily from male samples. One theoretical approach contends that desistance from crime is correlated with age. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 136) maintain that "[s]pontaneous desistance is just that, change in behavior that cannot be explained and change that occurs regardless of what else happens." According to this view, age has a direct effect on criminal behavior, which remains invariant across social, temporal, and economic conditions (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1995: 135).

Conversely, others argue that age alone cannot explain the desistance process (Sampson and Laub, 1992; Rutter, 1996). This theoretical approach maintains that desistance from crime is linked to informal social control, in which informal ties to social

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institutions can aid in the process of reform. In a longitudinal study of white[1] male offenders, Sampson and Laub (1993) declare that crime results from weak social bonds. On the other hand, life-course events (i.e. marriage, employment, military) encourage attachments and operate as informal social controls that can aid in gradual desistance from crime and deviance (Laub et al., 1998).

Despite research findings on the predictive validity of crime and desistance, what is notably absent from the literature is an examination of whether these theories are applicable to women offenders. In fact, much of the research overgeneralizes men's experiences to women's, which reflects the invisibility of women in the field of criminology and criminal justice (O'Brien, 2001; Richie, 2001). Mainstream criminology has been criticized for its lack of attention given to women and gender (Britton, 2000; Daly and Chesney-Lind, 1988; Smart, 1976). Not surprisingly, the reentry experience of women remains largely understudied and undertheorized (for exceptions see Maidment, 2006; O'Brien, 2001; Richie, 2001; Baskin and Sommers, 1998; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998). Further, few studies have explored whether the reentry experiences are similar or different for Black and white women.

Thus, my goal in this dissertation is to bring women and race to the forefront by investigating the reentry and desistance process between Black and white females released from prison. As the female prison population grows, it becomes imperative to understand how women manage post-release. This issue is in need of careful theoretical and policy attention. Research suggests that gender, combined with race/ethnicity, affects the tendency of individuals to internalize personal problems (Rosenfield et al.,

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[1] Throughout the dissertation, I do not capitalize the word "white" but I do capitalize the word "Black," which is in keeping with the style recommendations of Sociologists for Women in Society.

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2006), and this could affect the reentry and desistance processes. Moreover, many women offenders are victims of physical and sexual abuse, and have substance abuse problems, physical and mental health problems, minor children, limited vocational training, and spotty work histories (Bloom et al., 2003). Each of these factors is likely to shape the motivational and interpretive triggers necessary for successful reintegration and desistance. But while there are some women who do recidivate, some manage to "go straight." Thus, an important goal in my investigation is to examine why women desist from crime and how they manage to sustain desistance over time.

Theoretical and Empirical Work on Reentry and Desistance

Scholars have recently attempted to tackle the complexities of the reentry phenomenon. Reestablishing a life after prison is far from easy, as returning prisoners are expected to find a place to stay, obtain formal identification, reunite with family members, address substance abuse dependency, avoid criminal activity, and obtain a job, often with a sporadic work history and now, a criminal record (Visher and Travis, 2003). Some researchers maintain that the pathway to reintegration and desistance is a function of a good marriage, stable employment, the aging process, and identity transformation.

Marriage has emerged in the literature as central to a successful post-release transition, particularly among men. Using the Glueck's longitudinal study of 1,000 men (Glueck, 1968), Sampson and Laub (1993) use a life-course theory of offending that emphasizes the factors that shape its onset, persistence, and decline. Building on control theory, they argue that marital attachment can trigger desistance by fostering informal social controls and increasing social capital. The development of these social bonds in adulthood explains pathways to desistance independent of individual differences in

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criminal propensity. Although marital attachment functions as a form of informal social control that inhibits offending, Laub and colleagues (1998) demonstrate that the good marriage effect tends to be gradual and cumulative. The idea that desistance is gradual and accompanied by the accumulation of social bonds is supported in Horney, Osgood, and Marshall's (1995) study. Analyzing month-to-month changes in the year following recently convicted male felons release from prison, they find that changes in criminal offending are tied to variation in "local life circumstances." Specifically, they discover that living with a wife reduces involvement in illegal behavior.

Similarly, using data from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, Farrington and West (1995) find that marriage results in lower rates of offending among a sample of working-class males from London. Warr (1998), however, argues that marriage discourages offending behavior by disrupting or severing ties with delinquent peers. Using data from the National Youth Survey, Warr finds support for this hypothesis by demonstrating that some of the marriage effect on desistance was accounted for via the spouse's role in reducing involvement spent with deviant friends. Even qualitative scholars have identified that the development of conventional social bonds shapes the desistance process (Shover, 1996). For example, Irwin (1970: 203) states that an "adequate and satisfying relationship with a woman, usually in a family context" is related to desistance. Yet, the reality is that few prisoners are married. In a 1997 survey, only 16 percent of state prisoners reported being married and 59 percent had never been married (Mumola, 2000). Moreover, marriage rates among Black men have been declining for the past few decades, demonstrating that a substantial group of released men will not step into the family role of husband immediately following their

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release from prison, which can impact their post-release success (Visher and Travis, 2003).

Labor market experiences have also been found to predict post-prison outcomes. In their social control theory, Sampson and Laub (1993) find that in addition to a good marriage, commitment to employment reduces criminal behavior. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Pezzin (1995) discovers that individuals with higher paid legitimate jobs are more likely to stop offending. Uggen (2000) maintains that age interacts with employment to affect self-reported recidivism rates. In his study, he finds that offenders aged 27 and over are more likely to report crime and arrest when they are provided with marginal work (defined as minimum wage jobs) than when such employment opportunities are not provided. While studies show that a successful post-release transition to a conventional lifestyle requires stable employment, many ex-convicts have difficulty finding opportunities for legitimate work (Pager, 2002). The accumulation of weak connections to employment, few work skills, limited work history, and the stigma of incarceration make it increasingly difficult for returning prisoners to land a job (Western et al., 2001; Sampson and Laub, 1993).

However, some contend that desistance is not merely a function of a good marriage or stable employment, but rather is tied directly to age. For instance, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) contend that individuals self-select into prosocial institutions, like marriage, as they age out of offending behavior. They conclude that "crime declines with age" (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990: 136). In his qualitative interview with persistent male thieves, Shover (1996) discovers that aging influences subjective contingencies, which in turn impact desistance. For these men, the meaning

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and calculus of crime changed over the life course, which prompted them to turn away from crime.

Others, however, maintain that maturation can develop independent of age and that a personal decision to change is at the heart of a successful transition. Maruna (2001) asserts that individuals who are in the process of desistance undergo a change in self-concept and self-identity. Using data from life-history narratives for 55 men and 10 women, Maruna reveals that compared to recidivists, reformed offenders are more likely to find satisfaction in generative behaviors, feel a sense of control over the future, and discover purpose and meaning in their lives. Likewise, Graham and Bowling (1995) find that changes in identity and maturity influence desistance. For instance, desisters identified that a sense of direction, recognition of the consequences of crime, and becoming aware that crime does not pay impacted their decision to stop offending.

Overall, studies have identified marriage, employment, aging, and identity transformation as critical factors that play a role in a successful transition from prison to the community. Most of these studies, however, have been conducted on male offenders or have included only small samples of women. A better understanding of the reentry phenomenon requires moving beyond the traditional focus of males to a women-centered approach that provides insight into their post-release experiences.

Gender, Reentry, Recidivism, and Desistance

Compared to men, we know far less about women offenders' return to the free world. With imprisonment growing at a faster rate for women than men (Harrison and Beck, 2006), we can expect a continuing rise in the number of women returning home. While most inmates exiting prison confront similar challenges upon release, women's

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reentry experiences are qualitatively different than that of their male counterparts. Central among the many differences is that men typically return to a home and a family (Belknap, 1996) and are more likely than women to secure income-generating employment (O'Brien, 2001). On the other hand, when a woman is released, she must often reestablish a home and family roles, regain custody of her children (Belknap, 1996), as well as secure a job that pays sufficient income to care for herself and her children (Johnson, 1995; Pollock-Byrne, 1990). This has proven to be rather difficult, as the average woman who leaves prison "lacks a home, financial support, employment, socially legitimated and rewarded skills, practical knowledge about how to secure resources, and most lack a sense of hope for their future outside of prison" (O'Brien, 2001: 2-3).

For many women leaving prison, the barriers they face are insurmountable, which is reflected in the large number who have subsequent contact with the criminal justice system. Recent cross-state estimates of recidivism show that 58 percent of incarcerated women are rearrested, 38 percent are reconvicted, and 30 percent are returned to prison in the three years following release (Deschenes et al., 2007). Some feminist scholars argue that female criminality and recidivism are shaped by victimization. Many underscore the disproportionate number of female offenders who have experienced physical and sexual abuse (Greenfeld and Snell, 1999), and conclude that victimization as a child and during adulthood is linked to subsequent offending (Chesney-Lind, 2002; Daly, 1998; Richie, 1996; Owen and Bloom, 1995; Gilfus, 1992; Arnold, 1990).

Others contend that the trend toward "feminization of poverty" – the concentration of poverty among women – drives females to engage in economically-

based crimes (Holtfreter et al., 2004; Heimer, 2000; Steffensmeier, 1993). For instance, Holtfreter and colleagues (2004) demonstrate that poverty status increases the odds of rearrest among female felony offenders. They find that women who are provided with state-based financial support are less likely to reoffend than those who do not receive government support. Moreover, studies demonstrate that economic marginalization and structural dislocation largely impact Black woman because of their status in society (Philips and Votey, 1984). Dressel (1994) highlights the economic hopelessness among Black women in which the means for legitimate income-generating activities are limited as a result of the interplay of racism, classism, and sexism. Thus, many conclude that the worsening economic situation of marginalized women is related to increased rates of women's offending (Heimer, 2000; Steffensmeier, 1993).

However, some assert that substance use is also critical for understanding women's pattern of reoffending, as drug use is one of the most commonly cited correlates of recidivism (Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008; Dowden and Brown, 2002; Harm and Phillips, 2001; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998). Some feminist scholars maintain that women use drugs to cope with the pain of abuse and that petty drug sales are typically a means of economic survival to support themselves and their children (Chesney-Lind, 1997; Daly, 1998). Others highlight the economic needs created by drug use, as women often turn to the illegal market to fund their drug habits (Uggen and Thompson, 2003).

Some scholars have also investigated the factors that shape successful post-release outcomes. While marital attachment and job stability have emerged as dominant factors related to desistance among males, this is not the case for females (Giordano et al., 2002). Rather, there is evidence to suggest that family and children, aside from an intimate

relationship, may have strong positive effects for women (Alarid et al., 2000; Sharp, Marcus-Mendoza, Bentley, Simpson, and Love, 1999; Daly, 1998; Steffensmeier and Allen, 1996). Many studies have identified that children serve as an important catalyst for change (Hope, Wilder, and Watt, 2003; Giordano et al., 2002; Enos, 2001; Graham and Bowling, 1996). Giordano and colleagues (2002) discover that children are commonly cited as a motivating factor for desistance. Likewise, Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) demonstrate that women are more likely to exhibit behavioral desistance (self-reported illegal earnings) if they have children. Moreover, supportive interpersonal relationships have been identified as vital for women's successful reintegration (Maidment, 2006; O'Brien, 2001). Thus, evidence suggests that familial and parental relationships are essential to understanding women's reentry process.

Similar to studies that have been conducted on all or largely male samples (Maruna, 2001, Shover, 1985), identity transformation has also emerged as a factor that facilitates reform among women. In their theory of cognitive transformation, Giordano and colleagues (2002: 1000-1001) identify four stages to the transformation or desistance process that includes: 1) openness to change; 2) exposure to "hooks for change" or turning points; 3) fashioning an "appealing and conventional 'replacement self;'" and 4) a lifestyle transformation in the way the actor views the deviant behavior. They argue that lasting change consists of replacing one's old self. Likewise, in a largely theoretical piece, Rumgay (2004) asserts that desistance may stem from an opportunity to claim a socially approved self-identity. Here we see that studies have underscored the importance of offenders negotiating their social identity in order to maintain desistance (Baskin and Sommers, 1998).

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Already research on women's transitions from prison to the community has allowed us to understand the challenges returning female inmates face when they return to free society and the factors that contribute to their reentry successes and failures. However, a comparative analysis of current and former women offenders offers the opportunity to enhance our understanding of the relationship between prisoner reentry, recidivism, and desistance. Following an approach similar to Maruna (2001), my aim is to investigate women's understanding of the factors that impact their community reentry following release from prison.

The Current Study

My goal is to provide a nuanced analysis of the pathways women take into crime, the challenges they face post-release, the strategies females use to successfully or unsuccessfully reintegrate into the community, the reasons for recidivating, the motivators and methods used to desist from crime, as well as to capture the meanings of their experiences. In addition, I consider racial variation in reentry. To accomplish the study goals, I located two groups of Black and white female offenders: those released on parole who are successful in avoiding revocation during their first two to three years post-incarceration, and those released during the same time frame who recidivated and are reincarcerated. I used purposive sampling to select a matched group of 50 female offenders released on parole in St. Louis City and St. Louis County between June 2004 and December 2005 with two to three years to serve on parole. Only by interviewing a matched sample of former and current offenders am I best able to identify the factors influencing recidivism and understand the desistance process among women. Using a

comparative approach, I further investigate women's understanding of the factors that both facilitate and hinder successful community reintegration subsequent to incarceration.

Generally, quantitative studies on current or former prisoners focus on identifying the factors that predict recidivism; yet, most of these studies treat recidivism as a static outcome. Few studies on incarcerated offenders and ex-offenders explore the *processes* by which an individual continues to be involved in offending or desists from crime. Even fewer studies explore the processes involved in successfully reintegrating those who have violated the law. The dissertation is designed to help fill the gap in the literature on prisoner reentry by exploring the processes by which women continue to be involved in criminal activity *and* the processes by which they desist from crime and reintegrate into society. Scholars have argued that the study of recidivism and desistance would benefit from a broader longitudinal framework that incorporates a whole life perspective on desistance and offending (Belknap, 2007; Visher and Travis, 2003; Laub and Sampson, 2001). For this reason, this project will entail a life-course framework that takes into account the women's circumstances prior to incarceration and the immediate and long-term periods after prison release. Focusing attention on the various individual, social, and economic dimensions returning prisoners experience may lead to a better understanding of why some formerly incarcerated women prisoners commit new crimes and others do not, as well as why some former female offenders manage to successfully reintegrate into the free world and others fail to do so.

Desistance as a Maintenance Process

There are, however, some conceptual/theoretical issues related to desistance to consider. It is important to note the subtle but significant distinction between two key

concepts: termination of crime and desistance as a process. Laub and Sampson (2001:11) explained:

> Termination is the time at which criminal activity stops. Desistance, by contrast, is the causal process that supports the termination of offending. While it is difficult to ascertain when the process of desistance begins, it is apparent that it continues after the termination of offending. In our view, the process of desistance maintains the continued state of nonoffending. Thus, both termination and the process of desistance need to be considered in understanding cessation from offending. By using different terms for these distinct phenomena, we separate termination (the outcome) from the dynamics underlying the process of desistance (the cause), which have been confounded in the literature to date.

Laub and Sampson make clear distinctions between termination and the desistance process. Understanding the reasons offenders terminate their criminal behavior is different from understanding the process of going straight and maintaining desistance (Maruna, 2001). While the study of termination sparks the question of *why*, the study of desistance as the maintenance of nondeviant behavior prompts the question of *how*. In the current study, I seek to understand what initiated women ex-offenders to terminate their criminal participation, and how they managed to continue desistance over a period of time. The focus here is on both the change and the maintenance of crime-free behavior.

One might suggest that the current study is unable to truly understand the dynamics underlying the desistance process because respondents were interviewed once with no follow-up. However, one must keep in mind that since desistance is an ongoing process that ex-offenders work at daily, all of the women in the desisting sample were actively going straight as I interviewed them. These women had initiated and sustained their continued crime-free behavior for a two to three year period, making it possible to understand the process of desistance.

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Overview of Remaining Chapters

As described, this dissertation is a study of the reentry experiences among a group of Black and white current and former female offenders in St. Louis. In the next chapter, I describe the research methodology of the current study, which consists of a description of the study setting and design, sample and measurement issues, as well as data collection and analysis. While the majority of the study focuses on women's post-release experiences, I first describe the pathways to offending. Because women's reentry experiences cannot be understood apart from the onset of criminal behavior, in Chapter 3, I investigate the origins of women's criminal and drug activity.

Chapter 4 shifts focus from women's pathways to crime to the challenges they face following their release from prison. Since a growing number of women cycle in and out of prison, it is important to recognize the legal and practical hurdles that they encounter to reintegration. Chapter 5 builds from the findings in chapter 4 to focus on the specific factors that facilitate and hinder their transition from prison to mainstream society. Specific attention is placed on both paroled women's perceptions of what led to them to successfully reintegrate and incarcerated women's assessment of factors that impeded their ability to reintegrate into the community. Only by understanding reintegration success and failure of women can effort be made to improve released inmates' prospects for success.

Chapter 6 explores the reasons incarcerated women recidivated while on parole supervision. Because the vast majority of released inmates have subsequent contact with the criminal justice system, it is critical to understand the motivating factors that influenced their decision to reengage in criminal activity. Despite the fact that

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recidivism is a common occurrence among ex-felons, Chapter 7 examines *why* formerly incarcerated female offenders chose to abstain from criminal activity and *how* they managed to sustain desistance for a two to three year period. I explore both the motivators and methods women used to take pathways out of crime while faced with challenges and obstacles. I tie everything together in Chapter 8, discussing the implications of the study for research on reentry and desistance among women, and conclude with an overview of some policy implications that emerge from this research.

CHAPTER TWO: THE STUDY

My goal for the dissertation is to provide an examination of the pathways women take into crime, the reintegration challenges they face post-release, the resources females use to successfully reintegrate into the community, the reasons for recidivating, and the motivators and methods used to desist from crime. To accomplish the study goals, I located 50 incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women residing in the St. Louis metropolitan region who were willing to share their life experiences. In order to capture the complexities of women's lives I employed a multi-method research strategy, which included the use of qualitative in-depth interviews with incarcerated and paroled women, supplemental survey interviews, and an examination of official records. The use of multiple methodologies and data sources provides a means to triangulate the qualitative data, which is a common strategy utilized to increase confidence in the validity and reliability of qualitative analyses (see Marshall and Rossman, 1989).

Study Setting

Because individuals are greatly affected by their immediate environment, incarcerated and released inmates cannot be understood apart from the communities in which they reside. All of the women interviewed for this project lived in St. Louis City. Table 1 displays select demographic and social indicators for the City and County of St. Louis, including median family income, a measure of racial segregation (the percent of Black population), a measure of the level of supervision available in the neighborhood (the percent of female-headed households with children), the percent of individuals living below the poverty level, and the unemployment rate. The differences between St. Louis City and St. Louis County are quite striking, as the table shows that the median family

income is nearly two times less in the City of St. Louis compared to the median family income in the County of St. Louis. For the remaining characteristics, St. Louis City exceeds overall County levels. Larger concentrations of African Americans reside in St. Louis City, including more than half of the city's residents. Further, increased levels of female-headed household formation combined with high levels of poverty and unemployment show that St. Louis metropolitan area typifies the high distressed urban city.

Table 1 also presents demographic and socioeconomic indicators for respondents' neighborhoods.[2] First, comparing the characteristics of the women's city neighborhoods and St. Louis City, I find that the distribution across family income, female headed households with children, poverty, and unemployment are similar; however, the neighborhoods where respondents reside are somewhat worse off. The most notable discrepancy between respondents in the city and St. Louis City is that, on average, the women in the sample resided in neighborhoods with larger proportions of African Americans.

Second, there is quite a disparity between respondents' County neighborhoods and St. Louis County. For instance, the median income is more than $15,000 lower for the neighborhoods where respondents are living in the County and the rate of African Americans is more than double compared to St. Louis County. Further, the percent of female-headed households with children, poverty, and unemployment is approximately

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[2] Incarcerated and paroled respondents were asked to provide the names of two cross streets near where they lived. The data in Table 1 comes from census neighborhood data from these cross streets, which reflects the average characteristics for each respondent. While this is not as precise a measure as using addresses to obtain census data for women's neighborhoods, it does provide a fairly accurate match. I was unable to use the information that nine respondents provided because the street names either were not located or they did not intersect with one another. Thus, Table 1 contains the mean information for 41 respondents. Of these women, 28 women resided in St. Louis City and 13 in St. Louis County.

one-third higher among respondents living in the county jurisdictions than in St. Louis County as a whole. Here we see that the average City and County figures reported in Table 1 underestimate the socioeconomic disadvantage found in the vast majority of respondents' neighborhoods. Understanding the neighborhood context where ex-offenders reside is critical, as studies suggest that neighborhood characteristics directly affect ex-offenders ability to reintegrate into society, which contributes either to a greater likelihood of recidivism or desistance (Kubrin and Stewart, 2006; Lynch and Sabol, 2001; Rose and Clear, 1998; Wilson, 1996; 1987).

Study Design

The study design was comparative in nature. Following Maruna's (2001) study design, I conducted a systematic analysis of the desistance and recidivism experiences of two groups of offenders released on parole during the same time period: 1) those who were not reincarcerated during the subsequent two to three years and 2) a matched sample of women who were returned to custody during this period. Interviews with both female ex-offenders in the process of desistance and incarcerated women recidivists allow for an examination of similarities and differences in women's life experiences that help account for why some desist from crime while others do not. Miller (2005: 4) notes that comparative qualitative research strategies are particularly useful for strengthening "internal validity by allowing for more refined analysis and greater contextual specification." By interviewing a matched sample of women in the process of desistance with those who did not desist, I am able to isolate factors that are directly related to both desistance and recidivism (see Burnett, 1994, 1992; Glaser, 1964).

Sampling

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This project used a purposive sampling strategy to explore how women managed

their release from prison, the factors that contributed to their involvement in crime, and

the methods and resources used to facilitate reintegration into the community. I

identified a sample of 26 incarcerated women offenders and 24 female parolees living in

the St. Louis metropolitan region. The participants were recruited based on the following

criteria: (1) they were released on parole in St. Louis City or St. Louis County between

June 2004 and December 2005; and (2) they were released with at least two to three years

to serve on their parole sentence. This time frame was selected because it provides an

ample follow-up period post-release to identify a sample of women who appear

successful in not recidivating and a similarly situated reincarcerated comparison group.

For women meeting the sampling criteria, I employed additional criteria to ensure the

comparative nature of the sample. Approximately equal numbers of women were

included in the study who (1) had no documented new crimes or technical violations that

resulted in reincarceration, and (2) were subsequently reincarcerated at the Women's

Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center (WERDCC) in Vandalia,

Missouri as a result of committing a new crime or technical violation.[3]

Figure 1 depicts the population of incarcerated and paroled women in St. Louis

who fit my sampling criteria. In all, 323 women were released to parole sentenced by St.

Louis City or St Louis County between June 2004 and December 2005. Of those women,

124 were placed on parole, 31 had been discharged, 11 had absconded, and 57 were

incarcerated. Of the 124 women on parole, 82 were located in the St. Louis area. Of

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[3] The Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center is one of two women's prisons in
the state of Missouri, and is located approximately 90 miles from St. Louis.

those women on parole, 51 did not return to prison. Of the 57 women who were currently incarcerated, 52 were housed at the WERDCC.

I obtained a list of the women imprisoned at the WERDCC and of women on parole in St. Louis City and St. Louis County from the Missouri Department of Corrections. I then selected names from each list that would allow me to have variation in the variables of interest. Ultimately, I wanted to interview a diverse sample of women while at the same time matching the two samples, as closely as possible, on variables such as race, age, marital status, offense type, and incarceration history. To the greatest degree possible, the samples were purposely matched on a case-by-case basis on the variables listed above, which are correlated with both recidivism and desistance from crime (see Deschenes et al, 2007; Holtfreter et al., 2004; Bonta et al., 1995; Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985).

Table 2 compares the respondents in my incarceration and parole sample with their respective prison and parole populations in Missouri. First, comparing the characteristics of respondents in the incarcerated sample to the WERDCC population, I find that distribution across age, marital status, and number of incarceration are relatively similar. The most notable discrepancy between the two groups is that a larger proportion of respondents in my incarcerated sample are African American compared to the WERDCC population. While a greater percentage of women in my sample are African American, the sample is a reflection of St. Louis. St. Louis City and St. Louis County are among the top sentencing jurisdictions in Missouri and both jurisdictions, particularly St. Louis City, have larger populations of African Americans than are found in the state as a whole. Second, respondents in the incarcerated sample have a greater percent of property

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offenders and fewer violent offenders compared to the population of WERDCC as a

whole.

When comparing the characteristics of the parole sample to the Missouri parole

population, I find that the distribution of age, marital status, and number of incarcerations

are similar. However, there are two discrepancies. First, more than three times the

number of women in my parole sample are African American, as compared to the parole

population within the state. Second, a much larger proportion of respondents in my

parole sample committed violent crimes compared with the population of parolees in

Missouri. These findings are, in part, a result of my examination only on offenders from

the St. Louis metropolitan area. Given these discrepancies, as well as the nature of the

study design, the sample is not representative of their respective prison and parole

populations.

When recruiting the incarcerated sample, the Assistant Superintendant at the

WERDCC informed the Functional Unit Managers at each housing unit about the project.

The Managers were then in charge of notifying the incarcerated women about the study.[4]

If the women volunteered to participate in the study, then an interview was scheduled in a

private office within the correctional facility. Before the interview, I briefed respondents

about my study, discussed their rights as study participants, and then they signed the

informed consent as mandated by the Institutional Review Board protocol. However, 11

percent of incarcerated women who met the sample criteria refused to take part in the

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[4] Some of the incarcerated women did not receive any notice about the study. For many of the women who
were imprisoned, I was the first one to provide them with any detail about the study once I arrived at the
correctional facility. This was actually beneficial as not one woman refused to participate in an interview
after I told her about my project. This is in contrast to the three women who did refuse to participate in the
study when a prison administrator informed them about the study.

study or were released before the interviews.[5] I rectified this problem by replacing these women with other incarcerated women in the sample population who met the sample criteria.

For the parole sample, the Unit Supervisor for the Missouri Board of Probation and Parole contacted the potential respondents' parole officer to inform them about the study. I contacted each of the women's district parole officer who told me when their client was scheduled to report for parole.[6] I then met each of the paroled women at their assigned parole office to notify them of the study. If the respondent was willing to participate in the study, I either interviewed her the same day or scheduled a date for the interview at the parolee's earliest convenience. The interviews took place in a private room at the parole office. As with the incarcerated sample, prior to the interview I briefed respondents about my study, discussed their rights, and had them sign the informed consent that confirmed their voluntary participation in the study. I was unable to interview many women who met my sampling criteria for a number of reasons: nine refused (18%), four absconded (8%), two were in jail (4%), two wanted to participate but had work conflicts (4%), and one each had their parole revoked (2%), were off parole supervision (2%), failed to show up when an interview was scheduled (2%),[7] or died

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[5] I omitted names of women in administrative segregation because I was not allowed to interview any of these women; however, some of the women I interviewed had spent time in administrative segregation in their current or previous commitments.

[6] A total of 17 paroled women who met the sampling criteria were on minimal supervision and did not have to physically report to their parole officer. For these women, I sent an introductory letter to their parole officer, who then mailed the letter to their clients inviting them to participate in the study. If the paroled women were interested, then they contacted me or their parole officer, and an interview was scheduled.

[7] I was unable to contact this person who did not show up for our scheduled appointment because her phone was disconnected. Her parole officer mailed her a letter about the study, which included my contact information, but she did not respond.

(2%). Women who were selected to participate in the study but unable to do so were substituted with other paroled women from the population who met the sampling criteria.

In total, 50 women were selected and interviewed for this project. Of these women, 26 were incarcerated at the WERDCC and 24 were on parole and resided in St. Louis City or St. Louis County. The majority of women resided in the City versus the County, as findings showed that 28 women lived in St. Louis County compared to 13 women in St. Louis County.[8] Interviews began in December of 2007 and were completed in March 2008. Paroled women were paid $30 and incarcerated women were paid $10,[9] and both sample groups were promised strict confidentiality.[10]

Operationalizing Desistance and Recidivism

Desistance from crime is defined as "the long-term abstinence from crime among individuals who had previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending"

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[8] This number does not equal the total sample of 50 because, as mentioned earlier, respondents were asked to provide the names of two cross streets near where they lived. However, I was unable to use the information that nine respondents provided because the street names either were not located or they did not intersect with one another.

[9] Although I initially planned to pay $20 to both sample groups, one of the members on my dissertation committee cautioned against it. Since I was interviewing a select number of women, $20 – considered a large amount of money in prison – could place incarcerated women at potential risk. On the other hand, it was suggested that $20 may not provide enough incentive for some paroled women who may be busy working, taking care of their children, fulfilling parole requirements, etc. As a result, incarcerated women were paid $10 and paroled women $30. This proved to be a wise strategy, as a number of incarcerated women in the study informed me that they were willing to talk to me for free; however, every respondent was paid for their participation. In addition, a few paroled women either took time off work or were willing to take some time off to take part in the study.

[10] In order to protect the privacy of the respondents, I did not record any identifying information on the interview guide except for a number that was placed on the top left corner of the interview guide. This number and the respondent's name were logged in order to keep track of the completed interviews. However, in order to ensure strict confidentiality and to avoid having any information subpoenaed, the identifying information was logged by a family member who resides out of the country. In addition, pseudonyms were used for all of the women's names as well as the names of people to whom they referred. Also, I took several steps to provide women with information about available services. At the conclusion of the interview, I provided respondents with a detailed description of community agencies that provide intervention and assistance in housing, employment and job training, drug treatment, domestic violence, parenting, HIV/AIDS, abuse situations, and other reentry services for women.

(Maruna, 2001: 26). Research on desistance has used various operational approaches, each containing strengths and weaknesses. Some scholars rely on official criminal records to measure desistance through changes in arrest, conviction, and incarceration over time (Le Blanc and Loeber, 1998; Visher et al., 1991). Although frequently used by researchers, the limitation of using official data are that they may not be an accurate measure of crime but rather a reflection of policies and practices of law enforcement agencies, police biases, and reporting errors. Survey methodology is another common measurement approach to examine self-reported crime (Massoglia, 2006; Warr, 1998). Self-report surveys are largely used when studying large populations, making it high in generalizability and reliability; however, survey methodology has the weakness of being somewhat artificial, which limits the validity of findings. Other scholars use narratives or interviews to measure desistance (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Baskin and Sommers, 1998), which offers rich detail about the process of desistance as it is experienced from the perspective of the research participants. The use of narratives or interviews provides individuals with the opportunity to discuss their own perceptions of the movement away from crime in their own words; yet, since most qualitative studies have small samples, findings are not generalizable beyond the interview sample.

To overcome the limitations of each operational approach, for the purpose of this study, desistance was examined using official and subjective measurement approaches. Desistance from crime was first measured as not returning to prison as a result of committing a new offense or technical violation throughout a period of two to three years following release from prison. This specific definition was operationalized only during

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the sample selection stage of my research. That is, the selection of a group of women who had not been reincarcerated following a two to three year period with a comparative group who had gone back into custody during the time period. The two to three year cut-off was employed because long-term follow-up studies suggest that approximately two-thirds of offenders recidivate within three years of their release from prison (Deschenes et al., 2007; Langin and Levin, 2002). Once the total sample was selected, I departed from any reliance on official measures to characterize desistance.

The second criterion for inclusion in the desisting sample was subjective. Respondents had to self-report that they had not committed any crimes since their last release from prison. Essentially, it was left up to the women to determine if they were "going straight" – i.e., maintaining desistance.[11] When women met the first two criteria, I included one additional criterion: to be included in the desistance sample, women had to have been arrested at least three times at the time of their last incarceration.[12] I included this last point because I was interested in women who desisted after having had a history of offending. Overall, 15 respondents reported over two to three years of crime-free behavior after multiple previous offenses.

Recidivism is defined as "the reversion of an individual to criminal behavior after he or she has been convicted of a prior offense, sentenced, and (presumably) corrected" (Maltz, 1984: 1). Researchers, however, have used several operational approaches of recidivism. These measures include the commission of a new arrest, a return to prison, violating probation and parole conditions, or time until an offender is rearrested,

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[11] Of the 24 women who were on parole, five reported having committed crimes; thus, they were not included in the desistance sample.
[12] Four women were arrested less than three times at the time of their last incarceration. All four of these women were arrested and incarcerated one time; thus, they were not included in the desistance sample.

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reconvicted, or has their parole/probation revoked (Kruttschnitt et al., 2000; Schwaner, 1998; Jones and Sims, 1997; DeJong, 1997; Hepburn and Albonetti, 1994; Stewart et al., 1992). As with desistance measures, the limitation with measuring recidivism using official records is that the data are based on crimes that come to the attention of the police and that lead to arrest, conviction, or imprisonment. Since many crimes are unreported and do not result in criminal sanctioning, recidivism data are largely incomplete.

In this project, recidivism was first measured as returning to prison as a result of committing a new offense, a law violation, or technical violation throughout a period of two to three years following release from prison. Second, following Maruna's (2001) approach, respondents were included in the recidivism sample if they self-reported involvement in criminal activity since their last release from prison.[13] If women were reincarcerated for committing a technical violation but claimed not to have committed any crimes, then they were not included in the sample.[14] Finally, since I was interested in women who had a pattern of reoffending, respondents had to have been arrested three or more times at the time of their incarceration. A total of 22 women were included in the recidivism sample.

There are several strengths to my sampling approach. First, a comparative research design was incorporated in the study. Attempts were made to match two groups of female offenders: those released on parole who were successful in avoiding revocation during their first two years post-incarceration, and those released during the same time

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[13] There were five women on parole who admitted to having committed crimes; however, they were not included in the recidivism sample because they did not return to prison.

[14] Four incarcerated women returned to prison for having committed a technical violation but they maintained that they had not committed any crimes since their last release from prison. As a result, they were not included in the recidivism sample.

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frame who recidivated and were reincarcerated. The comparative sample was matched on race, age, marital status, offense type, and incarceration history. This careful sampling strategy sets the study apart from most qualitative research, which often relies on convenience or snowball sampling techniques. Second, the multi-method research strategy provides a means to triangulate the qualitative data, further increasing confidence in both the validity and reliability of the analyses (Marshall and Rossman, 1989).

There are, however, limitations to my sampling. This project used a targeted, purposive sampling technique in an effort to identify women ex-offenders in the process of desistance as compared with incarcerated women recidivists. As such, the two samples that were identified for this study are not representative of all women offenders and ex-offenders. Because the sampling strategy is purposive in nature, the findings for this project are not suitable for making broad generalizations about the distribution of recidivism and desistance in some population. Despite this limitation, it has the advantage of a comparative sample that addresses the diverse issues facing former and current incarcerated women. Overall, the in-depth focus of the study provides insight into women's experiences of offending, reentry, recidivism, and desistance.

Data Collection

Data collection began by obtaining official sentencing records for the women in my sample. The Missouri Department of Corrections provided me with access to the women's criminal records, which I used to provide a reliability check on information obtained during the interviews, as well as to provide further statistical information to contextualize the qualitative component of the research. I was provided with demographic information about incarcerated and paroled women in my study, including

their name, race, age, marital status, and the sentence county. The Missouri Department of Corrections also gave me information regarding women's criminal histories, including the offense that led to women's last incarceration, the date they were admitted into prison, the length of their prison sentence, the date they were last released from prison, and the supervision district where paroled women had to report to their local parole officer. I also received additional information about the incarcerated sample, including the reasons for their parole revocation, and the date of their first release from prison and their first prison return.

Interview Guide

The survey and interview guide were a modified version of the instruments used in Leverentz's (2006), Maidment's (2006), O'Brien's (2001), and Maruna's (2001) studies. However, I added some questions to provide information on women's involvement in criminal activity with peers or intimate partners. I also included questions about women's prior and current relationships with their children and the impact women's incarceration had on their children. Before finalizing the survey and interview guide, I pre-tested the draft instrument with two formerly incarcerated women to observe the time it took to complete and to identify questions that they thought might cause discomfort. Pre-testing the instrument proved to be invaluable in targeting central areas of the research that the women identified as important, which contributed to a broader understanding of the overall lives of former and current female offenders.

Survey Interview

Each interview began with the completion of an extensive survey instrument. I read each question to the respondents and filled out their responses. The instrument

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collected general demographic and descriptive information, including a range of questions about women's physical and mental health status, their victimization histories (personal victimization, own perpetration of abuse, and witnessing others' abuse), their involvement in crime, their substance addictions, as well as treatment, residential, and custodial experiences (see Appendix A).[15] Women were asked about their familial and peer relationships, as well as their involvement in criminal activity. I also asked women questions about their most recent experience with the criminal justice system, the challenges they faced upon reentry to society, and the degree of satisfaction they had with the progress they made upon their last release from prison. In the survey, I focused on examining the impact of preincarceration, in-prison, and post-prison experiences on incarcerated and paroled women.

In-depth Interview

The survey provided baseline information for the data collected in the in-depth interviews, and I drew from women's survey responses to guide the conversation during the in-depth interview. All of the interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and were typically completed on the same day as the survey.[16] These interviews were the primary data I drew from for this project, to gain insight into women's understandings of their experiences relating to reentry, desistance or recidivism, situated in their accounts of

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[15] The attached survey instrument in Appendix A is for prisoners. While I use the same survey instrument for both incarcerated and paroled women, each of the questions are specifically targeted towards women based upon their status as a prisoner or parolee.

[16] On a couple of occasions, interviews for paroled women had to be continued on another day. For instance, if the interview began towards the end of Probation and Parole hours of operation, then there was not enough time to complete it and the interview had to be rescheduled. The in-depth interviews were approximately one to two hours in length. I completed the interviews of incarcerated women in three weeks. I went to the WERDCC three to four times a week and interviewed, on average, two to three women per day. In contrast, the paroled women were harder to reach so it took me three months to complete the interviews for this sample

the context and circumstances of their lives.[17] My objective in using in-depth interview techniques was to provide the women with wide latitude in describing their perceptions of the challenges they faced as they transitioned from prison to the community, allowing women's understanding of these issues to emerge inductively. In addition, the use of narratives provides a contextualized understanding to further gain insight as to the reasons for recidivism, as well as the process used to desist from crime.

The interview guide was semi-structured and contained open-ended questions that allowed for considerable probing (see Appendix B).[18] The women were first asked to describe their initial and subsequent participation in crime and contact with the police. I collected contextual information on these incidents, including what crimes were committed, why they were committed, and who was present. Also, when women reported being victims of crimes, they were asked to describe what happened, why and how it happened, their response to the victimization, as well as its consequences.

I then moved to questions about women's incarceration experiences.[19] They provided general information about a typical day in prison, the advantages and

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[17] While the primary source of data was verbatim transcriptions of recorded interviews, I kept a log that detailed observational notes from the interview sessions, recorded personal reflections as the study progressed, and documented conversations with participants between interviews.

[18] The attached interview guide in Appendix B is for prisoners. While I use the same interview guide for both incarcerated and paroled women, each of the questions are specifically targeted towards women based upon their status as a prisoner or parolee.

[19] Initially, I intended to compare the correctional experiences of both the incarcerated and parole sample. However, during the data analysis, I came to realize that while I questioned both samples about their incarceration experiences, I failed to ask the incarcerated women about their *last* experience in prison. Rather, I made the mistake of asking the incarcerated sample about their *current* incarceration experiences. Therefore, I was unable to examine how incarcerated women's prison experiences impacted their reentry experiences, meaning I was unable to compare the correctional experiences of both samples. While I cannot make comparisons, I do document, where appropriate, the incarceration experiences of paroled women.

disadvantages of imprisonment, and their involvement in correctional and prerelease programs. If women reported participating in prison programs, they were asked to discuss whether they found it helpful, why or why not, and ways to improve the program. I also asked women about the impact incarceration had on their own lives, and how imprisonment affected relationships with their families, friends, and romantic partners.

The interviews then shifted to a discussion of immediate and long-term reentry challenges after release from prison. Women were asked to discuss if and how they secured employment, found housing, reunited with family and children, recovered from substance abuse, and received external resources that aided their transition process. If women reported committing crimes while on parole, they were asked to describe these events, and to reflect on the reasons they engaged in criminal activities. Women were also asked to identify people or agencies that had a positive and/or negative effect on them, and their perceptions regarding their parole officer and the parole supervision process. I concluded the in-depth interview by asking women about their short and long-term goals, as well as their own accounts of what they needed to accomplish their goals. This basic guideline was followed for each interview; however, when additional issues arose in the course of the interview, I deviated from the guideline to pursue them.

When the formal interview was completed, I asked each of the respondents their thoughts about the interview. During this time, many of the women said that the interview with me was therapeutic and helpful.[20] Our conversations provided women

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[20] An excerpt in my log illustrates this: At the end of the interview, when I asked the respondent how the interview went, she replied that some of the questions I asked were strange but it actually helped her. During the interview, she informed me that all five of her immediate family members had died within three years while she was incarcerated. Although I noticed she grimaced and flinched when telling me this, I didn't realize how difficult it was for her until after the interview. She told me afterwards that when she was talking about the death of her family members she realized that she wasn't over their death. She

with an opportunity to think about their lives, reflect on where they had been, and consider what direction they wanted to go in. The in-depth interviews resulted in a rich contextual examination of the pathways women take into crime, the experiences offenders have in prison, the reintegration challenges they face post-release, the resources they use to successfully reintegrate into the community, the motivating factors for recidivism, and the process towards desistance. This interview technique provides a unique opportunity to examine not just the context and circumstances of events, but also their meanings for the individuals involved (see Weitzer, 1999, 2000; Anderson, 1990).

However, capturing detailed facets of women's social lives is not always simple. There are a number of reasons why former and current offenders may be guarded about discussing the nature of their experiences and activities, including attempts to avoid shame and embarrassment, guilt, or even incrimination. This is especially relevant given that throughout the course of the interview, participants are asked to disclose rather private information about themselves to me – someone they have never met before. With this in mind, I took great effort to build trust, familiarity, and rapport between myself and the study participants. Doing so is regarded as important in research such as this (Miller, 2008). One way I attempted to accomplish this goal was by beginning the interview with a survey, which began by asking basic innocuous questions (such as demographics and living arrangements), and then moving towards more sensitive questions about criminal activity and victimization. The use of a survey instrument aided in the process of building rapport with the participants because by the time the in-depth interview began,

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thought that she had gotten over their deaths but she admitted that she was "breaking down inside." However this comment was quickly followed by her proclamation that the interview was helpful since it brought her to this realization.

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some level of familiarity had already been established. I also attempted to build trust between the study participants and myself by informing women that I wanted to learn from them. This can provide women with a sense of empowerment in the research process as it allows them the opportunity to be heard and have their perspectives taken seriously. This is something that may not always be available to former and current offenders.[21]

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed inductively for patterns regarding how participants in each group interpreted and defined their lives. This was achieved using modified grounded theory method techniques including the search for and explication of deviant cases (Strauss, 1987).[22] The data were manually coded, which allowed for a greater degree of interaction and familiarity than software programs often provide. This approach facilitated the development of key concepts and themes that emerged throughout the research process.

The analysis began with open coding, which involved searching the data for emerging concepts and repeating ideas (Strauss, 1987). Consistent with existing research (see Miller, 2008; Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; Strauss, 1987; Lofland and Lofland, 1984; and Miles and Huberman, 1984), once concepts were identified, the data were

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[21] An excerpt in my log provides an example of incarcerated women not having the opportunity to speak about their lives in such a manner: During the course of my interview with one of the incarcerated respondents, the women at the WERDCC had to be counted again because someone had left a cell door open. When the respondent left to head back to her room, one of the case managers asked me, "are your ears ready to fall off from all that yapping she did?" I said, "no, I enjoy listening to her." She replied, "well, I wouldn't because she just gets on my nerves. All that yapping, she doesn't even take a breath." I replied again that "I enjoy talking and listening to her." This account illustrates that even though incarcerated women have case managers, they are not always inclined to listen to women offenders speak about their own life experiences.

[22] Although I used grounded theory methodology I did not strictly follow this approach, which requires more theoretical sampling rather than purposive sampling techniques.

separated into merged files that included the following: processes into drug activity, processes into criminal activity, incarceration experiences, reentry challenges and barriers, factors leading to reintegration success and failures, reasons for recidivating, motivators for desistance, and methods for taking pathways out of crime. In each file, the narrative accounts that were related to multiple categories were duplicated. To facilitate the comparative analysis, separate files for each category were created for both former and current female offenders. I inspected each dataset for thematic patterns, while noting similarities and differences that emerged. Each file was analyzed intensely in search for new emerging concepts and relationships. For each main category, I conducted my initial analysis of incarcerated and paroled women's accounts separately. Afterwards, systematic comparisons were made to search for overlapping and distinct themes between the two sample groups.

I completed the analysis by refining the basic themes, probing the relationships between women's descriptions and their explanations, and making theoretical sense of these relationships. In checking for the validity of the analysis, I ensured that the concepts and illustrations typified common repetitive patterns in women's accounts while paying attention to deviant cases and patterns.[23] Although findings are not generalizable, the study provides important insight into women's understanding of the life events, experiences, barriers, and resources that have contributed to their onset and maintenance of criminal activity, and desistance from offending.

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[23] Throughout the chapters, I use the words "the vast majority" to indicate approximately three-quarters or more; "most" or "the majority" to indicate more than one-half; "many" to indicate more than one-third; "a number" to indicate approximately one-quarter or more; and "several" or "a few" to highlight themes mentioned by a small number of women but more than two.

CHAPTER THREE – WOMEN'S PATHWAYS TO CRIME

The main focus of this dissertation is to examine the experiences of women coming out of prison. Yet, prior to discussing women's reentry experiences, it is essential to understand their initiation into crime as women's past experiences can shape their transition out of crime. Researchers have documented gendered pathways to crime and imprisonment (Belknap, 2007; Bloom et al., 2003; Daly, 1998; Owen, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Daly and Chesney-Lind, 1988). The distinct differences between the lives of women and men shape their patterns of criminal offending. Empirical evidence indicates that victimization, economic marginalization, and substance abuse disproportionately affect women and play unique roles in shaping female criminality (Daly, 1998; Owen, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Belknap, 1996;).

One of the most salient tenets of feminist criminology is the association, or blurred boundaries, between women's victimization and offending. Research indicates that child abuse is tied directly to subsequent delinquency, addiction, and criminality (Belknap and Holsinger, 1998; Richie, 1996; Daly, 1992; Gilfus, 1992; Arnold, 1990). Most female offenders have prior histories of physical and sexual abuse, and rates of adult intimate partner abuse are much higher than for women in the general population or for men in prison (Chesney-Lind, 2002; O'Brien, 2001; Greenfeld and Snell, 1999). Not only is victimization more common among female offenders, but abuse has also been found to start earlier and last longer (Chesney-Lind, 1989); thus, further contributing to subsequent offending (Daly, 1998; Owen and Bloom, 1995).

Although victimization may be an important component of women's pathway to crime, it is not the only factor that accounts for female criminality. Economic

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marginalization plays a role in shaping women's initiation and persistence in crime (Holtfreter et al., 2004). Daly's (1992) pathway-to-crime framework identifies several routes to various forms of crime;[24] however, most of the paths specify poor economic status as a vital characteristic. Other scholars have established that a disproportionate number of women offenders are minorities who come from economically distressed neighborhoods (Richie, 2001; Owen and Bloom, 1995), which typically provide little opportunities for employment (Daly, 1994). Thus, the structural conditions that women reside in coupled with increasing economic pressure drives many women to engage in illegitimate activities to survive. Not surprising, the worsening economic situation – or the "feminization of poverty" – of marginalized women is related to increased rates of women's offending (Heimer, 2000; Steffensmeier, 1993).

Substance use is also critical for understanding women's pathways to crime. Research indicates that women who use drugs are much more likely to be involved in crime (Merlo and Pollock, 1995; Arnold, 1990). Women in state prison report high levels of drug use at the time of incarceration (Greenfeld and Snell, 1999), and the vast majority have substance abuse problems (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1997). Many feminist scholars assert that women use drugs to cope with the pain of abuse (Daly, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 1997). However, some argue that women who reside in socially disorganized neighborhoods, face deficient levels of human capital (i.e. adequate

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[24] Daly's multi-dimensional framework includes the following pathways: *Street women* consist of females who fled abusive homes, became addicts, and used criminal means to survive on the streets. *Drug-connected women* include those involved in using, manufacturing, and/or distributing drugs in the context of an intimate partner relationship or family-based arrangement. *Harm and harming women* include females who were subject to child abuse in the home and resorted to violence by the time they reached adolescence. *Battered women* consist of those females in domestic violent relationships who resorted to violence in an attempt to fend off abusive men with which they were (or had been) in relationships. The final pathway, which Daly labels *other*, consists of women who commit crimes because of their desire for money.

education), and lack employment opportunities are more susceptible to participating in

the drug world (Daly, 1994). Once addicted, women are less likely to engage in

legitimate enterprises and more likely to participate in illegal activities to make money to

purchase drugs.

As the above evidence has shown, several factors shape women's choices and

behaviors. There are clearly multiple pathways to distinct forms of criminality, which

can ultimately impact the desistance process. In this chapter, I turn attention to 50 former

and current female offenders' accounts of their own entry to drug and criminal activity.

In analyzing the data, I discovered distinct patterns as they relate to women's pathways to

drug involvement and non-drug related crimes. These pathways will be discussed

separately.

The women in the sample cited various influences on their initiation to illicit drug

activity. A number of women reported that their exposure to narcotic substances by their

family led to their involvement with drugs. Most stated that their desire for approval and

acceptance by their peers and male intimate partner also influenced their decision. And

some used drugs as a way to cope with negative life events.

Unlike the pathway to drug involvement, the route to non-drug related crimes

were tied directly to economics for these women. A drug-crime connection was evident

in many women's accounts, particularly those who engaged in criminal activity for the

sole purpose of obtaining money to support their drug habit. A few women reported

committing crimes to support themselves and their children. Finally, a number of

females in the study admitted to partaking in crime because they simply desired money.

In this chapter, I explore some of these pathways into offending, as understanding these

routes may offer insight into the unique challenges that women face in the process of desistance.

Pathways into Drug Activity

Exposure to Drugs by Family Members

Families exert a significant amount of influence on the behavior of their members, and this is especially true for women and girls. Specifically, 88 percent of incarcerated and 79 percent of paroled women in the study reported using drugs in their lifetime. Of the women who used drugs, 74 percent of incarcerated women and 79 percent of paroled women had at least one member of their family who was drug addicted, indicating that women are more likely to use narcotic substances when members of their own family abuse drugs.

A number of incarcerated (23 percent) and paroled (25 percent) women in the study stated that their initiation into the drug world began as a result of their exposure to illicit substances by their family during adolescence. This pattern was more common among Blacks, as two-thirds of African American women and one-third of white women reported having been exposed to drugs by their family members.[25] When asked why she started using drugs, Cara, a 31-year-old white incarcerated woman who witnessed her parents and siblings use drugs daily as a child, said: "I guess I was curious. I mean, like, when I started smoking marijuana at 12, it's 'cause I was curious. There always be roaches in the ashtrays, you know, 'cause my parents smoked weed….they smoked weed

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[25] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.825$, chi-square $= 0.049$). Because this is not a random sample, my use of significance tests is solely to demonstrate the strength of the pattern rather than make any claims about the generalizability of my findings.

in the house." And Tawanna, a 39-year-old Black woman who was doing prison time, admitted to viewing a great deal of drug activity as she was growing up:

> My parents never dealt in drugs but I had uncles, cousins. My mom's house was like a party house….It seems that's where everybody hung out at. We was the "kick it" house. I seen a lot of things go on as a child comin' up. My uncle, my mom's only brother, he used to talk to me a lot about different things. Show me a lot of different things. Not to say that he showed me how to sell drugs but I seen a lot of drugs and different things like that.

While Tawanna stated that her parents were never involved in illicit drug activity, her statement "but I had uncles [and] cousins [that were]" infers that her relatives did participate in drug-related offenses. The home that Tawanna grew up in was considered "the party house" where she witnessed quite a bit of drug activity as a child. Yet, even though she expressed that her uncle did not show her how to distribute drugs, her comments suggest that she still observed his involvement with illicit substances.

Yet some women not only witnessed their family members' involvement with illicit drugs, but several cited that their family provided them with alcohol or drugs. Lisa, an incarcerated African American woman in her thirties, admitted that her first encounter with alcohol began as a young girl. She said, "the first time I drunk alcohol…my father gave it to me when I was a little girl. My father gave me a beer and [I] got drunk off that and then I didn't drink no more until I was 13."   Once she became a teen, she started smoking crack with her uncle:

> My uncle, my uncle was like a man that I looked up to. And also he was kinda like a guy I use to snort cocaine with too. That's how I started smokin' crack actually was with my uncle. 'Cause I was 'bout 13 going on 14 and I was in my grandma's house. He was staying there at the time with my grandma as well. And he was like my advocate to get me out the house. He was my excuse.

Jackie, a 38-year-old Black woman on parole, explained in explicit detail how her stepfather encouraged her to sell crack cocaine as a teenager:

> When I got 17, I got introduced to crack. My mother's husband was a Vietnam veteran, and I started off in the beginning – he was trying to educate me on why people was always comin' in our neighborhood buyin' drugs….I asked him, I said, "well, Arthur, why have they got all that traffic comin' in and out like that?" He said, "they sellin' crack." So he said, "I tell you what. I'm gonna buy some, and I'ma invest in some, but I'm gonna have you to sell it for me." And I said, "why you want me to sell it?" He wanted me to sell it because I don't smoke. He smoked, and if he tried to sell it hisself, he wouldn't make no money because he would smoke it all up….So I sold it. I made like $2,000 in like 40 minutes.

But not only did Jackie's stepfather show her how to distribute illicit drugs, he also got her "hooked" on crack:

> So after I made him $2000, all for selling it, he introduced me to it on the glass bowl. And then the $2000 that I had made for him, we smoked that up….He put it on a glass, a glass bowl, and I guess, and he said, "I'm gonna show you how this cloud." This cloud, just this big old glass bowl had a little tool stuck down in the side of it. And he put his dope on there, and it clouded up, and he said, "now hit this." And when I hit it, I just lost all sense, direction and everything. And I was smokin' crack. And I just couldn't – all that day, I just wanted more and more and more and more to the point where I took my mother's money out of the house and from that day on, I was smokin' crack.

In Jackie's case, her drug-addicted stepfather encouraged her to sell crack. After Jackie made a large sum of money within a short span of time, her stepfather "turned" her out on crack and she became an addict.

For some women, their siblings and relatives initiated their process into drug activity prior to or during adolescence. At the age of 10, Jane, a 46-year-old white woman in prison, explained how inadequate parental supervision led her to experiment with drugs with her siblings: "My brothers use to smoke marijuana and my second oldest brother was more or less taking care of me while my mom worked because she was

always gone all day working…[so] I smoked weed with my brother." As her brother's addiction escalated so did Jane's. She said that "they started taking pills and then I started taking pills. And one thing led to another and more drugs, more pills, more marijuana." As a result of her drug use, Jane said, "my mom had put me out [of the house] when I was 12…because I was smoking weed and she didn't want that in her house."

Keisha, a 32-year-old African American woman in prison, also explained having used drugs at the age of 16: "First drug I really used was smoking a joint, probably, marijuana….I have cousins that were older, and they had their own apartment. And I was hanging out with them, and they were smoking it, and I just decided to try and smoke it." And 44-year-old Alissa, a Black woman on parole, detailed how her aunt's involvement in drugs led her to get high at 16 years of age:

> [M]y aunt was already selling marijuana [and] my cousin was smoking marijuana, which is my aunt's only son. So they smoked weed together. Our mother would let us go over there every other weekend. One particular weekend my sister and I went over to my aunt's house. My aunt and my cousin was smoking marijuana… this particular weekend [and] my aunt came to me and my sister and she asked both of us, "would you all like to try this weed?" My sister said, "no" [and] I say, "yeah." They showed me how to smoke it, how to inhale it, and this and that. When I finally came back to my senses I was looking in the mirror at myself and smiling at myself. I guess then, in a roundabout way, I was probably telling myself that this was something that I'm going to be doing from now on because I liked the feeling.

Alissa's aunt also introduced her to harder drugs, such as speed and PCP. She continued:

> [M]e and Bonnie [my friend] went over to my aunt's house. Now she smoking on this glass pipe. She had some 151 rum, she had a hanger, she had cotton ball on the end of the hanger, she was dipping it in this rum. She lighted up this glass pipe and I see all this smoke in here. I'm already curious anyway. I already got a little taste of the drug life so I didn't know it was going to lead me down a destructive path like it did. But anyway

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> I'm already a curious person….First thing she said like she has always done, "would you like to try this?" Of course, me [I said] "yeah."

While these accounts reveal how the negative influences of loved ones shaped women's pathways into drug activity, the impact of drug-involved family members on women was not just relegated to their adolescent years. Women in this group discussed how their family members' substance use impacted their decision to sample drugs even as adults. At the age of 25, Tamara, a young Black woman on parole, stated, "[m]y brother taught me how to smoke weed *(laughs)*. My brother, he smoked weed all the time. He was smoking when he was young, young. I was like, 'what do that do?' He was like, 'light it.' So I lit the joint." And when 55-year-old Christina, a white woman in prison, was in her mid-twenties, she professed, "I went to visit my brothers and they were getting high….Next thing I know [they asked me] 'do you wanna get high?'" Christina decided to get high and she soon became an addict. Likewise, Alisha, an older African American female on parole, described her first encounter with crack cocaine when she was in her forties:

> My oldest sister introduced it to me and that's how I started using. But it was fun….She asked me to go get it for her and I didn't know what it was. She called another member of my family and they brought it to her. When they brought it to her she showed it to me and we smoked some together.

For many of the women with whom I spoke, the presence of drugs in the home led to pathways to substance use during adolescence. But for some, the use of illegal drugs among family members initiated their pathways into substance use even as an adult. Clearly, drug involvement among family can shape the participation in drug activity for other members (Owens and Straus, 1975). Further, as we will now see, peer networks also impacted the decision to use drugs among the women in my sample.

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Seeking Approval from Peers and Boyfriends

During adolescence, the risk for offending is high, particularly because of the stress of peer pressure and puberty. The majority of incarcerated (54 percent) and paroled (54 percent) discussed that their association with deviant peers influenced their entry into drug activity as youths. This pattern was more common among African American women, as two-thirds of Black women and one-third of white women reported that the desire to fit in with friends served as a motivating factor as to why they experimented with drugs when they were younger.[26] This was particularly the case during the early stages of adolescence, that is, between the ages of 11 and 15. Stacey, a white incarcerated woman in her late thirties, alleged that she smoked pot when she became a teen because she "was just following the crowd." And 37-year-old Janelle, an African American woman on parole, professed to having used marijuana at 15 because "I wanted to be a part of a group. I wanted to be a part of somebody." Likewise, 44-year-old Gloria, a Black paroled female, said that her reason for experimenting with drugs as a pre-teen was "to fit in." Sandy, a white paroled woman in her thirties, explained why she smoked marijuana:

> [My friends] were all using. That's the only thing that was going on at that time. Can't really say how often I did it 'cause it was as less as possible. Just when I felt I was like that outsider. I felt that. They didn't make me. They didn't do nothing to make me feel that way but, you know, just so that I would fit in I did it.

Although Sandy reported that her friends did not make her use drugs, the fact that all her friends were drug-involved prompted her to use in order to avoid being the "outsider." For several women, including Sandy, their friends did not necessarily force them to use

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[26] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.961, chi-square = 0.002).

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drugs. But even in the absence of direct "peer pressure," many felt compelled to experiment with drugs in order to be accepted by their friends. For instance, in response to why she smoked marijuana at 12, Bridget, a 26-year-old white woman on parole, replied, "I was with friends...[and] I just wanted to try it." By the time she was 16 years, Bridget admitted that her drug use escalated to meth because "[e]veryone else had been doing it." Likewise, Jackie, a Black paroled woman in her late thirties said she experimented with PCP as a teenager because "everyone was doin'it." And Kenisha, a Black paroled female in her twenties, admitted to using drugs at the age of 13 because "that's what everybody else was doing."

The urge to fit in, however, was also common among women in late adolescence and in their twenties. In response to why she used marijuana between the ages of 16 and 17, LaToya, a Black woman in her thirties who was on parole supervision, said, "[to] keep up with my age group. That's what they were doing, so I did it." And Brianna, an African American paroled female in her mid-thirties, also affirmed, "I think it was just the thing to do. All my peers smoked weed in high school. I just was doing it just to be doing it, not thinking that something would actually be wrong." Similarly, 46-year-old Felicia who was serving time in prison contended, "I was just sampling, being with the in-crowd, wanted to fit in." Jamilla, a 32-year-old Black incarcerated female, explained her first encounter with crack cocaine at 17 years of age:

> Yeah, I was with a couple of my friends and I was staying in – we was all at a hotel, and I seen him bringing out this little white glass thing, he was putting stuff in it. And then I seen him put some drugs inside of it and smoking it, and I was, like, "yeah, what are y'all doing and what is that?" And they was, like, "this is a pipe, this is how we smoke our crack." So they just, like, I said "doesn't that mess y'all up?" And they was, like, "no, it don't hurt us." So I asked them if I can try it to see what would it

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do….Everybody else was doing it, and I just felt I was left out. So I said, "let me in on the game," you know, to fit in.

In response to why she started using drugs, Whitney, a white imprisoned woman in her forties, replied, "I think I started using drugs to [do] typically teenager stuff, experimenting and going with the gang." And 46-year-old Cherise, a Black incarcerated woman who used drugs when she was 16, declared that "back in the 60's, everybody smoked weed. So weed was just one of those things….Everybody passin' the joint. All your friends smokin', you know." And 30-year-old Kristy, a white imprisoned woman who used drugs at 14 years of age, proclaimed, "I had my friends, and they had a joint. By that time, I was like, 'yeah, let's do it.'" All of these accounts demonstrate the significant influence peers had on current and former female offenders, particularly during adolescence. Seeking acceptance among peers prompted many women to dabble with drugs, even though they were not directly "pressured" to use. The mere fact that their friends were drug-connected drove many women to try it themselves so that they would not be the odd one out. But while most women did not report being forced by their friends to actually engage in illegal drug activity, some women were coerced. The following dialogue with Lyn, a Black woman in her early thirties who is serving time in prison, detailed the purest form of peer pressure to use drugs:

Interviewer: Why did you start using drugs at age 17?

Lyn: Because everybody else was doin' it. And I wanted to be hip and wanted people to like me so I just started doin' it.

Interviewer: Were your friends using it?

Lyn: Um hmm (yes).

Interviewer: Did they pressure you?

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Lyn: Yeah.

Interviewer: And how did they pressure you?

Lyn: Like I'm a follower. Well back then, I was a follower then. Really didn't nobody really like me and I just wanted to be liked and do what everybody was doin' so I just started thinking I could smoke this. I just started.

Interviewer: Okay, can you describe the first incident in which you first started using drugs?

Lyn: Which one? The weed or the crack?

Interviewer: The weed at 17.

Lyn: Well, I had went to a party that everybody was in there smokin' except me. And they was like, "here, smoke this," and I'm like, "no" because I was pregnant at the time. And they was like, "it ain't gon' do nothing, [it] ain't nothin' to trip off of, it ain't gon' do it. Do it. Just try. Try." And I tried. And I just started smokin' weed.

During adolescence, youths typically move from having close attachment to their family to having personal attachment to peers. At this stage of the life-course, peer networks have the ability to greatly influence the behavior of one another and are central to our understanding of offending (Giordano and Rockwell, 2000; Warr, 1998). For most women in the study, peer relationships were strongly implicated in women's initiation into drug use (Matsueda and Heimer, 1987). A substantial body of literature reveals that the more delinquent peers one has the more likely one is to become delinquent (Agnew, 1991; Warr and Stafford, 1991). Even some former offenders believe this because according to 44-year-old Chantelle: "When you hang around those type of person you bound to be doin' it if you wit' them….Eventually it will tear off into you." While experimenting and socially using drugs is common among youths, the increasing engulfment of drugs propelled many women to become drug addicts (Baskin and Sommers, 1998).

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Despite the strong influence of peer networks, seeking acceptance among friends was not the only motivating factor that led women towards the path of substance use. Although not a frequent occurrence, approximately 15 percent of the incarcerated sample and eight percent of paroled women reported having tried drugs because of their association with drug-involved males. This pattern was reported slightly more among Blacks rather than whites, as two-thirds of Black woman and one-third of white woman discussed using drugs because of their association with males.[27] For example, asked to explain the first time she used drugs, Whitney, a white 42-year-old incarcerated woman, said, "I was probably about 16 or 17. I lived in England and we were with a couple of guys. It was my sister and I, my younger sister. And the guys had a joint so we all smoked it and I remember liking it." Jessica, a young white woman in her mid-twenties who was on parole, stated she used crack in her early twenties because "it was in my face." When asked who had it in her face, she responded: "A guy that I was pretty much staying with. During that time he said he got money back from a car accident. I stayed there for like three or four days probably." And Felicia, a Black 46-year-old imprisoned woman, admitted to smoking crack in her thirties because "the guy I was going with introduced me to it and I thought that was the thing to do because I thought I was in love."

A few women declared that their boyfriend at the time specifically pressured them to use narcotic substances. For instance, in response to why she dabbled with ecstasy, 26-year-old Shauna, an African American incarcerated female, maintained, "I was with a boyfriend of mine. He was, like, 'I got this pill.' He was, like, 'try it,' and that's how I

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[27] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.885, chi-square = 0.021).

started. I tried it." Janelle, a Black 37-year-old woman on parole, described her first encounter with crack cocaine: "When I first started using crack, I did it in a primo [marijuana mixed with crack] so I had to be like 18….And I met this married guy and he was using crack and he wanted me to do it and I'm like, 'no.' And so he wanted me to use the pipe and I said, 'no.' [But] I did it with the weed – the marijuana, and the crack together." The following dialogue with Toyin, a 24-year-old incarcerated Black female, detailed her first encounter with heroin:

Toyin: I was introduced to heroin and crack by an ex-boyfriend, and he did it and offered it to me, the heroin, and I started it. Out of curiosity, I wanted to see how the crack [was] so I did that also.

Interviewer: Was it because your boyfriend was using it at the time?

Toyin: Um hmm (yes).

Interviewer: Did he ever pressure you to use?

Toyin: Yeah, him and my cousins pressured me to use. They was, like, "try it." And I think it was because I had a job – I had a full-time job and I had money every day, and so they figured if I got a heroin habit I'll continue my habit. I'll continue to have it, so they'll always have it, so – yeah, they pressured me into doing it.

In Toyin's account she described how both her boyfriend and her cousin coerced her to use heroin. Although not certain, Toyin suspected that their intent was to get her addicted so that she would supply them all with drugs. While such findings are not the most common pattern in the current study, they are consistent with prior research establishing that women are pulled into criminal activity by men in their lives (Mullins and Wright, 2003; Gilfus, 1992). Overall, the centrality of relational concerns among women shaped some of their onset of offending.

Drugs as a Coping Mechanism

Though their initial drug use was attributed to the desire for acceptance, a number of women in the study turned to drugs as a way of dealing with negative life events. A traumatic life experience that many women in the study encountered was childhood abuse. In particular, nearly two-thirds of incarcerated women and one-quarter of paroled women were victims as a child. Of those who were abused, 86 percent reported being the victim of sexual assault and 36 percent of physical assault. Consequently, many used drugs as a coping mechanism to ease the physical and psychological pain of abuse, often perpetrated by family members. This pattern was more common among the sample of women in prison – 35 percent of incarcerated women and 8 percent of paroled women reported using drugs to cope.[28] This pattern was more common among Black women, as 60 percent of African American and 40 percent of white women reported this as a reason for using drugs.[29] Betty, an incarcerated white 46-year-old woman, explained that her drug addiction, which began at nine years of age, stemmed from having been sexually molested multiple times by her stepfather from the age of six to fourteen years:

> I was nine trying to sleep through the night seeing as how my stepdad –
> my mom was sick a lot. She was gone a lot so it was me. I was a mother to
> my brothers and sisters. I was taking care of a household. I was going to
> school. And I was also the one that my stepdad turned to every night. In
> order to sleep through the rapes, I turned to the neighborhood thugs to help
> me get something to go sleep. I didn't want to wake up so that was my
> escape. I didn't know at nine years old that you can become an addict.

And Lisa, an incarcerated Black woman in her early thirties, declared that she started smoking crack when she was 13 years because she "suffered from a lot of low self-esteem." When asked why she had low self-esteem as a kid, she declared, "[a]t the

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[28] Using chi-square analysis, incarceration and parole status achieved statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.048, chi-square = 3.926).
[29] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.768, chi-square = 0.087).

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time I was going through so much. Not only was I – my parents died when I was younger....I had to be raised in a very emotional abusive home with my grandparents…[and] my uncle [was] coming in tryin' to to [have sex] with me." Lisa recounted an incident in which she was sexually assaulted by her uncle, who was also living with her grandparents:

> 'Cause I was 'bout 13 going on 14 and I was in my grandma's house. [My uncle] was staying there at the time with my grandma as well….But the encounter was when he took me on a dirt road and told me he wanted to have sex with me. And I was like, "no," and he got out the truck, made me get out the truck. Put me on the back of the truck and slapped me [and] made me have sex with him.

In response, Lisa ran away from her grandmother's house numerous times to escape from the abuse:

> I was so out of control and started running away from home 'cause all this stuff was going on there. And I didn't want to be there. And my grandma lost custody of me and they was like she's too old. Because I didn't want to like tell nobody because I was like so scared about my uncle. I was so scared and they ended putting me in his custody. Ended up putting me in his custody.

Running away was a resistance strategy that Lisa employed to avoid abuse at home. Research indicates that girls like Lisa, who come from violent homes, are more likely to be charged with status offenses like substance abuse and running away (Widom, 1995; Chesney-Lind and Sheldon, 1992). Because girls have few available options for escape from physical and sexual violence (Gilfus, 1992), running away provides an opportunity for young abused females to have some form of control over their lives (DeHart, 2005). Because of the accumulation of assault that she experienced as a child, Lisa declared, "I saw acceptance out into the world where people did drugs and where it was drinking….When I used drugs that kinda like made me feel better about myself." A

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number of studies have demonstrated that childhood victimization is an important factor that facilitates women's involvement in delinquency and adult criminality (Bloom et al., 2003; Belknap, 2001; Arnold, 1990). Just as Lisa experienced, the chain of events leading to criminalization often begins with "child physical and sexual abuse, which produces a vicious cycle that include running away, institutionalization, return to [the] dysfunctional family unit, running away, and ultimately street deviance," such as prostitution and drug use (Baskin and Sommers, 1998: 69).

Janelle, an African American woman in her thirties who was on parole, also detailed a similar life experience that entailed a childhood filled with physical, sexual, and verbal abuse. When asked why she resorted to drugs, Janelle replied, "[t]he neglection that I was feeling, I felt like I was alone and didn't nobody listen to me. I felt like didn't no one love me. So I was trying to cover up the abuse." In the following account, Janelle described the abuse she encountered from her parents:

> When I was growing up, my father was a drinker, very controlling and abusive not only to me but to my mom. And my sister can do anything, he always beat me, telling me I'm never going to be nothing, I'm just gon' be a no life Black woman with a house full of babies on welfare. Calling me out my name….And when he whup me – I remember this one incident where he held me up by one leg and he beat me until my uncles came and got him off of me. He just was beating me. And my mom, she verbally abused me [as] far as calling me out my name, every name but the name that was on my birth certificate. And I was like – you know the story of Cinderella? I was that little girl. The only difference was they weren't my step parents, they were my biological parents.

Janelle continued to explain having been sexually molested by her uncle, her cousins, and a pastor:

> With my uncle, when it first started, I was eight years old.…My uncle, he took my virginity from me. It was like after my uncle did what he did, it was like my cousins and 'em, they start. And I was threatened because my father had already said that I wasn't his child so he felt that I wasn't

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> related to them and he felt they wasn't doing anything wrong….Then after my cousins and my uncle, I had met the next door neighbor. He's a pastor and I use to go over there and clean up, you know, stuff for him and then he started.

Janelle was victimized in multiple ways by a series of people who were close to her. When she did inform her parents of the abuse, they refused to believe her and the assaults continued. Janelle grew up in an environment where she felt unprotected and alone in having to cope with the aftermath of suffering multiple traumas. Thus, when questioned about why she resorted to drugs, Janelle simply responded, "[t]o escape from the pain that I was feeling….I didn't want to deal with the pain and everything."

And Cherise, an African American female in prison, asserted that the reason she smoked crack in her mid-thirties was because she had begun to recollect her childhood experience of "not being treated the same as [my] brothers or sisters" by her parents. She recalled:

> [My brother and I] brought our report cards home. I had a C on my report card. My brother had all F's and a D. They patted him on the back. And I got a whoopin' for that C. So yeah, I was abused as a child mentally and physically. More mentally 'cause I was a big child. So all the whoopins didn't really mean nothin'. But that mental stuff counted. It took me to different points of my life that I probably wouldn't have went.

Experiencing assault as a child, especially if perpetrated by a family member, can produce a great deal of trauma (Pipher, 1994). The resulting disturbance can be further heightened when the survivor believes she does not have anyone to confide in or turn to for support and guidance (Baskin and Sommers, 1998). If not dealt with adequately, the trauma can continue even in adulthood and result in subsequent offending (Belknap and Holsinger, 2006; Richie, 1996; Daly, 1992; Gilfus, 1992; Arnold, 1990).

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However, not all women turned to drugs as a result of having experienced extreme forms of child abuse. Several turned to drugs to medicate feelings of loneliness, depression, and sadness. Crystal, a young Black woman in her twenties and on parole, contended that she smoked marijuana at 12 and cocaine at 19 years of age because she had a "sense of loneliness." Even though 26-year-old Shauna, who is incarcerated, admitted to having used ecstasy once because her boyfriend pressured her to try it, she reverted back to the narcotic substance because she was "depressed by him leaving." She stated, "I was alone and then I just started taking the pills and that's how I started." For some, it was easier to suppress painful feelings with the use of drugs than directly confront the root cause of the problems. Cherise testified that "dealin' with 'em [sadness and depression] would've meant I would've had to go through the pain again.…I didn't want to do that so I got high. And it was a temporary relief." Likewise, Stacey, a 39-year-old white incarcerated woman, asserted when she used drugs, "it seemed like everything was less critical. Everything was less sharp around the edges with pot."

Some women's path to drugs was spawned at the passing of a loved one. Lisa, a 32-year-old Black woman in prison, said one of the many reasons she turned to drugs was because "my parents died when I was younger." Likewise, 30-year-old Lyn, an African American incarcerated woman, stated she resorted to crack because "my daddy hit my momma and, it's like, I still hold her death over him." She continued:

> And it's like you see everybody with they families or they callin' they mom and I couldn't. And it's like it just triggers me and I get all depressed. I just started smokin' crack. I was with some friends and I was like, "what's that?" And they was tellin' me what it was. And I'm like, "well, let me try it, then." Once I tried it, I like it. And it's like I just left weed alone and just started smokin' crack 'cause it like took away all my problems. When I got sad or depressed, I just go get crack.

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And Melissa, a white 44-year-old imprisoned woman, reported only turning to drugs because "[m]y daughter's dad, my old man who I was with for nine years, he passed away from cancer." Consequently, she admitted rather than "seeking help with a counselor or whatever, I took to drugs…[and] the next thing you know, there I am, addicted to it." These women experienced stress from the death of their loved ones, which motivated them to turn to drugs. According to Agnew (1992), the failure to achieve positively valued goals (e.g. monetary success), the loss of positively valued stimuli (e.g. the death of a loved one), and the presentation of negative stimuli (e.g. assault) can produce strain in individuals, causing them to behave in deviant ways. In the current study, women were motivated to use drugs when they experienced abuse, the loss of a loved one, and painful feelings.

Consistent with prior studies, findings revealed that the vast majority of women in the study experienced physical and sexual abuse as children, often perpetrated by family members. This pattern was particularly common among incarcerated women. Empirical research shows that women with a history of sexual abuse who are also raised in a problematic family environment are more likely to experience adverse outcomes, such as low self-esteem, limited self-efficacy, constrained coping abilities, and increased feelings of insecurity and powerlessness (Sanders and Moore, 1999; Chandy et al., 1996). With a greater number of incarcerated women in the study having experienced childhood abuse, it is not surprising that they were more likely than the parole sample to use drugs as a coping mechanism. Given the patterns related to the onset of drug activity among incarcerated women, these factors may also impact their ability to successfully desist from crime.

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Pathways into Other Crimes

There are multiple routes women take to drug activity. For the women with whom I spoke, many resorted to illegal drugs because of their exposure to narcotic substances by their family members. Most women also felt compelled to experiment with drugs because they sought acceptance by their peers. And a small number sought approval from their boyfriend. Finally, for many women, drugs were used as a coping mechanism to deal with abuse, grief, depression, and loneliness.

The process into other crimes, however, was often tied to economic motivation. A number of women took pathways into crime for the sole purpose of feeding their drug addiction. For these women, drugs played a significant role in intensifying their involvement in crime. A few engaged in criminal activity to support themselves and their children. And many chose to engage in deviant behavior because they desired material possessions.

Drug-Crime Connection

There is a strong link between female criminality and drug use, as research reveals that women who use drugs are more likely to commit other crimes (Merlo and Pollock, 1995). Approximately 80 percent of women in state prison in the United States have a substance abuse problem and more than half were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of their offense (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1997). Moreover, one-third of American women in state prison report having committed the offense that led to their incarceration to obtain money for drugs.

Over one-quarter (29 percent) of incarcerated women and 21 percent of paroled women in my sample reported having engaged in criminal activity to obtain money for

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drugs. This pattern was more common among African American women than whites. Of the women who committed crimes for the sole purpose of supporting their drug habits, two-thirds were African American and one-third was white.[30] For drug-involved women, substance abuse increased their contact with other users and sellers entrenched in the local drug market. These contacts further enlarged their opportunities to both use and distribute illicit drugs. For example, Alissa, a 44-year-old Black woman on parole, asserted that she sold drugs simply "to get money so I can get high. To use drugs, smoke crack." Likewise, LaTisha, an older African American paroled woman, said, "I sold drugs to keep my habit up….I only did it because it maintain[ed] my high." A clear drug-crime connection is illustrated in these women's accounts.

But even more common than selling drugs was committing other economic crimes. This was the case for Jane, a white incarcerated woman in her forties. She stated the motivating factor for committing fraud at a bank was because "I was shooting dope…and I needed to keep up with my dope habit." And once her boyfriend "burnt out the banks" by committing forgery, Betty, a 46-year-old white incarcerated woman, stated, "I had to follow suit, provide him with his drug money…and I want my drugs." Likewise, when asked why she committed forgery, Bridget, a young white paroled woman in her twenties, said "I was high. Definitely high. I wasn't thinking right." Keisha, a Black 32-year-old female who is serving time in prison, explained the first crime she engaged in:

> I guess the first crime I ever committed would have to be associated with
> the forgery. There wasn't a lot that I had to do. It was with somebody
> that I was hanging out with, getting high. Basically, all I had to do was go

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[30] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.825, chi-square = 0.049).

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in a store and return something with a receipt, and that was it, and get the money for it. And I mean, I knew it was a crime. I knew it was illegal, you know what I'm saying. I knew all that…[but I did it] to get money to buy drugs.

And 40-year-old Tara, an African American imprisoned woman, maintained that her initial involvement in forgery and theft stemmed from her desire "[t]o get money for drugs." Carol, a white 34-year-old female who was serving time in prison, committed motor vehicle theft in her twenties "[b]asically to get around when I was getting high [and] to support my habit. Anything, any way I needed to get somewhere, it was just an easy thing to do and make money fast to get high." Similarly, Gloria, a Black paroled woman in her forties, explained her initial involvement with theft: "I would go in stores and if it's a Dillard's I'd get me a Dillard's bag and I'd watch everything, just look around, and I steal all they clothes. I'd steal whatever, Tommy Hilfiger, it didn't matter…it was supporting my drug habit." Mia, a 54-year-old Black woman on parole, explained her rationale for partaking in theft as opposed to another economic crime, such as prostitution:

> You know I needed money for drugs so a friend of mine he said, "instead of selling your body for crack, I'm gonna show you a different type of way to do things." We go in the store and he would do his thing and I would do mine and we could come out and sell whatever we had.

While Mia chose not to engage in prostitution, Lisa, a young Black woman, did. She said, "when I got into smokin' crack cocaine I wanted a way to try and make money the easy way. And dating was one of 'em. Dating, turning tricks was one of 'em." The following dialogue with 32-year-old Jamilla, a Black woman in prison, described why she resorted to burglary:

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the first crime you ever committed?

Jamilla: I was staying out in Overland and I was getting high, using drugs, and I didn't have money, no way of getting money, so I started breaking into people houses and stealing things that I can get to get high. So I ended up getting – that's when I got caught, and they gave me attempted burglary and second-degree burglary.

Interviewer: Okay. And why did you decide to burglarize?

Jamilla: Because I wasn't getting money to get my drugs. I didn't have a way of getting my money and getting drugs.

There is a clear relationship between drug use and criminal behavior. For a number of women their initiation in crime occurred as the result of their drug addiction. Drug use played a significant role in escalating their involvement in economic crime because women perceived the criminal world as an attractive alternative to obtain money for the purpose of supporting their drug habit. Consistent with other studies, findings reveal that women's involvement in crimes intensified over the course of their addiction (Uggen and Thompson, 2003).

Economic Marginalization

Nonetheless, not all women engaged in drug-related crimes. A small number of women reported that their pathways to crime were tied to economic marginalization. Specifically, 12 percent of incarcerated women and 17 percent of paroled women in the sample were more likely to report economic difficulties prior to their involvement in crime. This pattern was similar for both African American and white women in the study, as 57 percent of Black women and 43 percent of White women reported having committed crimes to support themselves and/or their children. Brianna, a 37-year-old paroled Black woman, said, "I had left my husband during that time and we were on bad terms. I did it [committed forgery] to find shelter. I needed a place to stay, I needed some fast money so I met somebody that showed me how to make some money and I went

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with it." Like Brianna, Beth, a white 49-year-old woman on parole, stated, "I just got a divorce from my husband and I was trying to pay everything myself.…I was doing it [committing forgery] trying to keep my bills paid, trying to keep everything." The following dialogue with Patricia, a young Black female serving time in prison, described her initiation to crime:

Patricia: My first crime was what I'm on now: forgery.…I was out on – me and my friends were out, didn't have any money, and wanted to get quick cash and we came across some checks and we were writing a lot of checks going to the stores.

Interviewer: How did you come across these checks?

Patricia: My friend worked at a post office, and she got a box of checks, and we just redid them. They got IDs in them, and the people's names, and [we] went to different stores getting a lot of merchandise and selling it in auctions.

Interviewer: Okay, so when you went to the stores, you weren't getting the merchandise for yourself? You were getting them for selling?

Patricia: Just to keep the – to sell and keep the money.

Interviewer: Okay. And why were you engaging in those crimes?

Patricia: Why? Because I didn't have – in the process of me doing it, I didn't have a place to stay. You know, I was staying place to place trying to get a little more in my pocket to get a place to stay, you know, somewhere steady, keep a roof over my head, keep food in my stomach, because I wasn't eating. I wasn't, you know, getting the proper health that I needed, so that's the reason why I did it.

In all of these accounts, the circumstances produced by economic marginalization contributed to women's involvement in crime. Facing economic distress, several women also attested that providing adequate care for their children prompted their path to crime. When asked why she resorted to prostitution, Betty, a white 46-year-old incarcerated woman, said, "to supply my living habit, to support my kids…to provide a roof over my head." And Cleshay, a Black woman on parole, explained why she started selling her body at 15 years of age: "I ran away from home too, I needed money to support me and

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my son. Yeah, that little welfare check wasn't getting it." Like Cleshay, Lyn, a 30-year-old incarcerated Black female, complained, "I had my first son and it was like we was on welfare but it wasn't enough to take care of him and me. And his daddy wasn't helpin' support us so I just started stealin' to get what I needed for me and him." When asked why she committed forgery, 30-year-old Rebecca, a white woman on parole, said, "[t]o help take care of my kids at the time." She expressed:

> I was currently working at a retail store, and kept a customer's credit card, and took it home and used it elsewhere, to buy stuff for my kids and my house….At the time, I currently didn't have enough money to buy my kids clothes, and stuff they needed, and thought that if I had a credit card, I could use it, and buy them whatever they needed, and then, didn't have to pay for it.

While not a frequent occurrence, evidence shows that some women's involvement in crime started as a means of economic survival to support themselves and their children. This is consistent with previous studies showing that increased rates of divorce, female headed households, and other indicators of economic disadvantage for women are tied to high rates of property crime among females (Steffensmeier and Haynie, 2000; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Steffensmeier, 1993). It appears that for some women, offending is tied to their rising economic instability (Heimer, 2000). These findings, coupled with the fact that the majority of women offenders are mothers with minor children (Owen and Bloom, 1995), suggests that poverty plays an important role in females' path to crime. These findings lend credence to feminists' argument that women's involvement in crime is largely a product of personal and social oppression (Bloom et al., 2003; Belknap, 2001; Gilfus, 1992; Arnold, 1990).

The Desire for Money

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However, not all women engaged in crimes because they were in desperate *need* to support themselves or their children. Rather, 15 percent of imprisoned women and 21 percent of women on parole simply *wanted* money because they desired material things. This pattern was more common among Black woman than white woman. Of these women who engaged in criminal activity, 78 percent were Black and 22 percent were white.[31] Stealing, particularly as a youth, was a common occurrence among women in the sample. Kristy, a 30-year-old incarcerated white woman, stated, "there was stuff I wanted and I didn't have money for [it]." Stacey, an incarcerated white woman in her late thirties, admitted, "[I was] probably about 13. I think it was probably just a kid thing. See something in the store that I wanted." While Gloria admitted to stealing on a regular basis to support her drug habit, she also confessed that shoplifting was "paying my bills, and I furnished my house for seven years straight."

Typically, the desire for clothes prompted women to shoplift. Asked why she started stealing, 39 -year-old Tawanna who was serving time in prison said, "I just felt that I wasn't gettin' what I wanted. So in high school I felt that I would go out steal. And steal me clothes at school so that's what I did." And Crystal, a Black paroled woman in her twenties admitted that she stole clothes at 12 years of age "to look good." She said, "I did it because I wanted to do it." Toyin, a young Black incarcerated female, said: "I wanted all the clothes that other girls had that I was going to school with, and I wanted to look like they was, and my mother couldn't afford the different clothes, so I stole them." Asked why she stole an outfit out of a store as a teen, LaTisha, an older African American woman on parole, replied, "[b]ecause I was being greedy. I had some money to

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[31] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.342, chi-square = 0.904).

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buy the outfit but I wanted to see [if] I could steal the outfit." LaTisha openly admitted that even though she had the money to purchase the outfit, she chose not to because of greed. Likewise, Cleshay, an African American paroled woman in her forties, said, "I like the nice clothes, and I wanted my son to have nice clothes." Notice that in Cleshay's statement, rather than stating a need to provide clothes for her son, she simply *wanted* her son "to have nice clothes."

Some women have an urge for even grander illicit gains. Chantelle, a 44-year-old Black female who was serving time in prison for robbery and kidnapping, described in vivid detail how her desire for an automobile prompted her to commit a violent offense at the age of 20:

> It was just somethin' I knew I could do and I just did it. And the reason I did it, I didn't want to go out and ask my people for nothin'….And therefore I said, "well I could get a car." So, I went out and I got the car. And how I got it? I robbed to get the car. I didn't hurt anyone and I went out to the mall out in [the suburbs] at the grocery store. I told my sister that when I leave home I'm gonna come back with a car. So I asked this lady will she take me to the hospital. She said, "you don't look like you feelin' good." So she said, "yeah." She said, "okay, get in the car." I didn't have a pistol gun to commit this crime so when I got in the car she let me sit in the back and she sat in the front. So I just reached over and just had an ink pen and said, "you can get in the back and whatever you got just give it to me." Lord so God help me. So she did and she lay down in the front seat and I got in the front seat and I drove. I took the car home and I went and got my sister and I put her in the back trunk and I drove around and she was hidden in the trunk of the car saying, let her out. So we took her downtown by the river and let her out. We wasn't gonna hurt her, I just wanted the car…[and] I knew that I could do it. And I just done it….I just had a smart mind and I just figured that I know I can get it. I said, "well I'm tired of walkin', I think I'm gonna go get me a car today." So a few minutes later I come home with a car. That's as simple as that.

For Chantelle, greed drove her to commit a violent offense. In these accounts, we see that some women, comprised of largely African Americans, deliberately chose to engage in acts of crime because of the desire for money. It is possible that for some women, the

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desire for money was tied to their poor economic conditions, as some simply wanted a more secure and comfortable lifestyle. Although these women did not directly express a need for material gain, for some, their economic situation prevented them from acquiring what they wanted. Thus, offending provided these women to access their "wants."

The desire for monetary success – the American Dream – is all together common in the United States. In a nation that stresses the goal of economic success and places little emphasis on legitimate ways for achieving success, it is not surprising that crime rates are high (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001). Crime, however, is not equally distributed, as African Americans are disproportionately involved both as victims and offenders in crime. Some scholars argue that larger patterns of racial inequality result in social isolation and ecological concentrations of the truly disadvantage, which in turn lead to structural barriers and cultural adaptations that may increase the likelihood that crime will be seen as an available mechanism for achieving material gain (Wilson, 1987; 1996). Thus, because many Blacks disproportionately face blocked, or limited opportunities to achieve such success, some, including a minority of the women in my study, are willing to "pursue their monetary goals by any means necessary" (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001: 64).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I document a series of pathways to women's initiation to drug and non-drug related crimes. We learned that for the women in the study, there were different routes to distinct forms of offending. When investigating the path to illicit substance-related activities, patterns were similar across race. Findings suggest that exposure to narcotic substances in the home greatly influenced incarcerated and paroled

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women's decision to use drugs as youths. But drug-connected family members also impacted women's entry to drug activity even as adults. This comes as no surprise given that the majority of women in the sample came from homes where family members used and abused drugs. With a large number of women coming from families that are drug-involved, they are perhaps more likely to view such illegal activity as acceptable.

In addition to women's exposure to drugs by family, findings reveal that attaining approval among deviant friends influenced most women's decision to use drugs during their adolescence and early twenties. Although most women did not report receiving direct pressure by their peers to use drugs, they still felt compelled to dabble with drugs so that they would fit in. Findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that one is more likely to be delinquent if they associate with delinquent peers (Agnew, 1991; Warr and Stafford, 1991). However, approval from peers was not the only motivating factor that induced women to experiment with drugs. A few admitted that their initiation into crime stemmed from the desire to be accepted by their drug-involved male intimate partner. Although a small number of women in the sample reported this, studies on women and crime have uncovered similar findings that women may be "coerced" into offending by males (Gilfus, 1992; Arnold, 1990).

In addition, a number of women in the study turned to drugs as a way of dealing with life's trouble. Drugs were used to numb the trauma of abuse, the loss of a loved one, and medicate feelings of loneliness, depression, sadness, and pain. Confronting a negatively valued stimuli, such as assault, and removing a positively valued stimuli, such as the loss of a loved one, have been found to contribute to female deviant behavior, such as drug use (Slocum et al., 2005; Agnew, 1992). According to general strain theory,

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individuals may turn to drugs to cope with strain. Women's coping abilities are particularly hindered if they have histories of sexual victimization coupled with family stressors (Sanders and Moore, 1999; Chandy et al., 1996). This pattern was common among incarcerated women in the sample. It is quite possible that these patterns related to onset of drug activity for women serving time in prison may affect their ability to desist from crime as well.

Women's entry to drug-related offenses is distinct from their path to other crimes. For women in the study, the pathway to criminal activity was tied to economic motivation. In many cases, women's substance abuse appears to have caused the onset of their criminal behavior. Drug-addicted women were more likely to have committed economic crimes for the purpose of obtaining money for drugs. For these women, drugs played a significant role in heightening their involvement in crime in order to support their drug habit.

Although not a dominant theme, some women's path to crime developed only after experiencing economic difficulties. The inability to manage economic demands and pressures to care for themselves and their children resulted in their initial involvement in crime. Findings are consistent with prior research documenting that women are more likely than men to report economic hardships prior to their offending (Greenfeld and Snell, 1999). For some women, the economic marginalization shapes the onset and persistence of offending (Holtfreter et al., 2004).

Finally, some women's entrance to crime emerged because of their motivation to acquire money and material possessions. This pattern was more common among African American women, who typically resorted to theft to obtain what they desired. These

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findings reveal that the triggers to crime are not just limited to victimization or economic oppression, which is typically emphasized among feminist scholars (Bloom et al., 2003; Gilfus, 1992; Arnold, 1990). Recall, LaTisha stated, "I had some money to buy the outfit but I wanted to see could I steal the outfit." For her, as well as a few others, the desire for money facilitated their entrance to crime. In this sense, expressions of female offending occasionally shared some similarities with male offending. The cultural emphasis on monetary success and weak emphasis on achieving this goal through legitimate means has been identified as a contributing factor to why some groups, like poor African Americans, in the United States are more likely to engage in crime (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001).

This chapter documented the factors that shape women's patterns of criminal offending. Understanding one's initiation into crime is important to fully understanding the reentry and desistance process (Maruna, 2001). When returning prisoners grasp *why* they engaged in criminal activities it then becomes easier to identify *how* to desist from crime. In addition, understanding women's pathways to offending may offer insights into the unique challenges they will face when they return to the free world. The next chapter examines the obstacles and barriers women face following their release from prison.

CHAPTER FOUR – LEGAL BARRIERS AND PRACTICAL CHALLENGES TO REINTEGRATION

The increasing rise of imprisonment in the United States has led to an unprecedented number of inmates leaving prison. The figures are staggering: In 2005, nearly 700,000 inmates – approximately 1,900 per day – were released from state and federal prisons (Harrison and Beck, 2006). During this period, more than 80 percent of felons leaving prison were placed on parole (Travis, 2005), with women making up 12 percent, or 93,000, of those on parole supervision (Glaze and Bonczar, 2006). Yet, despite having served their sentences, newly released female prisoners face multiple consequences as a result of their felony convictions.

In this chapter, I turn attention to the hurdles that incarcerated and paroled women in the study faced upon their last release from prison. I explore the legal and practical restrictions they encountered, which made it increasingly difficult as they transitioned from prison to the community. Returning female prisoners confront several barriers, further complicating access to jobs, benefits, or services that can assist their reintegration efforts. Below, I highlight some of the obstacles the women in my sample faced in obtaining housing, securing legitimate employment, reestablishing relationships with family and children, receiving adequate medical or physical and mental health treatment, and getting treatment for substance abuse.

Securing Housing

Finding housing is one of the largest challenges that returning prisoners face upon their release, as it impacts their ability to successfully transition into the free world.

Bradley and colleagues (2001: 7) detail the role that housing plays in shaping the reintegration process:

> For the returning prisoner, the search for permanent, sustainable housing is more than simply a disagreeable experience. It is a daunting challenge – one that portends success or failure for the entire reintegration process….Housing is the lynchpin that holds the reintegration process together. Without a stable residence, continuity in substance abuse and mental health treatment is compromised. Employment is often contingent upon a fixed living arrangement. And, in the end, a polity that does not concern itself with the housing needs of returning prisoners finds that it has done so at the expense of its own public safety.

Locating a place to live is one of the immediate concerns returning prisoners encounter; yet, this is often permeated with numerous obstacles. For instance, landlords and property managers are more inclined to reject applicants who are ex-convicts (Helfgott, 1997). When asked what challenges and obstacles they faced following their prison release, 31 percent of incarcerated and 29 percent of paroled women I interviewed reported having difficulty obtaining housing. This pattern was more common among Black women, as 60 percent reported challenges in locating housing compared to 40 percent of white women.[32] For instance, when looking for a place to live, Shauna, a 26-year-old Black woman serving time in prison, claimed there were "certain places that I would try to go for housing [but] they wouldn't give me any assistance because of me being a convicted felon." Shamika, a 28-year-old African American woman on parole, reported having been denied housing "because of my [criminal] background." And 29-year-old Kenisha, an African American woman on parole, said that when it comes to housing, "you have to get a [criminal] background check and sometimes you, most of the

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[32] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.700, chi-square = 0.149).

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time, you won't get the apartment." Trina, a Black paroled woman in her thirties, concurred:

> Because they say you got a felony, they use that as a mark against you. They asked you, "what was your crime about?" and if you wanted to explain it that's fine. But if you didn't – like me I told the lady, "I have a felony on my record." She said, "can I ask what for?" I said, "stealing." She said, "well, you would have to file for a hearing and then explain everything and then have to wait on the director."

Patricia, a 28-year-old incarcerated African American woman, recalled initially having problems securing housing because the landlord mistakenly thought she had been convicted of a drug offense. She said, "they thought I had a drug case but I didn't. It was a misunderstanding, and once you're a drug – have a drug conviction, you can't get housing at all." According to federal regulations, public housing agencies have the authority to exclude certain offenders from receiving federally assisted housing. Specifically, convicted drug and sex felons are prohibited from residing in subsidized housing (Legal Action Center, 2004), which further depletes their housing options.

Kim, a 38-year-old white paroled woman, expressed her frustration with the barriers she and other ex-offenders encountered when attempting to find housing:

> The reality of it is that apartment complexes will not rent to a convicted felon. And it does not matter how long ago your crime was. It doesn't matter. My crime was a white-collar crime, it doesn't matter. And it's not Missouri law either but these apartment complexes flat out will not go ahead – they disbar you right away from obtaining housing from them.

As a result, Kim stated, "I've stayed away from apartment complexes only because I know that it's an automatic disbarment from even getting any kind of consideration for an apartment." Rather, she is "looking at houses to rent" and her "intent is to buy the house." Returning prisoners' status as ex-convicts often gives landlords reason to rent to another applicant. A survey of 196 property managers and owners in Seattle,

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Washington revealed that 43 percent were disposed to rejecting an applicant with a criminal record (Helfgott, 1997). Such exclusionary practices make it increasingly difficult for former inmates to locate suitable housing.

Confronted with numerous obstacles to finding a place to stay, Kim asked, "where does a convicted felon live?" In response to her own question, she replied: "If you don't have family and you don't need to be in transitional housing, you have to stay there." This is true to a large degree, as those with few or no familial support often have to make arrangements prior to release from prison to reside in a transitional house, residential program, or shelter. Cherise, a Black incarcerated female in her forties, asserted, "I really didn't have a place to stay. That was the reason why I went to the Honor Center.[33] 'Cause that's…that's where you go when you don't have a place." Likewise, Bridget, a white 26-year-old paroled woman, claimed, "I ended up doing, like, 10 months in the Honor Center because I didn't have a home plan."

During their time at St. Mary's Honor Center, newly released prisoners were required to work and pay rent.[34] The demand to pay rent, however, posed a huge financial burden for some women. Cleshay, a 41-year-old Black paroled woman, stated, "you had to pay $70 [a week] in the Honors Center. But for those that were there, [they] still have to pay it if they left owing anything." Although the rent payment was not a large sum of money, 46-year-old Cherise argued that paying rent is difficult when "you not makin' that much money." She questioned, "how do they think you gon' save up

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[33] St. Mary's Honor Center (which is now called St. Louis Community Release Center) is a transitional house holding 500 males and 50 females under probation and parole supervision. The objective of the transitional house is to assist clients with reentry to the community and help them to sustain themselves as independently as possible. Residents are expected to gain employment – unless participating in an approved training program or are disabled and receiving/applying for benefits – to establish residency in the community, and report to probation and parole officers as scheduled.

[34] St. Mary's Honor Center no longer requires its clients who are living on the premises to pay rent.

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enough money to get a down payment for your own place?" And Bridget said: "I didn't have any help, I was only making $5.15 an hour. So I ended up doing 10 months there so I could save up enough money to get me an apartment. I had to pay the Honor Center a good $700 to move out." Betty, a 46-year-old white woman, lamented that the transitional houses' policy of charging rent to its clients could only result in harm to those released inmates who have little or no money:

> You're going to pay them $400 to be there to pay the rent that they require but yet you can barely afford a bus pass to get back and forth to work. You're coming out with nothing. They don't hand us a box of clothes and hygiene's and bus passes and say good luck. They put you in a place where everything is nothing. You don't have nothing. But yet they want your check and they put you in a position to where you're vulnerable. Unless you're a strong person, you're not gonna get out of the halfway house or the Honors Center.

Even though the Honors Center did provide returning prisoners with shelter and food, the combination of having to work, often for low wages, and pay rent led some women to believe that the transitional house was not beneficial. When asked what she was provided with at the Honors Center, Tara, a Black imprisoned woman in her forties, replied, "I mean, we ate and we had a place to stay. You know, but we had to work every day and we got our weekend passes and stuff like that, but I can't say they really provided me with anything." When further prodded, Tara concluded, "to me it was just a place to go once I left here in order to get home. That's basically how I look at it. It wasn't helpful or non-helpful."

Overall, the criminal record that women carried with themselves served as an impediment to securing safe and affordable housing. Both incarcerated and paroled women in the sample had difficulty accessing housing post-release. A stable home environment provides social and emotional support and structure that is conducive to

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positive reentry transitions (Sullivan, Mino, Nelson, and Pope, 2002). However, in a recent multi-state study of reentry outcomes, Mallik-Kane and Visher (2008) found that while 56 percent of women lived with family following release from prison and most had received some sort of financial or social support (e.g., food, transportation), one-quarter of women had not received any tangible support from family. It is no surprise, then, that finding housing has been considered the "lynchpin that holds the reintegration process together" (Bradley et al, 2001). In other words, the inability to secure housing immediately following imprisonment decreases the likelihood of successful reintegration for returning prisoners.

Employment

Although locating a place to live is one of the immediate concerns returning prisoners face, securing legitimate employment is also vital to successful reintegration. Employment helps ex-offenders to become productive and establish positive roles in the community, to secure income to take care of themselves and their families, to develop important life skills, and to distance themselves from negative influences and opportunities (Travis, 2005; Petersilia, 2003). However, former women prisoners face numerous barriers to employment. Most have very low levels of education and limited work experience, making employment prospects bleak. In 1998, approximately 45 percent of women in local jails, 44 percent of women in state prison, and 27 percent of women in federal prison had less than a high school education (Greenfeld and Snell, 1999). An estimated 40 percent of women were employed full time at the time of their arrest and 37 percent reported having earned less than $600 per month (Greenfeld and Snell, 1999).

While most formerly incarcerated inmates are primarily concerned with landing a job following their release from prison (Nelson et al., 1999), because of their record, the vast majority of women in the sample faced a number of challenges in obtaining legal employment. Specifically, 77 percent of incarcerated women and 71 percent of paroled females discussed facing difficulty finding a job post-release, as their ex-offender status represented an important barrier to employment. This pattern was more common among Blacks, as 62 percent of African American women and 38 percent of white women reported having difficulty finding work post-release.[35] Kim, a white woman on parole, stated, "employment had been difficult again because of being a convicted felon." Crystal, an African American 28-year-old woman on parole, claimed, "the hardest obstacle was just the whole finding an occupation." Likewise, Kenisha, a Black paroled woman in her twenties, remarked, "my felonies was popping up so they was hindering me from certain jobs." And Jamilla, a 32-year-old incarcerated African American woman, explained her daily struggle of looking for work:

> [O]n the application they asked, "have you been convicted [of a] felony?" "Yes" or "no"...I would put "yes." I wouldn't lie to them, and they don't accept felonies.

When asked how often she searched for a job, she stated:

> I was going – when I got out the halfway house, I was going every day, five days a week. I would go at least three hours a day. I would use the bus and one time I did it on a weekend and I walked around the neighborhood and do it.

Nonetheless, Jamilla admitted, "I did it for, like two months, and I just gave in....I was just mainly, I was stealing from family, I was out there prostituting again, doing drugs

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[35] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.417$, chi-square = 0.659).

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again, fighting." In Jamilla's case, the insurmountable wall between her criminal status and job opportunities was too tall to climb, and she was unable to overcome the barriers to obtain employment. Evidenced in these accounts, employers are reluctant to hire individuals who have spent time in prison (Pager, 2002; Western et al., 2001). According to a national survey, American employers are far more averse to hire male ex-offenders than other groups of commonly stigmatized workers, including welfare recipients, someone with a spotty work history, and applicants who had been unemployed for a year or more (Holtzer et al., 1996).

Procuring a job is made even more difficult when an applicant's criminal record is coupled with a history of unemployment. Bridget, a white paroled woman in her twenties, questioned, "do you know what it's like to find a job being a convicted felon and you have no job references?" She continued: "Finding a job, oh my God, was the hardest thing in the world to do." And Mia, an African American imprisoned woman, asserted that her felony status in combination with her older age impeded her ability to find a job:

> I'm a convicted felon. That has really closed a lot of doors to things that I
> know that I can get....If you had a place of business and you had a 30-
> year-old come up in there and I'm 54, but mind you, our work skills are
> the same, which one would you take?

Likewise, Betty, a 47-year-old white incarcerated women who has a serious illness, claimed to have three strikes against her that made it difficult for her to land a job: "You know as well as I do that when you go for a job interview and something that's concerning yourself, they're going to look at your health, your age, and your background. I got three strikes right there so it's scary."

Consequently, when women did divulge their criminal past to employers, many did not receive callbacks. A number of women believed that they had been subject to discrimination on the basis of their criminal record, which prevented them from acquiring the jobs they wanted. Tawanna, a 39-year-old Black woman serving time in prison, claimed, "I was honest and I put on there what my conviction was and I never got a call back. And I know that was part of why I didn't get a call back." Similarly, Lisa, an African American 32-year-old incarcerated woman said, "I tried applying with this one company but the lady never called me back. So I just left that alone." She further explained:

> On those applications they say well if you say that you've committed a felony that they don't judge that. But I really do think certain businesses do judge that....And I don't think they hire based on that, though their application says they don't but personally I think they do.

And Carol, a white incarcerated woman in her thirties, suspected her criminal record prevented her from getting a job: "Yeah, there was a lot of jobs I applied for where they didn't actually come out and say – but they'd never call me. Or they'd say, 'okay,' and then just throw it away to the side." And Melissa, a middle-aged white woman who was serving time in prison, explained her struggle to find work:

> I dropped, I know, 20 different applications and put on there, like, okay, Kohl's shopping store, you know, just places like that, to work in their warehouse or wherever, you know. I put on there that I have been incarcerated, that I was on parole. I never got one call back from any of them. Not one.

Likewise, when asked if she admitted to having a felony conviction on job applications, 44-year-old Gloria replied, "I'd check it but I'd never get callbacks." As a result, Gloria, a Black paroled woman, described constantly calling one company:

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> I call them back. I say, "I put in an application on so and so day." I say, "you were hiring." One company just told me they were filling their application files, they were accepting applications." I said, "no it said you were hiring. It said now hiring, not accepting applications to fill our file." I told them like I heard. "No, well, Miss Glover you called three of four times but no we're not hiring." I'm like, "yeah, they must have read my application." That's the feeling I get.

The effect of a criminal record on subsequent employment opportunities was clearly illustrated in Pager's (2002) experimental study. Using matched pairs of male individuals to apply for real entry-level jobs, Pager found that applicants with criminal records received 50 percent fewer callbacks. However, the effect was even greater for African Americans. Black men with criminal records experienced a 64 percent reduction in job offers, demonstrating that African Americans are strongly affected by the impact of a criminal record.[36]

Moreover, the licensing requirements applicable to many jobs present further employment barriers for former offenders. A few women in the study attempted to get a job in the medical field but to no avail. After attempting to get a job in home healthcare, Shauna, a Black 26-year-old imprisoned woman, stated, "they would call me and be, like, well, they were, like, I guess I didn't get the job due to my criminal history." And 28-year-old Patricia, a Black woman serving time in prison, asserted, "I wanted to work at the Barnes Hospital 'cause my mom, she's been there 39 years. I couldn't get that because I'm a convicted felon." Likewise, LaToya, a 33-year-old Black woman on parole, said that "Barnes had a medical billing position paying $13.00 an hour, and I knew if I would've put [that] I didn't have a felony on my record, I probably would've

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[36] Even more noteworthy is that Pager found that whites *with* a criminal record were more likely to receive callbacks than Blacks *without* a criminal record. Unfortunately, her study was limited to men. It would be particularly useful to also examine this question as it applies to women.

gotten the position." After being denied the opportunity to work in a hospital, Beth, a 49-year-old white woman on parole, said, "I ask[ed] them how come they didn't hire me" and they responded "because of my background, by [me] being incarcerated." Former felons are legally prohibited from working in a number of employment sectors under state and, in some cases, federal law (Hahn, 1991). Currently, all states restrict ex-offenders from working as beauticians, barbers, and nurses and they are commonly barred from employment in the field of child care, home health care, nursing, education, and security (Petersilia, 2003).

To make matters worse, state and federal laws bar some released offenders from certain jobs they held prior to incarceration. For instance, some women were completely or nearly certified as a nurse prior to serving time in prison; yet, they were unable to pursue that line of work because of their felony conviction. When asked if there were any jobs she wanted but was unable to get, Jackie, a 38-year-old Black woman on parole, lamented, "before I caught those two cases, I was [a] certified CNA [Certified Nurse Assistant]. Since I've been home, I can't get no job doing what I want to do because of my felonies." Kenisha, an African American paroled woman in her twenties responded, "back when I was pregnant with my daughter in '03, I was going to college for nursing. By me catching drug possessions that hindered me from being able to become a nurse or work in the medical field." And Kim, a 39-year-old white woman on parole, surmised, "working for the nursing home or doing any kind of volunteer work, you cannot be a class B felon."

With so many policies and legal barriers surrounding the employment of individuals with criminal records, it is not surprising to learn that some former inmates

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choose not to disclose their criminal history on job applications. The failure to divulge such information to prospective employers, however, has consequences. As 46-year-old Felicia, a Black incarcerated female, explained:

> [A]t that job there, they drop on you [test for drugs] if they wanted to or whatever, which I signed paper for that. When they first took my first urine when I first went out there, 'cause you have to go through different processes, and I was clean 'cause I was doin' my parole and everythang then. And I didn't have no problem then, but I thought they was going to check before they even hire me. But, after 30 days…they come back and they said that they found out that I was an ex-felon and they couldn't keep me on but that I was this good worker. And I was…I was making $10.95 an hour. I'd of made it up to 15 [dollars an hour].

While her employer said she was a good worker, Felicia was fired because of her felony status. The company, however, did give her another entry-level job but according to Felicia "it pays six dollars an hour." And Tawanna, a 39-year-old African American woman serving time in prison, described the anxiety she felt about her employer discovering she was an ex-felon: "All I kept thinkin' about was, 'oh my God they gonna do a background check….They gonna come to me one day, call me from my register, and then they gonna tell me I'm fired.'" Yet, those with a criminal record still risked getting fired even though they revealed their criminal past to their employer. Trisha, a Black imprisoned woman in her mid-forties, explained:

> I was able to be honest with the HR [Human Resource] person and Red Cross. And she said, "honey, did you kill anybody?" And I said, "no ma'am." And I told her what it was and she said "that's nothing. We're not going to write that down." She said, "at least you told me." I guess when she got promoted and when someone new came in and started doing record checks, it looked like I wasn't honest because it wasn't checked on the [form]. So that's why I was fired.

An applicant's conviction(s) can be considered when employers are making hiring decisions. If the employer discovers that the applicant failed to disclose her criminal

background, then she can be fired legally. Consequently, many returning prisoners found themselves ensnared in a no-win situation when attempting to acquire a job. Carol, a 34-year-old white woman serving time in prison, explained: "It's really discouraging when you go for jobs because if you don't tell them and they find out, they fire you for lying; if you tell them, they don't want to hire you because you're a convict." Kenisha, a 29-year-old Black paroled woman, concurred, "if you tell the truth on an application, they more likely to just pass it over. If you lie, they gonna do a background check and find out anyway." And 30-year-old Kristy, a white imprisoned woman, stated, "you don't want to lie on applications, things like that. But yet, sometimes it's hard to know how to tell the truth, you know. And you don't want to make it sound too bad. You want a job." Alisha, an older African American parolee, who has been unable to obtain a job since her release from prison, said:

> Some people tell me I shouldn't put it [my criminal conviction] on there [job applications]. You know when it asks that, that I shouldn't put it on there. But it wouldn't do no good to have a job and later on they look back and find it. I still wouldn't have [the job].

Former prisoners find themselves in a rather precarious situation when attempting to find a job. When former prisoners admit on a job application that they have been convicted of a crime, they give prospective employers reason to hire another non-criminal applicant. Studies show that employers are less likely to hire ex-convicts than those who fail to provide information about past convictions on their employment application (Western et al., 2001). According to a national employer survey in the 1990s, nearly two-thirds of employers would not knowingly hire an ex-convict and 30 to 40 percent of employers conducted a criminal background check on applicants for non-collegial jobs (Holtzer, 1996). However, answering untruthfully means potentially

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getting fired for being deceptive about their criminal status. As 34-year-old Carol stated, "[i]t's a hard ball to play." Thus, it is not surprising to see that most incarcerated and paroled women in the study found it incredibly arduous to land a job.

Obstacles with Family Reunification

In addition to having to secure housing and employment in the days, weeks, and months following release, former prisoners must also confront the sometimes difficult task of reestablishing ties with family. This proved to be challenging for 35 percent of incarcerated women and 29 percent of paroled women in the sample. This pattern was relatively common across race, as 56 percent of Blacks and 44 percent of whites reported that family reunification was challenging. Jenny, a 28-year-old white woman, recalled constantly being called a "prison bitch" by her own father once she returned home. To make matters worse, he falsely accused her of stealing on a regular basis:

> And then every time something would come up missing he would try to blame me, and I hadn't even been out there or anything. One time my sister and her – my step-mom's daughter – had stole his guns and went and pawned them, and they blamed it on me. And I was in prison at the time. It later came back when he had his guns traced that it was my stepsister who did it. My dad just, he doesn't like to apologize.

With regard to her family, Chantelle, a 44-year-old Black woman, said, "[t]hat's the one[s] that say once I done the crime and once I started in the addiction of substance then I'm just a fucked up person." However, Chantelle argued, "it's another life beyond that. 'Do you know what the word change mean? Rehabilitate means?' That's what I tell them." Likewise, even though she was approved by the Parole Board to stay with her mother when last released from prison, Jane, a white woman in her mid-forties, claimed "the day I got there...she said I couldn't stay at her house." She explained: "Because what it was, was, my oldest brother was staying there, which he's dead now, too, and his

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wife, and we didn't get along." When asked how she felt, Jane described the strained

relationship she had with her mother in the following dialogue:

Jane: Well, I was use to it because that's what she did all my life, you know.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Jane: I couldn't never stay with my mom.

*Interviewe*r: Since you were 12?

Jane: Yeah. I don't know why. I asked her, but she never would answer me. Maybe because I was a girl and she didn't want me. She didn't want to have no girls, because all my brothers got to stay.

Although Jane expressed uncertainty about her mother's treatment towards her, earlier in

the course of the interview she mentioned why her mother kicked her out at 12 years of

age:

Jane: I was smoking weed and she didn't want that in her house. In the apartment we was living in, I guess, but I was the only one that got kicked out. My brothers didn't never get kicked out.

Interviewer: And they were using, too?

Jane: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever ask your mom about that?

Jane: She never would talk to me.

Needless to say, resolving previous disappointments or cutoffs with family members can

be tough, especially when relationships were strained prior to an individual's

incarceration and release. As evidenced in these accounts, not all family members are

welcoming of returning prisoners, which makes family reunification even more difficult.

Although some families do not offer any type of support to returning prisoners,

others do provide housing assistance and financial support. Reunification can still prove

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to be problematic, especially when former offenders move in with family or relatives. Several women complained about the number of rules they had to abide by while residing with family members. While staying at her mother's house, 28-year-old Jenny claimed, "they had a lot of rules, and I felt like I was still incarcerated." She further explained: "I couldn't have phone calls after 9:30. I couldn't leave the house and be home. I couldn't have a house key. I couldn't do this. I couldn't bring any of my friends to their house." Likewise, Christina, a white 55-year-old woman, described her mother as "old and crabby." She stated, "we just can't get along. I go to bed at 10:00 o'clock [because] everything keeps her awake." And Toyin, a young Black woman who lived with her aunt, said, "she doesn't do anything and she's not going to let me do anything....She's not going to let me unless I will leave her house." With all of the rules her mother set, Cara complained, "sometimes she makes me feel like a little kid again. She'll talk to me like I'm still a kid. She, like, forgets I'm in my 30s."

Even though some family of returning prisoners provided them with housing, a few women voiced feeling unwelcomed. Trisha, an African American woman who lived with her grandmother upon being released said, "when I got there I'm sleeping in the living room and I felt like I was wearing out my welcome....I felt like I was just living in a shopping bag." Alisha, a 52-year-old Black woman who resided with her sister, said it was "nerve-wracking." When asked why, she reflected:

> Because I don't have any money to help her pay her bills with. I really
> don't feel comfortable eating all the time 'cause I don't have anything to
> contribute. She's got a husband, I'm uncomfortable. I can't walk around
> the house like I'm…you know when you wake up sometimes you want to
> just put on your house clothes or be in your pajamas. So, it's difficult.

For some women, reunification is so unbearable that they have chosen to avoid meeting their families. Kim, a white 39-year-old paroled woman who maintained that she never committed a crime despite being convicted of fraud, explained how her relationship changed with her family:

> I still haven't seen them yet. But I've kind of distanced myself from them because I've missed out on so much with my family. My family was very close knit and I don't know how my nieces and nephews would react to seeing me....I still have not taken that first step in getting a travel pass and going to visit them because I know they're still, not so much upset, I think disappointed. I just still feel like I've let my parents down too, which I shouldn't even think like that because I really have not done anything wrong. But unfortunately I was incarcerated so obviously I did do something wrong. It's like a vicious circle.

When asked whether she planned to see her family any time soon, she responded:

Kim: No, I keep going back and forth, back and forth. I've talked about getting a travel pass to go out there and still have not taken the initial step. The one time I did get a travel pass, I bought my plane ticket and I did not go. I wasn't ready and I don't know if I'll ever be ready. I'm sure I'll never know, I just need to do it. But it's just not comfortable for me yet.

Interviewer: When you bought the plane ticket at the last minute you decided not to go?

Kim: Um hmm (yes). It was at the airport and I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it.

Interviewer: So you ended up losing your ticket and your money?

Kim: Yeah (laughs). I think probably what I need to do and what will happen is my friend, Nicole, has said that she will actually take me down there. Just as a support for me as well. But you can't make somebody do something if they're not comfortable with it. So until I'm comfortable, and I don't know when I'll be. I may not. But someday I will get on a plane or hop in the car and go.

In Kim's case, missing out on years of her family's life as a result of her confinement coupled with her family's disappointment has hindered her from seeing her loved ones. While she did make an attempt to see her family, she was paralyzed with fear and unable to do so.

Not only did women confront challenges to reestablishing ties with family, but they also faced issues related to receiving custody of their children, parenting, and repairing relationships. A few mothers, who were primary caregivers of their children, openly admitted that they were not ready to take on the full responsibility of caring for and parenting their children. Donna, a white 36-year-old woman, who regained custody of her children within weeks of her release, admitted that she was not prepared to take on the full responsibility:

> I acted really well. But, I wasn't ready, I mean, I was ready maybe for release, but I wasn't ready to get the kids. Bam! Back within six to eight weeks of my release....When they came home, I lost self again....I just lost self because everything was so much on me where I couldn't focus on me anymore.

And Tia, a 28-year-old African American woman, also reflected on the difficulty she faced in terms of meeting the financial obligations for her children:

> I don't think I was prepared for it because first of all, I had to go out and find a job, you know what I'm saying. And then I had to get money and all this type of things. And then it was almost Christmas time, and 4th of July, and my kids were, like, "oh, Mama, we want this, we want that," so – and I wasn't prepared for it all.

Reestablishing parental roles also proved to be hard for women returning home from prison. Specifically, several women asserted that their children would not listen to them. When asked the challenge she faced upon release from prison, Trina, a 38-year-old Black woman, said "my oldest son [was] being rebellious. That was one of my biggest challenges." And Cara, a white 41-year-old female, said, "when I go home my son don't listen to me. He argues. We argue like we're brother an' sister, or like we're not mother an' son. We don't talk to each other like that. I mean he don't listen to me. He don't take

me serious at all." The following conversation with 52-year-old Alisha, a Black woman, is illustrative of the effect incarceration has on parenting:

Interviewer: What kind of relationship do you have [with your children]?

Alisha: It's not a good one. I mean they'll talk to me. Hmph. They'll listen to some things I say but they still show that attitude. They still show it.

Interviewer: What kind of attitude is that?

Alisha: Is more like, "I'm grown. You can' tell me. You did it." That type of attitude.

Interviewer: Do all three of your kids have that kind of attitude?

Alisha: Yeah but in different ways.

Interviewer: Did doing time in prison make your relationship with your children better or worse?

Alisha: Worse.

Interviewer: How did it make it worse?

Alisha: 'Cause when I say [something], they say, "you did it," or "you was with" so and so and so and so. They wouldn't do that before.

Likewise, 38-year-old Jackie reflected on the relationship she had with her children: "Them two younger ones disrespect me...they get real grimy. And that's when I got home [from prison]." But in addition to being disrespected, Janelle, a 37-year-old Black woman, noted how her daughter has difficulty trusting her: "My 15 year old, she stubborn. She's afraid, I have to still – she still working on her trust issue because regardless that I've been here for two and a half years, she afraid that I might leave again. And she don't want that no more." The challenges of reestablishing a relationship with children and other family members after a period of confinement are considerable, all of which can impact a successful reintegration.

Access to Health Care and Services

Correctional inmates and ex-offenders are generally in poor health, experiencing much more serious health problems than the general population. For many, their risky lifestyle, substance abuse histories and inadequate access to health care prior to imprisonment contributes to their physical and mental health conditions. According to a survey conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, nearly one-third (31 percent) of state inmates and almost one-quarter (23 percent) of federal inmates reported having some physical impairment or mental condition (Marushak and Beck, 2001). Female prisoners are largely affected, as 34 percent of women in state prison and 30 percent in federal prison admitted having such physical and mental health problems. Among those released from prison, a disproportionate number have serious infectious diseases. In 1997, almost one-quarter of all Americans infected with HIV/AIDs were released from prison or jail, as were one-third of people with Hepatitis C, and more than one-third of individuals who had tuberculosis (Hammett et al, 2001).

Ironically, while inmates have access to state-provided health care in correctional facilities, many have a tough time obtaining health care once they return to the community. Specifically, in the study, 27 percent of incarcerated women and only 4 percent of paroled women described having difficulty getting access to treatment and services.[37] This pattern was more common among white women, as 63 percent faced challenges receiving health care services compared to 37 percent of Black women.[38] Cara, a young white incarcerated woman, claimed, "the worst thang was tryin' to get my psych meds and not havin' no insurance. I couldn't get in no place at all. I wasn't on my

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[37] Using chi-square analysis, incarceration and parole status achieved statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.028, chi-square = 4.809).
[38] Using chi-square analysis, race achieved statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.10 (p = 0.088, chi-square = 2.903).

medication at all this last time out." Kristy, a 30-year-old white incarcerated woman, stated, "I was [at the] time Board stipulated to continue my psych meds...I don't have medical insurance or anything like that." Julie, a 26-year-old white imprisoned woman said:

> Like as far as when I first got out, I had a hard time. I was working on trying to get my Medicaid back and back on my SSI for my mental health. And keeping up on my medication was really hard. When I left here, I had a 30-day supply. And you can't find places out there to really get you your medication out there without having, like, your Medicaid or whatever. They don't supply you it freely and some people need their mental health meds.

As a result, some women had to resort to neighborhood clinics to receive their medication. Since she only had a 30-day supply of medication, Julie had to go to "the three-day clinic." And because she needed her psych meds, Kristy complained, "you've got to find a, like a mental health clinic that will supply those to you and then they – they don't want to do that unless [they have] so many visits with you a week." Ironically, even though mentally ill prisoners did receive psychotic medicine to treat their illness in prison, they encountered problems receiving ongoing attention for their health needs once released from the correctional facility.

Moreover, the high costs of treatment and delays in getting health insurance prevented women from immediately enrolling in drug treatment programs. As a result, Julie stated, "I didn't go. I couldn't pay for it and I was trying to get on my Medicaid to pay for it because if you had Medicaid it would cover your classes. And it's expensive and I didn't have the money to deal with all that." Likewise, Carol, a 34-year-old white woman serving time in prison, said:

> The outpatient drug treatment...every one of them I called wanted at least $75 for the initial interview; $50, $75, $125. Because they were, like,

personal care providers. They weren't, like, state-funded agencies....So I'm, like, "okay, let me call some of these private people." And they were, like, "oh, well, be here Thursday and bring a check for $75. Yeah, we'll get you started right up." I'm, like, "I bet you will."

When she attempted to find agencies that were funded by the state, Carol ran into more roadblocks:

Places in the St. Charles area, where I could go and try to get alternative outpatient drug treatment because the place was state-funded, Bridgeway, was so backed up. And you had to meet certain criteria and be only off a drug for this amount of time. I'd been locked up for so many years. And, "oh, you've been clean too long. We can't help you." They've always got a loophole when they're overcrowded.

The inability to get into treatment placed parolees at risk of relapsing and violating their parole. Carol stated, "even the state-funded agencies have, like, 30 days to a 6-month waiting list, and that wasn't fast enough for [my parole officer]." For that reason, Carol contacted private and personal health care providers only to find out she could not afford them without health insurance coverage. And Betty, a white imprisoned woman, said, "I couldn't get the treatment center to let me in....I had a waiting list. Yeah, figure that one. So I'm in violation anyway. But that would have saved me from coming back here [to prison]. Then I went and used." Consistent with prior studies, the period immediately following incarceration poses a high risk of relapse among former prisoners with a history of substance abuse (Nelson et al., 1999). And the inability to get access to medical care or treatment further increases the risk of drug relapse and recidivism. Recall in chapter 3, over one-third of incarcerated women (compared to 8 percent of paroled women) used drugs as a coping mechanism and 20 percent of incarcerated women (compared to 8 percent of paroled women) used drugs as a result of their

association with males. Yet despite their involvement with drugs, incarcerated women faced increasing difficulty getting access to drug treatment upon release from prison.

Not only do returning prisoners encounter challenges in getting into substance abuse treatment but federal laws prohibit anyone convicted of a drug-related felony from receiving federally funded food stamps and cash benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Legal Action Center, 2004). Betty, who was convicted of a drug offense, said, "if you have a drug case, you don't get assistance. You don't get the food stamps, you don't get the emergency checks, you don't get nothing." Alisha was the only paroled women in the sample who reported having difficulty receiving access to health care services. Because she was convicted of drug possession, Alisha, a 52-year-old Black woman asserted, "I can't even get food stamps because of that" even though "I paid for my crime." Such restrictions led Toyin, an African American incarcerated 24-year-old woman, to conclude that she was always being judged by society:

> If you've been to prison, they [society] think like you're just a bad person, period. In schools, trying to get housing, get any help, assistance from the government, things like that.

Likewise, Shauna, a 26-year-old Black woman serving time in prison, surmised that "being a convicted felon kind of messed you up for, like, getting a whole lot of things, a lot of help, and you would think they would want to help people that can't be helped, but it's hard." When prisoners return home, they face numerous hurdles that impede their transition into the free world. Some face barriers in receiving care for their health needs; others confront obstacles in securing medication for their mental illness; and many encounter roadblocks in obtaining substance abuse treatment. Without the help to manage health conditions, medical problems will inevitably follow women as they

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return home from prison. All of these impediments place additional burdens on former prisoners, further decreasing the likelihood of successful reintegration.

Substance Abuse

Not only do most returning prisoners struggle to receive adequate health care for their medical conditions, but most have a history of substance abuse, which has been shown to disproportionately affect women and play unique roles in shaping female criminality (Owen, 1998; Daly, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Belknap, 1996). In their analysis of the 1994 Bureau of Justice Statistics of 15 state female release cohort recidivism dataset, Deschenes and colleagues (2007) find that approximately 42 percent of women are sentenced to prison for committing a drug offense. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (1998) reveals that 54 percent of females in state prison reported illicit drug use one month prior to their incarceration and nearly half (48 percent) were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time they committed their crime.

Given that most women are imprisoned for drug-related offenses (Belknap, 1996), abstaining from drugs and/or alcohol is a demanding challenge that former prisoners face upon release. This pattern, however, was much more common among women in the sample who were incarcerated, as 38 percent of incarcerated women reported how challenging it was to evade the use of drugs while only 8 percent of paroled women reported such difficulty post-release.[39] This pattern was more common among African American women, as two-thirds reported having trouble staying clean compared to one-

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[39] Using chi-square analysis, incarceration and parole status achieved statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.013; chi-square = 6.211).

third of white women.[40] Abstaining from drugs is made especially difficult for those returning to neighborhoods and social circles that triggered drug use, which makes relapsing very tempting. Toyin admitted, "my family members are still doing crimes, things like that. Friends....They did the same things I used to do – they did crack....And so when I got back out and they're doing it, it looks good to me." And Carol described the temptation she experienced when she stayed over at a friend's house after having no place else to go:

> When I was desperate and needed a place to stay, one of them [my friends], before my own family, was willing to let me stay in the basement. But that was a big mistake because seeing how I was, there I was around all the dope and around all the drugs again, and it was really hard not to get high with all that around me all the time. So I was, like, "I've got to get the hell out of here." So that's when I started staying in hotels and working the temp services. "This ain't working. Two more weeks from now I'm going to be sitting down there smoking crack with them. I've got to get out of here."

Shauna, a 26-year-old Black woman, also recounted how challenging it was to stay clean after having rekindled old friendships:

> It was, like, if I come in contact with a few of my friends and they'd be in the car and they'd be smoking weed. And when I got out, I didn't do that, so it was, like, a challenge for me not to do it. And for months, I didn't do it. I'd be in the car, but still wouldn't do it. But eventually, I ended up giving in.

But even when returning prisoners make effort to avoid known drug users, it is not an easy task because drugs seem ubiquitous. When asked what obstacles she faced, 30-year-old Lyn asserted, "[d]rugs. That's the only obstacle. Like every which way I go, there go drugs." And Mia, a Black woman in her fifties, claimed, "everyday is a challenge for me when it comes to my drug abuse...it's a challenge because no matter

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[40] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.825$; chi-square = 0.049).

where I go it's gonna be drugs. It's hard." Stacey, a white 36-year-old woman, explained:

> The last time I was released I did try this long not to get high. They had my family at Taco Bell. My mother, my children. And the dope man was like, "I'm good, I got fire" and all this mess. So it's all around me.

For some women, staying clean became a formidable task, particularly when family members and friends still engaged in drug activity. Moreover, conviction for a drug crime can have long-term consequences for social service provision. For example, recent welfare reform acts preclude any felon convicted of a drug-related offense from receiving government benefits for themselves or their families. This act has had a large effect on African American and Hispanic mothers as they are highly vulnerable to poverty and disproportionately represented in the welfare system. In total, 48 percent of women affected by the ban are Black or Hispanic, further complicating successful reintegration for minority women (Allard, 2002).

In addition, only a small percent of women actually have access to community drug-based treatment programs (Richie, 2001). Most women, particularly women of color, return to impoverished neighborhoods following release from prison (Dodge and Progrebin, 2001; Richie, 2001; Owen and Bloom, 1995). In particular, African American women are more likely to report a lack of access to programs and services in their disenfranchised communities (Richie, 2001). As a result, women of color who return home from prison often report feelings of marginalization within the context of an economically distressed neighborhood, making successful reintegration even more difficult. As we will see in chapter 6, the return to former communities and social circles plays a major role in recidivism and drug relapse.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the legal and practical barriers to reintegration that incarcerated and paroled women confronted post-incarceration. This chapter has revealed five important challenges to reintegration that women in the sample encountered. First, locating and securing suitable housing proved to be a major task for almost one-third of current and former female offenders. Both Black and white women who sought housing were often rejected because of their status as an ex-convict. Clearly, a criminal conviction served as a stumbling block for securing housing. As a result, a large number of women in the study had to make plans, prior to their release from prison, to reside in a transitional or halfway house. Although it provided shelter, the requirement to pay rent proved to be a financial burden for some who were not earning very much at their job.

Second, finding a job was the most challenging task both incarcerated and paroled women encountered. The majority of African American and white women were denied jobs because employers were unwilling to hire them. The lack of prior employment, limited or no job skills, and a criminal record made it difficult for women returning from prison to land a job. As a result of the legal restrictions to employment that women faced, many questioned whether or not they should reveal their criminal convictions on job applications. While their chance of obtaining a job increased if they did not disclose their criminal background, they also risked getting fired for being deceptive about their criminal records. Thus, women found themselves in a rather precarious situation when it came to finding work.

Third, family and child reunification proved to be difficult for over one-quarter of incarcerated and paroled Black and white women returning home from prison. After having attenuated ties with their family members as a result of their offending and drug use, not all returning offenders were welcomed back home. Some family members were unsupportive, leaving returning offenders to fend for themselves upon their release. However, for those who did reside with loved ones, many women complained about the burden of having to abide by many rules and being treated like a child. Several women also experienced difficulty related to parenting and establishing their role as a mother. A few women discussed not being financially and emotionally ready to care for their children after having served a period of time in prison. A trend in women's accounts was that several mothers complained that their children disrespected them either by not listening to them or by talking back to them. No doubt, children's response and reaction is a result of their mother's incarceration, making reunification difficult.

Fourth, getting medical needs met was a hurdle that incarcerated women reported more than paroled women. Incarcerated women, particularly white women, often had trouble receiving health insurance coverage post-release. The inability to receive access to Medicaid immediately following release from prison impacted women's ability to get their medication for their physical and mental health problems. Delays in health insurance coverage also hindered women from participating in outpatient drug treatment, further increasing the risk of drug relapse and recidivism.

This leads to the last challenge, which is abstaining from drugs. With most women entering prison for a drug-related offense, it is not surprising to learn that they also struggled to avoid drugs. This pattern, however, was much more common among

incarcerated women, as over one-third reported having a hard time staying clean, especially after their subsequent return to their old neighborhood and peers. For some African American and white women, the return to former communities and people made it increasingly challenging to stay clean. This became a formidable task, particularly when family members and friends remained involved in drug activity.

CHAPTER FIVE – FACTORS IMPACTING REINTEGRATION SUCCESS AND FAILURE

One of the unprecedented challenges facing the United States is reintegrating nearly 700,000 inmates who return home each year from the nation's prisons. Attending to this challenge is vital because approximately 93 percent of all inmates are eventually released from prison (Petersilia, 2003). Just about all offenders who "do time" inevitably experience prisoner reentry – the process of leaving prison and returning to society. As we have seen in the last chapter, a former offender's transition from prison is difficult, and newly released prisoners encounter multiple legal and practical barriers to reintegration. Housing, stable employment, family reunification and responsibility, sobriety, and integration with positive support networks are some of the obstacles that ex-felons face when they are released from prison.

Upon discharge from prison, most released prisoners seek to successfully reintegrate into conventional society. Though there is no consistent definition of successful reintegration, O'Brien (2001:23) defines reintegration as "the former inmate's acceptance of adult role responsibilities according to her capabilities (i.e., economic sufficiency, parenting), the individual's perceptions of acceptance by the community despite what is often a stigmatizing status, and the woman's sense of self-esteem or self-efficacy." While there is a paucity of research on women's lives post-release, some studies have documented factors resulting in successful outcomes for women, including the use of comprehensive services, access to community resources, involvement in programs that focus on empowerment, and social support (O'Brien, 2001; Richie, 2001; Koons et al., 1997). Since released female prisoners have multifaceted, intersecting

needs resulting from abuse (childhood and adult), substance addiction, low education levels, spotty work histories, family disorganization, and poor health care, several researchers have underscored the importance of utilizing a comprehensive approach to meet women's specific needs (Richie, 2001; Austin et al., 1992). Summarizing findings from a national study on effective correctional programs for women offenders, Koons and colleagues (1997) reveal that the most promising programs address women's multiple treatment needs. These "wrap-around services" (Reed, 1985) allow women with compound needs to receive assistance in one place while intervention services simultaneously address these multiple demands. This approach has been credited for working specifically with women in need because it uses a holistic approach to address the complex interrelated problems of women offenders (Rhodes and Gross, 1997).

Related to comprehensive programs that help returning female offenders reintegrate into their communities is a growing focus on the community and its impact in helping women as they transition from prison. Bloom (1991) observes that increasing linkages with community resources and ameliorating negative factors in the social environment of former prisoners are necessary for women's successful reintegration. A number of scholars have reported that the availability of community resources such as employment services, job training, and education, and the ability of former inmates to access these resources have a significant impact on post-release outcomes (Schram et al., 2006; O'Brien, 2001; Stanley, 1976). The role of neighborhood levels of concentrated disadvantage also has been a focus of recent work, as poverty has been associated with a decreased presence and quality of institutions in the community (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997) and reduced treatment services (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-

Rowley, 2002). In her study, Richie (2001) finds that African American women are more likely to report a lack of access to programs and services in their disenfranchised communities. She asserts that a community-development approach requires neighborhood level planning so that services are provided in communities where returning prisoners reside.

Evidence also suggests that women fare well when they take part in programs that empower them (Wilson and Anderson, 1997). Empowerment practice includes gaining "intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social power that enables one to make efficacious choices for everyday life" (O'Brien, 2001: 27). This approach focuses on extending women's coping and decision-making skills while assisting them to expand the options they have (Richie, 2001). Austin and colleagues (1992) find that effective community programs for women use an "empowerment" model in which skills are developed to allow women to achieve some level of independence. Empowerment can also occur when women are able to assess their own behavior, determine their need for change through positive role models, and give to others (Hale, 2001). For example, in her study of women prisoners transitioning to the community, O'Brien (2001) discovers that formerly incarcerated women experienced increased self-esteem from helping other women once they achieved stability in their own lives.

Finally, social support has emerged as an important element that can facilitate offenders' transition to conventional life (O'Brien, 2001). Social support has been defined as the "provision of affective and/or instrumental (or material) resources…[through] intimate or confiding relationships" (Cullen et al., 1999: 190). As such, social support from family members, friends, significant others, neighbors, and

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other instrumental affiliations can positively impact the reintegration process. In her study of formerly incarcerated women, Maidment (2006) finds that interpersonal relationships and social support systems are vital to women's successful reintegration. O'Brien (2001:119-120) describes the multi-level relationships former female prisoners in her study built and sustained, which is critical to successful reintegration:

> [A key] aspect of relationship building had to do with the willingness of the women to elicit assistance through their relationships with professionals, recovering people, ex-inmates, and peers for the information, support, and skills they needed to normalize some of the initial feelings of alienation. These mentors reflected a rootedness in reality and exemplified survival and growth as a possibility to the women. The women also looked for such support to decrease their sometimes overwhelming sense of powerlessness in handling the challenges during various points in the transition.

Personal and social relationships often act as a bridge between ex-offenders and the community, which facilitates the reintegration process. The relationships can lead to additional connections between the former offender, law-abiding citizens, and legitimate institutions while simultaneously providing ex-felons with a legitimate identity and a link to conventional society (Bazemore and Erbe, 2004). A handful of studies have examined women's lives post-release; this chapter attempts to build on prior studies by examining the factors that led formerly incarcerated women to successfully reintegrate into the community *and* the factors resulting in reintegration failure among incarcerated women.

FACTORS LEADING TO SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION

This section examines 24 formerly incarcerated women's perceptions of the process of reintegration as they moved from prison to the free world. These women relied on a number of resources to successfully transition from prison to the community. Many women identified the importance of receiving support from family and children;

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others discussed the role of finding employment; and most reported that having access to external programs and support systems facilitated their reintegration efforts.

Family Support

Family is important to understanding the reintegration of former offenders. In particular, 40 percent of formerly incarcerated women in the sample underscored the importance of receiving support from their family members, which helped to ease their transition to conventional life. This pattern was particularly common among African American women in the sample, as 93 percent of Blacks and 7 percent of whites cited that family support played a role in their ability to reintegrate.[41] Rebecca, a 30-year-old, was the only white woman to emphasize the importance of having positive family support. She stated, "my dad supported me 'til I could get assistance….[My family] helped with different situations, with transportation, or watching my kids while I went somewhere." Likewise, Janelle, a 37-year-old African American woman, claimed when she returned home from prison "different family members brought me clothes, gave me money to where I could have to get what I needed to go…I had a lot of support." When asked if she was able to support herself when discharged from prison, 38-year-old Trina, a Black woman, explained:

> The first two weeks my family, my friends, they basically, my cousins
> they like, "what you need? Is there anything you need?" They would
> bring me stuff [like] food…they brought me clothing and soap and stuff to
> get me started until I got a job and I can get more stable.

After her release from prison, Gloria, an African American female in her mid-forties, asserted, "my brothers took care of me. My brothers continue to take care of me."

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[41] Using chi-square analysis, race achieved statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.017$, chi-square = 5.714).

A number of formerly incarcerated women in the sample asserted that their families helped them by assisting with transportation, taking care of their children, and providing them with money, clothes, and food. Several paroled women discussed the importance of receiving concrete assistance immediately following their release from prison. And some, as is the case with Gloria, still continue to live with their family members and receive financial assistance from their family.

Not only was financial support important for reintegration, but receiving emotional support from family members was deemed just as important. Receiving emotional support from children was cited by women as a key source for reintegration. Asked if anyone had a positive influence on her since her release, Janelle claimed, "my kids. Because they willing to go to my NA [Narcotic Anonymous] meetings[42] with me." Cleshay, a 41-year-old Black woman, stated, "[my family has] been real supportive. They helping me through a lot, even my daughter – they have been supportive, with my recovery and stuff." Receiving affirmation from children was also tied to reintegration success. Shamika, a Black 28-year-old female, explained: "My daughter, she will come in, hug me, tell me she love me. It be times when I don't feel good, you know what I'm saying. They just brighten my day." And 38-year-old Trina, a Black woman, said, "[my children] keep me in check…they keep me positive."

A couple of women also received emotional support from siblings and other family members. Gloria, an African American woman on parole, asserted that "[my sisters] call me all the time. They talk to me every day. They write me letters, they send

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[42] Narcotic Anonymous is a community-based association that provides a recovery process and support network in which members share their successes and challenges in overcoming active addiction and living drug free productive lives through the application of Twelve Steps.

me cards just because….I might get a letter at home or a card that say, 'hi, I love you.'…That's my influence." When talking about the support she received from her family, LaToya declared that "everybody's family is not like my family. I know my family love me and my family will bend over backwards for me." LaToya recognized just how fortunate she was to have family members that she could depend on following her release, as not all women have such support. Overall, women in the sample believed that supportive families played an integral part in their reintegration. This pattern was common among Black women. This may not be too surprising, given that studies have shown that extended family networks have long been a feature of African American families (Patillo-McCoy, 1999; Stack, 1978; Billingsley, 1968). In the current study we see that family support, particularly in the form of providing financial assistance, emotional support, and housing is an important source of post-release success (Nelson et al., 1999).

Securing Employment

In addition to receiving support from family members, most women in the study perceived that the ability to find and secure a job helped them to make great strides to accomplish reintegration, which was mentioned by both Black and white woman. Specifically, 42 percent of women landed a job by turning to friends, family, and former employers for help. This pattern was common among African American women, as 70 percent mentioned that landing a job helped them to successfully reintegrate compared to 30 percent of white women.[43] Rebecca, a young white woman, claimed she found her current job as a customer service representative "[t]hrough a friend." In addition to

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[43] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.633, chi-square = 0.229).

family support, Rebecca has managed to support herself and her children by "keeping steady with a job." When asked how she got set up with finding employment, Brianna, a 37-year-old Black woman, said, "[m]y sister worked for culinary personnel and she's done banquets for years. She's like, 'I know you can get a job, just come on down here.' I've been working for them ever since with the job." Mia, an African American woman, claimed that she was able to obtain a job because her daughter offered her work:

> We had figured that out anyway even before I came home. She [my daughter] said, "well, Mom you don't have to worry about too much of nothing if you want to save. Because you know I do the daycare thing and you can help me out."

Likewise, Shamika, a young African American female, stated, "[m]y first job when I got out [of prison], my sister was the supervisor. She got me hired. They started me off higher than any crew member that was working their crew. This was a fast food place – Rally's…I was making $8.50 [an hour]. I worked that job a whole year." Shamika had since changed jobs and had been working as a housekeeper for one year. When asked how she found this job, she replied: "Actually it was in an Employment Guide and I had worked for them before I had got locked up. And I went back and filled out an application and they just remembered me and pulled me on in." Similarly, 33-year-old LaToya described becoming aware of an available housekeeping position from a neighbor:

> I got lucky because I came home…and the lady across the street from my grandmother's house I grew up with, she told me, she say, "there's a place out here by the airport, hurry." She said, "let's go out there"…I wasn't out [of prisons] a whole week. I went out there and I said, "I want to apply for the housekeeping position." The supervisor handed me a board and told me to go to work and do my application when I get home because she didn't have no housekeepers…And she was, like, "do you have a record?" I said, "yeah," she said, "I don't care." She said, "baby, I'm

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staying at the hotel because I don't have any housekeepers." She's
cleaning rooms 24 hours a day and she was the supervisor.

Because the supervisor was in desperate need of housekeepers, she hired LaToya.
Yet, keep in mind that LaToya first became aware of the vacant job position from her
grandmother's neighbor. Although she claimed, "I got lucky," it was the web of
connections and networks with others that allowed LaToya, and many other women in
the sample, to find a job. In these accounts, we see that some women relied on familial
and social networks for employment opportunities. In some instances, family members
and friends who were self-employed offered a job to women who returned home from
prison or found opportunities for them via contacts they had through their own line of
work. In other instances, women returned to their old workplace and asked their former
boss to rehire them. These established networks are vital to the reintegration process
because "[s]trong social relations…represent social and psychological resources that
individuals can draw on" (Laub et al., 1995: 93-94), all of which can facilitate the
reintegration process.

Some women obtained a job "through word of mouth" while residing at a
transitional or halfway houses – a place of residence where newly released inmates learn
to adjust to life outside of prison. Kim, a white 39-year-old female, explained how she
secured employment at a manufacturing plant within one week of her release from
prison: "A gentlemen, his name was Mick, at the Honors Center said that the company
that he worked for was looking for people to work there…[I] filled out my application,
submitted a resume, and then no sooner did I get back I had an interview the next day and
they hired me." Likewise, 44-year-old Alissa, a Black woman, stated that she got her
current job "[t]hrough a lady that was in the halfway house with me." She explained:

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> She was already working at the nursing home where I presently work now….Me and this female we just clicked one day. I know she had a job so I asked her one day. I asked her where she's working at, she told me the nursing home….So I said, "do they have any positions open?" And she said, "as a matter of fact they do."…I went on the Tuesday, I filled out my application. When I came back for my interview that Wednesday, I did my interview, and he already had my schedule ready. Yes ma'am and I've been there ever since.

Cleshay, a 41-year-old Black woman, said she landed a job as a housekeeper when she was in a halfway house, which "is hooked up with certain people…that they have contracts with, [and] that will give [ex-offenders] a job prior to coming out of prison." The halfway house offered released offenders with high levels of access to specialized employment agencies and resources. This facilitated the job search because many of these agencies refer formerly incarcerated women to employers who are willing to hire ex-offenders.

The ability to secure a job and other benefits through membership in social networks is known as social capital (Portes, 1998; Coleman, 1988). Social capital, however, is based partly on one's position in social structure (Lin, 2000). Most former offenders lack social capital (Sullivan, 1989) and, compared to men, women tend to have fewer social ties, particularly in the labor force (Lin, 2000). Therefore, women ex-offenders are likely to have less access to networks that are often necessary to obtain legitimate employment. But for ex-convicts with greater social capital, they are more likely to be employed and linked to services (Leverentz, 2006). For ex-offenders who manage to secure a job, they may feel as if they have accomplished half the battle as it relates to their transition into the free world. Employment serves reintegration purposes, as a job has the capacity to alter social relations, increase social capital, provide economic benefits and stability, and give status to ex-offenders in the community (Coleman, 1988).

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For many women, reintegration success was tied directly to their ability to secure a job.

External Services

In addition to receiving support from family and finding a job, women also expressed the significant value of having access to external resources and support services. Approximately 88 percent of paroled women in the sample reported being involved in several community-based organizations that provided them with a number of concrete assistance post-release. This pattern was more common among Black women, as 71 percent underscored the importance of getting access to services compared to 29 percent of white women.[44] Janelle, a 37-year-old Black woman, said that Project Connect[45] "had a lot of things to offer you if you willing to accept. They help you with housing, furniture, different programs, [and] they will help you try to find you a job." She also stated that the Center for Women in Transition[46] "help[ed] me with clothes for myself and needs for myself. They even help[ed] me for two years with Christmas things for my children…They gave me bus passes and different things like that." When asked what she found helpful about the community-based agencies that she was involved in, 34-year-old Sandy, a white woman, explained:

> That there was going to be something out there to help me get started with the way to go. They sent you with the job thing by applying. They had other job contacts and stuff like that. The clothes, the apartment, I thought that was kind of cool.

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[44] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.285$, chi-square $= 1.143$).

[45] Project Connect is a program designed to assist offenders in the successful reintegration back into the community by providing a strong support system consisting of community members and organizations working together with the Department of Corrections.

[46] The Center for Women in Transition is an organization that provides women who have been released from jail or prison with an array of referrals and services to help them achieve stable housing and employment, receive drug treatment, and reunify with family.

Not only did women receive concrete assistance, but some stated that the various agencies that they were involved in met all of their needs and they did not know how they would have made it without access to these available resources. Trina, a Black 38-year-old woman, said that the Center for Women in Transition "was tremendous 'cause I had all the resources that I needed…Jobs, clothing, food." And Sandy stated, "[g]oing into another structured but less than structured environment, I think that helped me. I don't know how I would have been going straight back into the situation I left. I don't know how that would have been." Gloria, a Black middle-aged woman, described how the St. Patrick Center[47] helped her:

> [St. Patrick Center] keeps you on your toes. They help you find a job. You gonna do the footwork but they give you all the leads you need, and the clinic, and food, and shelter, abuse centers, if anything. They help you with everything you need. Everything."

While such services and resources certainly aid offender's transition from prison, Gloria was also quick to point out the importance of each offender's willingness to help themselves. When talking about St. Patrick, she said: "Anybody that needs help that's willing to help themselves, that place is willing to help you as long as you willing to help yourself." Gloria makes an important point, as it cannot be assumed that ex-felons will be receptive just because programs are provided. Offenders who have a desire to change coupled with access to gender-specific programming are more likely to have a successful release (Girshick, 2003).

Moreover, 71 percent of women in the sample expressed developing positive relationships with their parole officer, who assisted their transition to the free world. This

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[47] St. Patrick Center is the largest provider of homeless services in Missouri, with more than 20 programs assisting more than 9,000 people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

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pattern was more common among African American women, as 70 percent reported having good relationships with their supervising officers compared to 30 percent of white women.[48] Interestingly, these relationships often occurred among women parole officers, as 80 percent of women described having good relationships with female officers compared to 20 percent with male officers. When talking about her parole officer, Shamika, a 28-year-old Black woman, said, "if I ask her about classes, job classes, she gives me information on that. She gives me the time when they'll be here." And Crystal, an African American woman in her twenties, said, "[my parole officer] was trying to get me to go to one of them little group homes and live in those houses, you know, that help rehabilitate women and stuff….She just wanted me to be better." Likewise, Brianna, a young Black female, asserted "[my parole officer] checks on things with me, and overall she's just really a nice lady." Cleshay, a Black woman in her forties, expressed:

> Oh, she helped me a lot. Well, she's new – well, I only had her a short time but the short time that I had her, she was real great. She gave me insight on – she asked me, is there some things that I want to do, that I didn't do. And I want[ed] to take computer class, and she was right prompt with that information. She sent it to me, through the mail. And, my visits with her [are] real nice, and they not short and brief. I have nice visits with her. And she ain't the type that try to kick you on out of there, and get you done. She really take the initiative to see what's really going on with you. So I really like that about her.

In addition to receiving assistance, parole officers were also said to provide emotional support to paroled women in the study. This type of support was not just relegated to female parole officers but male officers as well. When talking about her male parole officer, Mia, a middle-aged Black woman, said:

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[48] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.437$; chi-square = 0.605).

> I like Mr. Wight. He cool. He listens. He's not judgmental and he's not [a] condemner. He understands life, like things happen. It be like – I've been having this issue with my sister, she has cancer. For the last past three weeks, she's been in surgery where they removed something from her stomach and they had to stop. Then they had to schedule the other surgery for another week. He's been real concerned about that.

Trina, a Black 38-year-old woman said: "First [my parole officer] was Casey Bluet. Oh she was lovely. I loved her because she was herself and she let me be myself. We just kept it real with each other. And Tyrone Shelt, I love him 'cause same thing. He let me be myself you know." Asked who had a positive influence on her release, 34-year-old Sandy replied, "my PO has. She really has, 'cause she believes in me." One of the qualities Janelle, a young African American woman, mentioned that she liked about her supervising officer was that "she's a good listener."

Because of the emotional support some parole officers provided to their clients, some women reported that they viewed their officer as a friend. When talking about her supervising officer, Bridget, a 26-year-old white woman, stated, "I can talk with her about anything….If [there was] anything that I needed, I know I could call her and she would help me with anything." Kim a 39-year-old white woman explained her relationship with her first parole officer:

> The first parole officer I had, I think I told you, I loved her to death. She was absolutely wonderful. It was kind of like I was going in to see my parole officer but I didn't really look at her as my parole officer. She was a good friend to me. She really was. It was a great relationship. So it's kind of sad that my case had to get transferred because I live [somewhere else] now.

As evident in these accounts, parole officers played a major role in the lives of paroled women. Despite the context of supervision and control that parole officers represent in their clients lives, many women explained how their supervising officer

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provided them with support and guidance. While parole officers have a dual role that they must fulfill, which entails exerting control on and offering assistance to their clients, most women in the study underscored the positive relationship they had with their officer. Recent research has demonstrated that when the relationship between supervising officers and their clients is characterized by trust and fairness, it leads to positive outcomes for drug-involved and mentally-ill women (Skeem et al., 2008, 2007).

FACTORS LEADING TO UNSUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION

While women in the parole sample identified how they successfully rejoined the free world, the process of reintegration was not always smooth. In chapter 4, I documented the challenges that prisoners face following their release from prison. Juxtaposed to the difficulties of post-prison reintegration is the reality that some newly released offenders fail to successfully transition from prison to home. Drawing from the accounts of 26 incarcerated women, the following section identifies several factors that impeded their ability to reintegrate. Half of these women asserted that the nature of competing demands made the process towards reintegration difficult. Many blamed their association with negative social networks. And some said that their parole officer encumbered, rather than facilitated, their reintegration efforts.

Competing Demands of Reintegration

The combination of competing demands interfered with women's successful reintegration. Half of the women in the incarcerated sample reported facing a great deal of pressure in having to meet all of their parole conditions. This pattern was more common among Black women, as 62 percent reported competing demands of

reintegration compared to 38 percent of white women.[49] Several mentioned feeling

stressed out about finding a job and fulfilling their responsibilities as a parolee. Patricia,

a 28-year-old African American female, asserted that "[f]inding a job, it was hard. It was

very hard because when you first get released you gotta get an ID, social security card,

gotta go see a parole officer. They're on you because you don't have a job." And

Cherise, a 46-year-old Black woman, stated that she struggled with "tryin' to find a job,

clothes…[and] tryin' to find help with certain problems." Shauna, a Black woman in her

twenties, said:

> I was, like, I was happy to be home and I was stressed out because it was like, "oh, man, now, I'm back. I've got to get myself together"…[and] it was, like, stressful because I was trying to find a job. I didn't have no money. I didn't have nothing."

While Shauna reported feeling relieved to be discharged from prison, she also felt

anxiety about meeting the multiple demands of her parole conditions. And Toyin,

a young Black female, said she had difficulty "getting a job, [getting]

transportation, [and] getting identification." Kristy, a white 30-year-old woman,

complained: "Just to see my PO [was difficult] because I don't have a license and

I don't have a vehicle. Then, it was different things she wants me to do, like,

attend a substance abuse class. Then I was [at the] time stipulated [by the parole

board] to continue my psych meds [and] I don't have medical insurance."

Likewise, Julie, a young white woman, lamented:

> [I was] tired of trying to find the assistance [mental health treatment] that I need. And I've never had responsibility, so all this being thrown at me on my own was really overwhelming and I was really discouraged. And that's another reason I relapsed….The responsibility [of] going and finding a job

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[49] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.431; chi-square = 0.619).

> and getting a state ID and getting on the bus, going back and forth to see my PO [was too much].

Julie discussed the overwhelming burden she encountered by having to get treatment, search for a job, and obtain identification without transportation. Since she "never had responsibility," being plunged into a world where she was expected to suddenly become a responsible citizen was far too much for her to handle. It is quite ironic that returning prisoners are expected to take responsibility after being kept in a correctional facility that takes away their ability to be responsible and make choices from themselves. Evidence demonstrates that the prison experience heightens inmates' perception that they lack personal control (Blatier, 2000), which can serve as a detriment to reintegration.

Even those who found a job had trouble transitioning back to conventional society and coping with many demands. For instance, 40-year-old Tara, a Black woman, said that "as soon as I get a job, I'll start thinking about, 'okay, I've got to get a car and I want to get an apartment.' You know, I get aggravated if things just don't go a certain way. I try to rush everything." Betty, a middle-aged white woman, stated: "I [was] released from prison and just working at Bob Evans, and walking to work. [I was] walking 10-11 miles to get to treatment twice a week, plus my house arrest I had to pay for. It was too much. I couldn't do it." Likewise, Keisha, an African American female in her thirties, explained:

> I had to work, I had to go to treatment…[and] I think I probably just overwhelmed myself with stuff to do….I felt like I was always rushing….I [was] on house arrest, so I got to make sure that [I'm home] within the timeframe that they gave me to be out or the little box would go off and it'd be a violation or something.

The opportunity for successful reintegration is further complicated when parolees return home without any reliable social support. Carol expressed the

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overwhelming feeling she had as she attempted to transition to the community on her own:

> It was overwhelming, I guess you would say, because I had so many things – and when I say overwhelming [I mean] overwhelming in the respect that I was supposed to do all these things, and see this PO and do all this and have these appointments set up by this and this. And it was just, like, "wow." I don't even have a car, and I don't even have a license. What the hell am I going to do? And my mom's not dependable in the respect of getting me somewhere at a certain time. If I do get a job, how do I know I can get there? Because she'll say she'll take me, and then she won't be home to take me when it's time to go. So it was a lot of things on my plate at one time. I worried about transportation. I worried about a job. I worried about seeing the PO. I worried about all the things that the PO wanted me to do and still to try to find time and money to eat and sleep everyday and to get clothes enough to go look for a job. I wanted to try this and see my kids, and it's just a whole lot of stuff to try to do in a short period of time that the parole officer wanted me to get it done in.

Likewise, when she initially left prison, Betty claimed that she felt "overwhelmed [and] scared to death" to rejoin the free world on her own:

> I knew that I was only biding time until I was walking back through the [prison] doors here. It's hard. When you see the bus station and you have absolutely nothing and no one to go to, to help you. It's hard. I mean, it's scary. You know, you're thinking okay. Well, when you get off the bus what are you going to do? I mean these people aren't going to give you a dime to make sure you can take a cab or a bus to get where you going. It's hard. It's overwhelming….When these people let you go, you're on your own all the way, outside of your parole officer telling you you've got 30 days to do this or 30 days to do that or you're looking back at the cell of a prison….You got 30 days to find a job, some clothes, a place to live, some food, and ID and hope to God that you can get it all done in 30 days. But you know, the clock's ticking every second and sometimes the stress is too much and this [doing time in prison] is a lot easier. A whole lot easier than it is out there.

The overwhelming pressure Betty faced when she returned home led her to believe that serving time in prison was much easier than spending time on the outside. She, and many others, faced multiple demands following their release from prison, which impacted their ability to make a successful transition into the free world. For some, the

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stress was too much to handle. Lisa, a young African American woman, stated "I broke under pressure rather than endure the hardship."

The pressure to meet competing demands, however, was not just exclusive to incarcerated women. Also noteworthy is that some paroled women voiced similar concerns. Yet, 50 percent of the incarcerated sample cited that this matter impacted their reintegration efforts compared to 20 percent of the parole sample. Consistent with prior studies, findings reveal that the co-occurrence of competing demands can hamper women's opportunity for successful reintegration (Richie, 2001). For this reason, many feminist scholars have stressed the need for wraparound services – a large array of multiple services that meet women's multiple goals, needs, and problems through the coordination of various providers (Bloom et al, 2004; Covington and Bloom, 2003). In the current study, the parole sample made more use of such programs, as 88 percent of paroled women compared to 50 percent of incarcerated women were involved in external services following their release from prison.[50] These findings indicate the value of having wraparound services that meet women's specific needs, and finding ways to encourage women to take advantage of them.[51]

Negative Support Networks

In addition to the competing demands women faced post-release, negative support networks also impeded incarcerated women's ability to reintegrate. Recall that positive familial support was identified by paroled women in the sample as a factor that led to their transition to conventional society. However, not everyone has access to prosocial

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[50] Using chi-square analysis, incarcerated and parole status achieved statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.01 (p = 0.005, chi-square = 8.065).

[51] However, I did not ask women why they did or did not take advantage of external services.

relationships. In particular, 27 percent of women in the incarcerated sample identified negative support networks that hindered their ability to reintegrate post-release. Of these women, 86 percent were white and 14 percent were African American.[52]

For these women, the process towards reintegration became nearly impossible because their family members routinely accused them of engaging in deviant behavior or encouraged their illegal behavior. Jane, an older white woman, said that her last release from prison was difficult because "Leslie's [my oldest daughter's] trying to tell Laticia [my youngest daughter] 'she's on drugs again,' and this and that, which I wasn't." After serving time in prison for committing forgery, Jenny, a white female in her twenties, asserted that her sister still expected her to continue committing crimes. She said, "[my sister] would be like, 'Jenny, we don't have anything to eat. It's your responsibility to go get things.'" Jenny continued:

> I know it sounds really crazy, but it's like I always had to make sure my sister was happy because she would always use the kids. "Well, what are going to do about Beth and Jackson?" And "Beth [is] not having any birthday present" or something like that. I just felt like it was my responsibility to go make sure that they had something.

There were some women who failed to successfully reintegrate because they maintained a relationship with drug-abusing family members. Kristy, a 30-year-old white drug addict, explained how she tried to justify her relapse: "[My sister's] doing it [drugs] and I'm gonna hang out with her. And I'm gonna be around it and I'm gonna do it, too." According to Kristy, "even if I can give up friends, I could never give up my sister." Kristy raised a valid point about the difficulty of severing ties with immediate family members who participate in criminal activity. Because "blood is thicker than

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[52] Using chi-square analysis, race achieved statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.014, chi-square = 6.032).

water," cutting off family is not simple or sometimes even desirable. But neither is staying clean when close family members and relatives engage in drug activity. This is particularly relevant given that 58 percent of incarcerated women and two-thirds of paroled women reported having family who had been or were currently incarcerated.

However, other women reported that their male intimate partner seriously impeded their reintegration efforts by making false accusations and assaulting them. Cara, a 31-year-old white woman, stressed, "[my boyfriend] purposely was pushin' my buttons and making me feel not good about myself…so he could be in control." When asked how her boyfriend "pushed her buttons," Cara said "by accusin' me of bein' with other men…[and] runnin' the street. Just like I'm still out there doing that and I'm not." Much more common than accusations was abuse at the hands of male intimate partners. Carol, a 34-year-old white woman, maintained, "I wasn't even home two weeks and [my boyfriend's] drinking every other night. Then all of the sudden it's every night…[and] he was already choking me and beating the crap out of me." She continued: "if I hadn't been on parole I would have called the police on him. I can't afford to have interaction with the police in the situation [that I was in]. Just for having my name ran I could be violated for my parole officer." Carol did eventually leave her abusive boyfriend but declared, "I became homeless because he started drinking all the time, everyday." Cherise was the only Black women to mention the impact that negative support systems had on the process of reintegration. She asserted, "when I got married, I kinda went through a bad marriage…[and] my husband started beatin' on me.…[I got a] black eye, busted lip, teeth missing." Because of the physical assault that she endured, Cherise absconded from parole. She explained her reasoning:

> [My marriage] kinda got physical so that made me drop my parole officer. 'Cause you know, if we fightin' and I got scars on my face…I don't wanna go through all that questioning.…My teeth knocked out and I don't wanna have to tell [my parole officer] nothin' so I kinda ran….That relationship put me to the point where I didn't go see my parole officer. 'Cause I was seein' my parole officer straight for two and half years….'Cause she gon' be questionin' me about what's goin' on. And then I have to go through this abuse class that I don't have time for….And then she might make me leave my husband. My husband was a[n] ex-offender too. And she might be makin' me say that it's time for you to leave your husband. But I'm not ready for that. I'm not prepared right now. I'm tryin' to save. I'm tryin' to get myself together so I can leave him on my own. But you know, when you on parole, they tell you what to do. And what might be good time for them might not be a good time for me.

Because she did not want her parole officer to intervene in her marital affairs, Cherise chose to avoid her all together and absconded. And when Betty found herself with no place to stay immediately following incarceration, she called the only person she could think of – her ex-boyfriend. However, she explained how he took advantage of her:

> He was a man that I had dated and we remained friends during my incarceration. He gave me a home plan. A nice home, a nice neighborhood away from everything I was used to. He was clean. He didn't use. He worked, which was something far and few between in my life that you see a man actually have a real job. He decided $500 a month rent, plus utilities, and food wasn't enough. He just started creeping into my room [to have sex] every night and that wasn't part of the plan. That wasn't part of what we agreed upon. We agreed that I would pay $500 rent and I would pay for the food and I would pay the utilities, which left him basically with nothing left to pay for except his personal things. But he started creeping into my room [to have sex] and I thought that was a bit much.

As a result, Betty said, "I left… I didn't want to go back to that man's apartment to where I was at." Not only did Betty leave her boyfriend's house but she went on the run. After a couple of days Betty maintained, "I did call [my parole officer]. I told her…why I left. She's like, 'well just come in and talk to me.' I didn't trust her to do that." Because she was certain her parole officer would send her back to prison for leaving her place of

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residence without informing her, Betty did not report to her supervising officer and went on the run for over a year.

In these accounts, Betty, Carol, and Cherise all described undergoing abuse at the hands of their male partners who provided them with a place to stay. While their living arrangements were no longer safe for them, they came to the glaring realization that they had nowhere else to reside. Even though these women were the victims of abuse, not one of them felt comfortable reporting the assault to their parole officer and asking for counsel. Although Betty later informed her parole officer of her situation, it was only after she absconded. Even then, she refused to report to her supervising officer for fear of being sent back to prison. The relationship between supervising officers and their clients are important, as research has found that trust and honesty in the relationship make it possible for women to discuss their problems and figure out how to solve them (Morash, forthcoming). Overall, these negative social networks that women encountered upon their release from prison impacted their ability to successfully reintegrate into the free world.

Unsupportive Parole Officers

Finally, one-quarter of incarcerated women remarked that the transition from prison back into the community was encumbered by their supervising officer who made their reintegration efforts difficult. This pattern was exclusive to white women.[53] Of the women who had negative relationships with their parole officer, all had female officers who were over them. Melissa, a young woman, said "[my parole officer] was out to get me." She explained why she believed this to be the case:

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[53] Using chi-square analysis, race achieved significance at an alpha level of 0.01 (p = 0.003, chi-square = 9.100).

> [O]n my job that I got [rehabbing homes] when I first got out, I was getting paid cash, $15 an hour case, okay, and was going to do a 1011 form, you know, which means I would've paid taxes every four months, okay. And she would not allow that. She said she didn't care if I had to go work at Burger King. She brought up, "because do you know how much money them people make off of you because they're not taking taxes because they're paying cash?" And I felt like that was just really not fair to me, because here I am [and] you want me to go work at Burger King when I can be making $15 an hour. What are you trying to do, sabotage me here? You know, it's hard enough out here.

And 55-year-old Christina described a negative experience she had with her caseworker who was located at the transitional house where she resided:

> Now Miss Stone, the caseworker, is extremely prejudiced. She's a Black woman [and] didn't want to deal with white people. Now it's not just me. You ask anybody, they'll tell you. It's a fact, if you're Black and she liked you, you can sit in her office. I would come to her and she'd be screaming at me, "what do you want?"….So, it's discouraging. She's the one who is supposed to set up your schedule for your job. Half of the time I went to go to work, I'm not in the computer because she didn't do it. I would have to go hunt somebody down say "hey, I'm going to be late for work, can you do this?"

The negative relationship these women experienced with their supervising officer can greatly affect their reintegration efforts. Moreover, studies have found that women with co-occurring disorders, like mental disorders and substance-involvement, are more likely to have negative outcomes when officers exert a tough stance on their client (Angell and Mahoney, 2007; Skeem et al., 2007; 2003).

A lack of communication between parole officers and the women was also common. Christina remarked: "I really didn't know [my parole officer] that well. We didn't have a relationship. They might talk to you for a few minutes…or if you get in trouble then they'll talk to you. But other than that, they don't really deal with you too much." Likewise, 46-year-old Betty complained that "[t]here was no communication whatsoever" between her and her parole officer. In fact, Betty claimed, "[t]he first thing

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out of [her] mouth when I walked in was 'squat and cough.'" Because of the supervising officer's attitude towards Betty, she proclaimed:

> I didn't like the lady and I didn't like her attitude with me. I was very intimidated….I didn't feel comfortable enough to open my mouth to her. Every time I went in I knew all I had to do was give her a urine test, show her the numbers where I was at. I was on house arrest so she knew where I was at all the time. I wasn't comfortable. I never spoke to her. I just go and pee and hand it to her. She'd get my appointment for the next time and I was gone.

Since her parole officer intimidated her, Betty did not feel comfortable speaking with her, even when faced with a dilemma. Recall that after being sexually assaulted by her ex-boyfriend, Betty absconded. Although Betty left the home where she was abused, she absconded because she did not believe that her parole officer cared about her personal situation. The lack of communication between parole officers and their clients can impact women's reintegration efforts, as communication has been found to be "the fundamental instrument by which therapeutic goals [are] achieved" (Roter and Hall, 1992: 3).

The failure to communicate can, in turn, result in parole officers being inattentive to their clients' needs. Stacey, a 39-year-old drug addict, claimed that, at the time, she liked her parole officer only because "she didn't have any demands on me whatsoever….So for an addicted person it was great." Stacey continued: "She kept allowing me to put [my psychological evaluation] off. If I didn't show up that was okay, she'd reschedule. She wasn't a very good parole officer so how could I not like her because I was addicted." And 34-year-old Carol said that the "three most important things that I needed to get done [were] mental health, a job, and outpatient drug treatment. She [my parole officer] didn't sit down with me and actually help me try to

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figure them out or which one would be the best for me." As a result, Carol questioned, "I don't know if she [my parole officer] maybe just doesn't have the resources herself or [if] they're so over case loaded." And Donna, a young woman in her mid-thirties, stated "[my parole officer] was so busy. Their case overload is so busy. It would be nice if they had more of them to really help their offenders….People need that encouragement."

In reality, probation and parole officers have large caseloads with an average of 80 parolees per officer (Clear et al., 2006), depending on the level of activity involved with the supervision. For example, in St. Louis, officers dealing exclusively with enhanced (intensive) supervision have caseloads of roughly 50 clients; officers with blended caseloads (clients requiring moderate and active supervision) have caseloads of approximately 80; and officers with cases requiring minimal levels of supervision have an average of 280 clients.[54] Clearly, the large caseloads affect how much assistance parole officers can provide to their clients. With that said, empirical evidence demonstrates that smaller caseloads result in *higher* recidivism rates because intensive supervision leads officers to uncover more of offenders' misdeeds (Petersilia and Turner, 1993). While it is easy to see how smaller caseloads will allow parole officers to detect higher rates of offending behavior, it is also possible that smaller caseloads can result in successful reintegration. If parole officers have smaller caseloads and are more in tune with their clients' needs, it may very well increase the likelihood of reintegration. It is important, however, for parole officers to meet the individual needs of their clients. Recall, support from parole officers played a large role in helping former offenders successfully reintegrate back into the free world.

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[54] This information was provided to me by the Unit Supervisor for Missouri Probation and Parole.

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In addition, findings revealed that incarcerated women in the sample reported having negative relationships with their female parole officer who hindered their reintegration efforts. Interestingly enough, paroled women discussed having established positive relationships with both female and male parole officer who facilitated their reintegration back into society.[55] Findings suggest that parole officer's gender does not determine whether their female clients are successful or unsuccessful in reintegration. Rather, consistent with prior work, (a lack of) relationships/communication between parole officers and their clients can shape women's post-release outcome to some degree. Evidence shows that both probation officers and their clients believe that the quality of their relationships strongly affect criminal outcomes (Skeem et al., 2003). Morash (forthcoming) finds that supervising officers who promote positive change among drug-addicted women allowed women to divulge their feelings and respond emotionally through discussion while also referring them to community resources. While supervising officers may develop positive relationships more easily with some clients and not others, evidence suggests that when officers communicate and listen to their female clients they will be more likely to have positive outcomes.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the various factors that impacted reintegration success and failures. When examining the reasons formerly incarcerated women successfully reintegrated into the free world, there are several things we learn. First, family played an

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[55] Unfortunately, I did not ask incarcerated women the name of the last parole officer who supervised them. This precludes me from determining whether women in the parole sample who reported positive relationships with their parole officers and the women in the incarcerated sample who reported bad relationships with their parole officers shared the same parole officer. If they did share the same officer, this would strongly indicate that the relationships that build between officers and the women do impact women's reintegration efforts. I also failed to ask women the race/ethnicity of their parole officer, which would help me to determine any cultural dynamics that come into play.

important role in facilitating women's reintegration efforts, particularly among African Americans. For these women, their family ties insulated them from some of the pitfalls that are associated with being an ex-felon. Family members who provided financial support, emotional support, and housing assistance were cited as having a positive impact on women as they transitioned from prison. While research has shown that families play a crucial role 30 days post-release (Nelson et al., 1999), the current study revealed that positive support from family members impacts long-term reintegration success as well. Moreover, even though marriage has been found to reduce criminal involvement among male ex-offenders (Laub et al, 1998; Sampson and Laub, 1993), the current study has demonstrated that strong family ties, independent of intimate partner relationships, improve female offenders' post-release outcomes.

Second, many Black and white women asserted that securing employment helped them to positively reintegrate into the community. It was common for women in the study to rely on familial and social networks to find employment. Given the difficulty ex-convicts encountered in finding a job, locating work contributes greatly to increased confidence and self-esteem. Employment can lead to increased productivity and financial security for former felons, while providing an opportunity for them to develop life skills and establish positive roles in the community (Travis, 2005; Petersilia, 2003).

Third, the use of external programs and support systems facilitated women's transition from prison to the community. Many African American and white women took part in community-based organizations, which served as a vital part of their reintegration. These agencies provided women with concrete assistance that met their specific needs post-release. Juxtaposed with external resources, parole officers were also reported to

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assist women's transition into the free world. Many attested that their parole officer had confidence in them, provided them with emotional support, and helped them find jobs and provided other resources that helped to facilitate their reintegration efforts. In sum, the combination of family support, finding a job, and access to programs and services all helped women in the study to accomplish successful reintegration.

This chapter also examined the factors resulting in failed reintegration among incarcerated women. Both African American and white women frequently cited feeling overcome with the number of competing demands that they had to meet while on parole supervision. Although conventional citizens may easily be able to meet these demands, this may not be the case for returning offenders who, in the words of Julie, "never had responsibility." Thus, for some, the pressure is too much to handle and they are unable to make it in mainstream society.

Support systems play an important role in successful reintegration. However, incarcerated women in the sample were less likely to take advantage of these, and also identified their association with negative support networks as impeding their ability to transition from prison to the free world. Contact with criminally-involved family members and abusive male partners made reintegration hard for women, especially whites. These negative relationships made it easier for women to relapse, particularly when they were falsely accused or encouraged to take part in deviant behavior. However, several women were in domestic violent relationships, and they found themselves in financial hardships when they left their partner. A couple of women even absconded from parole because they believed that they would be sent back to prison for no longer

having a home plan. Without a stable home and financial stability, successful reintegration becomes nearly impossible.

Finally, incarcerated white women identified that unsupportive parole officers made reintegration challenging, as they failed to provide them with assistance. Some reported that parole officers were intrusive in their lives; others stated that their parole officer was inattentive to their needs; and many complained of a lack of communication. As evidenced in this study, parole officers played an important role in facilitating paroled women's reintegration efforts. But unlike the parole sample, incarcerated white women perceived a lack of sincerity from their parole officers. While relationships with parole officers do not solely explain why some women fail to reintegrate, studies do suggest that women are more likely to succeed when they feel their supervising officer genuinely cares about them and their circumstances (Girshick, 2003).

CHAPTER SIX – SUCCUMBING TO THE LURE OF CRIMINAL PURSUIT

Chapter 5 documents the factors impacting reintegration success and failures among women returning to the community after incarceration. Faced with a number of needs, many return to a situation as bad as the one that prompted their initial offending. On top of that, they return to society stigmatized as an "ex-con," further excluding them from legitimate opportunities for success. It is no surprise, then, that the majority of released prisoners commit crimes. Recidivism is a common occurrence among offenders who reenter society and my sample is no exception. Overall, 35 percent of the incarcerated sample were resentenced to prison for a new crime,[56] 12 percent for a new arrest,[57] and 58 percent for a technical violation.[58] Consistent with research, a growing number of women are reincarcerated for violating the conditions of their parole. In 2007, 39 percent of female offenders in the state of Missouri returned to prison for committing a technical violation, which increased 17 percent since 1998 (Missouri Department of Corrections, 2008). The increasing number of women returning to prison for committing a technical violation has contributed to the large number of incarcerated women in Missouri, which has doubled over the past decade.[59]

Evidence shows that most released female offenders will have subsequent contact with the criminal justice system. Recent cross-state estimates of recidivism show that within three years 58 percent of women had been rearrested for a new offense, 38 percent

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[56] Women were convicted for committing an offense.

[57] Women were arrested for committing an offense but not charged with violating the law. An arrest for a law violation can result in a conviction for committing an offense; however, the findings are based on the respondents' current status at the time the data was collected.

[58] These percentages do not total 100 because one offender returned to prison for both a technical violation and a law violation.

[59] The female prison population in Missouri rose from 1,244 in 1998 to 2,847 in 2007 (Missouri Department of Corrections, 2008).

were reconvicted for a new crime, and 30 percent returned to prison (Deschenes et al., 2007). Most failures occur within the first year of release, as findings suggest that roughly one-third of women are rearrested during that period. Since evidence shows that most released offenders will recidivate, predicting risk factors for reoffending is necessary. There is longstanding interest in predicting recidivism in the field of criminology. Over the past 25 years, corrections professionals commonly use actuarial assessment tools to measure offenders' recidivism risk and identify treatment needs. Using meta-analysis techniques, Gendreau, Little, and Goggin (1996) identify a number of risk factors that best predict recidivism among men. They reveal that a number of "static" risk factors – factors concerning individuals' characteristics and life experiences that cannot be changed –are predictive of recidivism: age, race, gender, prior criminal record, juvenile antisocial behavior, family rearing practices, family/parent criminality, and intellectual functioning. In contrast, "dynamic" risk factors – values and behaviors that are sensitive to change over time – are the best predictors of recidivism, including companions, antisocial personality, social achievement, interpersonal conflict, substance abuse, and personal distress.

Actuarial risk assessment tools, such as the Level of Supervision Inventory-Revised (LSI-R), are one of the most widely used classification instrument and were designed to be gender neutral (Andrews and Bonta, 2003; Dowden and Andrews, 1999). However, the notion that actuarial risk scales predict recidivism among females in the same way they do for males continues to be widely disputed (Reisig et al., 2006; Holtfreter et al., 2004). Critics argue that the tools fail to consider women's economic marginalization, their proclivity to be involved in drug-related crimes, and the salience of

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their prior victimization experiences (Covington, 2003; Holtfreter and Morash, 2003).

Not only have actuarial risk tools been faulted for being gender insensitive, but many contend that these instruments have not been validated with female samples, and may over-classify female offenders as high risk for reoffending (Reisig et al., 2006; Van Voorhis and Presser, 2001; Bonta et al., 1995). For example, in testing the validity of a risk scale instrument among a sample of 81 females, Bonta, Pang, and Wallace-Capretta (1995) show that while the instrument is predictive of female recidivism, it fails to adequately differentiate between risk categories. Reisig, Holtfreter, and Morash (2006), in their assessment of the LSI-R, find that the instrument over-classified a significant proportion of women who were economically disadvantaged and followed gendered pathways to offending. This disparity in assessment is problematic because faulty classification can result in placing women in overly restrictive custody control and can hamper their assignment to appropriate programming (Andrews and Bonta, 2003; Brennan, 1998).

Despite the ongoing debate about whether or not actuarial risk assessment tools accurately predict female recidivism, an emerging body of literature has identified a number of factors correlated with female recidivism. In their comprehensive review of the literature, Kruttschnitt and Gartner (2003) highlight the important role of preimprisonment, demographic characteristics on parole outcomes. Overall, offenders who are younger, have a substance abuse history, or have a lengthy criminal history are more likely to recidivate (see also Deschenes, Owen, and Crow, 2007; Stuart and Brice-Baker, 2004; Dowden and Blanchette, 2002; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998; Gendreau et al., 1996).

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In addition, economic marginalization has been identified as a central influence on female criminality and recidivism. As discussed in chapter 3, economic disadvantages impacts women's initiation and persistence in crime. Many women who return home from prison are not employed. A recent multi-state analysis of reentry outcomes reveal that approximately one-third of women are employed six months following their release from prison (Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008), making reentry more challenging and recidivism more likely. In her examination of the role of economic incentives on rearrest among female ex-offenders, Jurik (1983) finds that employed women are less likely to be rearrested for economic crimes. Her study also reveals that former women offenders who receive economic compensation are less likely to recidivate. Moreover, research shows that a disproportionate number of female offenders are poor women of color from the inner-city who are often situated in social networks that are unable to provide social, economic, and emotional support (Reisig et al, 2002), which further increases the likelihood of recidivism (Holtfreter et al., 2004).

While a growing body of quantitative research has explored the correlates of recidivism among women, only a small number of qualitative studies have explored patterns of recidivism among women. In their qualitative study of 38 women, Harm and Phillips (2001) discover that drug relapse, inadequate employment, and poor relationships with children and other family members contribute to recidivism. Schulke (1993) shows that one-third of female recidivists claim that the desire to provide for their minor children contribute to their continued offending patterns. However, her study also reveals that all of the women in the non-recidivism sample cite fear of losing their children as a motivating factor to desist from crime. Given that few qualitative studies have examined

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the context in which reoffending occurs, this chapter attempts to fill this void and build on the existing literature by examining the factors that influence continued offending among female offenders.

<u>MOTIVES FOR RECIDIVISM</u>

The goal of this chapter is to explore incarcerated women's pathways back into crime by painting a picture of the precipitating events that led imprisoned women to recidivate. I turn attention to 22 women serving time in prison – 59 percent (N = 13) of these women are Black and 41 percent (N = 9) are white – who were reincarcerated for committing a new offense, a new arrest, or a technical violation. While more than half of the incarcerated sample in my sample returned to prison for violating the conditions of their parole, the majority admitted to having engaged in some type of criminal activity post-release.[60] Table 3 details what led to women's reincarceration and the types of offenses incarcerated women committed prior to their return to prison.

Three themes emerged with regard to the life contexts that contributed to their decision to reengage in crime. First, most were motivated by the need for narcotics, stemming from their drug addiction. A second theme that emerged for many women was their exposure to negative life events, such as divorce and the death of a loved one. Finally, some women described the strong influence that returning back to criminal social networks and neighborhoods had on their decision to reoffend.

While each woman revealed her own trajectory back into crime, there were several common circumstances across women's stories. In fact, the three noted here typically overlapped in women's accounts regarding the factors that motivated them to

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[60] Four incarcerated women who returned to prison for a technical violation claimed not to have committed any crimes since their last release from prison; thus, they were not included the recidivism sample.

reoffend. Figure 2 illustrates how women accounted for their reinvolvement in crime. Because some women recounted more than one pathway to recidivism, Figure 2 depicts a clear picture of the extent of their interrelationships.

Drug Motivation

Drug motivation was commonly cited by women in the sample as a factor for reoffending. Specifically, 42 percent of incarcerated women purchased and used illicit drugs to satisfy their urge to get high or they committed crimes to attain money to support their substance addiction. This pattern was more common among Black women, as 70 percent reported having engaged in illegal activity for the purpose of obtaining drugs compared to 30 percent of white women.[61] A number of chemically dependent women described a strong urge to get high prior to and following their release from prison. Kristy, a 30-year-old white woman, explained her mindset the last time she was incarcerated: "I had only been like three, like four months here [in prison] and my intentions were to just get in and out of here as quick as I could and go back to what I was doing [manufacturing, using and selling drugs]. That was exactly what I wanted to do was go back to what I was doing." Christina, a 55-year-old white woman, stated, "I like to get high. I thought probably that it had been a long time since I had gotten high. I had gotten paid, had a little cash in my pocket and thought 'hmm, why not?'" Stacey, a white 39-year-old woman, claimed, "I hadn't even wanted to quit." Stacey, however, not only described having a desire to use narcotics but she emphasized her attempts to avoid relapsing following her release from prison:

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[61] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.665, chi-square = 0.188).

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> I was terrified. I was terrified to leave my house. I knew if I left that I would have that opportunity to start usin' again. I knew that I had already set myself up to use again. I hadn't even wanted to quit. I already knew. I tried to keep five of the dollars that I was released with in case I decided to leave; I'd have a couple of bucks to work with. I hadn't set it in stone yet that I was gonna get high but I knew that I wanted to. But I didn't want to. I didn't want to leave my home. I didn't want to leave my home again because I knew the risk of gettin' high again. I didn't take any good steps, any healthy steps. I didn't want to go see [my] PO because I knew the PO was gonna have rules. You know, things she wanted me to do. Things I didn't want to do. I didn't want to go to treatment. I didn't want to do any of that. So I was dreading the first appointment 'cause I was gettin' all this responsibility. Things to get around. That's what I was sayin' last time. How am I gonna get around the drugs? How am I gonna get around goin' to treatment? How am I gonna get out of it? More than anything I didn't want to leave my house.

Here Stacey clearly acknowledged having mixed emotions about resorting to drug activity. On the one hand, she sought to evade the temptation to use illicit substances by staying home, but on the other hand, she struggled with the intense desire to get high. Although initially conflicted, her addiction soon won out and Stacey relapsed. She further explained: "When I first got out I spent time with my significant other. My kids were gone still at that point. So I only made it like one day and then I spent all my time on the streets usin' with old acquaintances."

Of those women in the sample who used drugs, nearly three-quarters (73 percent) resorted to criminal activity in order to obtain money to support their daily drug habit. Jamilla, a 32-year-old Black woman, admitted that after she relapsed she got high "every day, all day." As a result, Jamilla admitted to committing theft in order to "get money to support my habit." Likewise, once she began using drugs daily, Toyin, a 24-year-old African American woman, started stealing weekly because she "needed extra money." Tawanna, a 39-year-old African American woman, asserted, "I eventually started writing checks all over again….Didn't get caught but I still done it. Harmin' myself because I'm

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using drugs." Stacey, a white 39-year-old woman, was explicit in describing how her criminal activities were motivated by her need for money to support her drug habit:

> And from the last time I was incarcerated that's when I quit stealin' from establishments and started stealin' from people. I've used every kind of drug. I've prostituted. I've stolen from most of the people I prostituted with. I pretty much conned people out of their money. Robbery. I stole from my family. Checks, their food stamps, their medications. I've stolen cars from people that I prostituted with. Just same crimes almost everybody commits. I've sold food stamps, that's against the law. Possession for drugs. Possession for paraphernalia. All the things that go with drugs use. All the basics.

In order to support her habit, Stacey committed crimes "all day, everyday." Although heavily involved in criminal activity, Stacey acknowledged her participation in the criminal world was "just a sick circle."

Once addicted to drugs, women perceived criminal activity as an alternative route to quickly acquire money to buy drugs. This is illustrated in Lisa's statement that prostitution is "pleasurable because it's money in it and it helps support the other pleasure, which is your drug." Asked how often she engaged in prostitution, Lisa, a 32-year-old Black woman, said, "as often as I could [to] be honest with you. I mean, depends on how many dates I needed that day to get me some drugs." And because of her daily use of drugs, Lyn, a Black 32-year-old woman, claimed, "I just started doin' my own thing. Prostitutin' and doin' what I had to do for money….I didn't like to work 'cause I like to have fast money." Keisha, a 32-year-old African American woman, stated that committing crime is simply a "means to an end." After she went from having no involvement with the police to heavy participation in crime owing to her desperate need for drugs, Keisha further explained her reason for committing forgery: "I wasn't stockpiling money to put away and buy things. It was just purely to support a habit.

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Before I had a habit I had never been associated with the police or anything at all up until that point." Most women reported regularly committing economic crimes for the purpose of obtaining money. Their subsequent criminal involvement was of an instrumental nature, which was to obtain fast money to purchase illegal drugs.

While most women committed non-violent economic crimes to support their drug habit, the desire to obtain money for drugs drove one woman to commit a violent crime, resulting in grave injury. When asked the reason she committed robbery and assault, Tara, a 40-year-old Black woman, said "because I was high and I figured it would be easy money and I still wanted to get high." She continued the story:

> I was high on crack [and] I ended up going to this little Chinese store in my neighborhood to get money. And I didn't go in there with the intention of hurting anyone, but that's basically what happened. I think I kind of panicked and ended up stabbing a lady. Thank God, it didn't hit her jugular vein or anything like that, and I ended up robbing her and that's what happened. To get more money. I was already high and I wanted more money to get high on.

Tara attributed her motivation for engaging in violence to her drug addiction. Although she did not intend to hurt anyone, Tara's desire to get a hold of some money to purchase drugs resulted in the victimization of an innocent bystander. Consequently, Tara was sentenced to 25 years in prison for committing robbery.

The overarching theme in all of these accounts is that incarcerated women had not overcome their drug addiction upon their last prison release. Of the 22 incarcerated women in the sample, 86 percent reported having used drugs in their lifetime and 84 percent acknowledged having ever received drug treatment. Although the vast majority of women admitted having received some type of substance abuse treatment, studies have demonstrated that most institutional programs implemented for female offenders fail to

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address their unique needs (Pollock, 2002; Morash et al., 1998). This may explain why many incarcerated women in the sample still had the urge to use drugs once released from prison. However, based on the data I collected, I am unable to determine if incarcerated women not only participated, but completed, in-prison drug treatment, outpatient or residential drug treatment, or both. This is important, as studies suggest that substance abuse treatment programming is most effective when intensive in-prison treatment is followed with residential community treatment (Wexler et al., 1999; Inciardi et al., 1997).

Economic Motivation

While half of the incarcerated sample committed economic crimes to support their addiction, the motivation to acquire money for other reasons was mentioned by 27 percent of incarcerated women as a reason for recidivating. This pattern was cited more frequently by African American women, as 88 percent of women who were economically motivated to commit crimes were Black and 12 percent were white.[62] A number of incarcerated African American women entered the drug selling business for the sole purpose of earning extra funds. For example, while staying at a transitional house, Cherise, aged 46, claimed, "I sold a 'lil drugs but then I quickly stopped that because I could see where that was leadin' again….It was just one of them things to get my pockets right." Tawanna, who was 39-years of age, became actively involved in the local drug market – using and selling drugs – "to make a little extra money." She further explained her reason for selling drugs on a daily basis:

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[62] Using chi-square analysis, race achieved statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.10 (chi-square = 3.010, p = 0.083).

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It's just so many things that I want. And I feel while I'm workin' it's goin' to take a little bit more time to get to where if I was out there sellin' drugs I can go out there and get this money real quick and I can get it.

But just like drug addiction can drive women to commit serious offenses resulting in injury, drug dealers are also prone to facing violent encounters. Because of their illegal participation in the drug market, drug traffickers and users have limited access to formal mediation and are often targeted by robbers and burglars (Jacobs, 2000; Wright and Decker, 1997). The following exchange with Tia, a 28-year-old drug dealer but not a drug user, is illustrative:

Tia: I shot at, like, this one dude who was trying to rob me for some heroin. I shot at him. It was mainly people, I guess, like, into drugs.

Interviewer: And so, for instance, the drug user who you tried to shoot, why did you shoot him or try to shoot him?

Tia: Because he was trying to rob me.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you end up hitting him?

Tia: Uh huh (yes).

Interviewer: Okay. Where?

Tia: Didn't die though. In his neck.

Interviewer: You said he didn't die?

Tia: Nuh uh (no). In his neck.

Interviewer: Okay. And you never got charged?

Tia: Nuh uh (no).

Interviewer: I guess he never –

Tia: Because he didn't tell.

Interviewer: Okay.

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Tia: He took off running. I guess he might've collapsed in the alley or something like that. Maybe somebody found him.

Ironically, the assailant who attempted to rob Tia quickly became the victim when she resorted to violence to resolve the dispute. Tia's response to the attempted robbery is not uncommon. Since trafficking illicit commodities is illegal, criminal-victims are less likely to rely on law enforcement (Jacobs, 2000; Black, 1983). According to Black (1983), criminals are more likely to resort to personal violence as a form of "self-help" when authoritative agents are inaccessible, as is the case when a drug deal goes amiss.

Economic motivation was even discussed as a reason for reoffending among women who committed crimes unrelated to drugs. During the time she resided at a transitional house, Cherise said she engaged in prostitution because the "pay [is] real good." Jenny, a 28-year-old white woman, who was reincarcerated for committing forgery, asserted that "wanting to fit in and have everything you want and just take the easy way out" motivated her decision to recidivate. Trisha, a 43-year-old Black woman, explained why she stole credit cards: "You know, gas price is up so I don't have to go pay for gas. Just being dishonest, thinking I could get away with it….I would get gas or groceries or get whatever I thought I could get without being caught."

Similarly, Lyn, a 30-year-old Black woman, said, "I didn't like to work 'cause I like to have fast money." As a result, she claimed, "I start sellin' my body, and I saw that I can get more money from stealin'. I just stopped sellin' and just started stealin'." And Shauna, a 26-year-old African American woman, asserted that she committed forgery, "[j]ust for the money. It's good money." The money was so good that she carried out this illegal activity on a daily basis. Asked how often she engaged in forgery, she explained:

> Every day. Like every day, I would write checks. Every day, I would go. It was an everyday thing for me to get up and go write checks, except for the time when I had a job. I'd still write checks when I got out of work. I would write checks, even if I had a job, I would write checks.

Aside from drug motivation, economic motivation was also a central reason incarcerated women recidivated after their release from prison. Many incarcerated African American women in the sample engaged in illegitimate behavior because they saw crime as an alternative route to acquire quick money. A large number of women were attracted to the "fast money" that accompanies a criminal lifestyle.

Negative Events that Lead to Downfall

Aside from having the desire to obtain drugs and money, 27 percent of incarcerated women described experiencing negative life events as a reason for taking pathways back into crime. This pattern, however, was more common among white woman – who were more likely to commit drug crimes – as 71 percent of white women and 29 percent of Black women committed crimes when faced with negative events.[63] For many recidivists, facing a negative crisis, such as the death of a loved one, shaped their decision to reengage in deviant behavior. Julie explained why she resorted to using drugs:

> I was trying to find closure. My father passed away and I had a hard time with that. My father was always there for me and he was always my best friend. And leaving out of here and me facing his girlfriend and he passed away at – it was really hard for me.

In Julie's case, the death of her father evoked feelings of depression. She stated, "I didn't feel like I had any reason or purpose for living, so it really didn't matter to me. I just

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[63] Using chi-square analysis, race achieved statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.047, chi-square = 3.956).

didn't care about life in general." Consequently, Julie dealt with her loss by retreating into drug use.

Likewise, in explaining why she ran away from a transitional house, Cherise, a 46-year-old African American woman, explained, "[m]y father had died and they [the people in charge at the transitional house] didn't let me go and see my father. And there was too many emotions goin' through there….I decided to leave until I get myself together." While Cherise did not blame the staff at the transitional house for the death of her father, she did fault them for not allowing her to go and see her father who passed. As a result, because she was experiencing "too many emotions," Cherise decided to disobey the rules of the house and she absconded because she "couldn't stand to be there no more." Recall earlier that Cherise admitted to engaging in drugs sales and prostitution while she was in a transitional house. This, however, did not result in her return to prison. Instead after her father passed away and she was not permitted to see him, Cherise absconded, which resulted in her reincarceration. Findings are consistent with prior research, demonstrating that for women, strains are conducive to deviant adaptations such as drug use and depression (Broidy and Agnew, 1997; Steffensmeier and Allan, 1996).

For some women, it was not the death of a loved one but rather a quarrel or disagreement with an individual that served as the source they identified for their recidivism. Christina, a white 55-year-old woman, said, "I had been living with my moms but then I got into it with my mom. And I called my PO and I said, 'you need to find me some place to go.'" As a result, "[my parole officer] put me down in St. Mary's Honor Center. Bingo. That was it….I went there but a short period of time and went and

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got high. Came back here [to prison]." And Trisha, a 43-year-old Black woman,

explained the reason she recidivated:

> Something was going on with my car. My dad at the time was like, "I'm going to help you get this done. Just have the car towed to the house and I'll have someone to look at it." After a couple of days I was like, "Dad when are you going to have someone to look at my car?" He said something like, "I don't know how to do it," as if he didn't remember. He told me he was going to help me. It may be a little thing but when I tell somebody that I'm going to do something, if it's somebody I care about, I'm gonna do it regardless. I mean that's my dad and I felt like he broke a promise to me. I felt like he knew what I was trying to do and he knew that I wasn't working and I needed him. What do I do? I just felt frustrated and betrayed.

As a result, Trisha said, "I didn't even hesitate to go steal a credit card the same way that

I did the last time." According to Trisha, the betrayal and hurt she felt from her father

was reason enough to turn back to illegitimate activity. And Donna, a 36-year-old white

woman, who was drunk and high at the time of the offense leading to her incarceration

said, "[s]ome guy that had the crack cocaine took my money from me out of my

hand....He didn't give me my dope and he sure didn't give me my money back." Because

Donna felt cheated, she reacted violently:

> I became very mad and wanted revenge. So, I went and got my husband's truck and told my husband a lie that I had to go do this an' that. I had a friend drive me back to Fulton in my husband's truck because her truck was parked in the back of my house. When I went back to Fulton, I seen the guy and I said tell him to come out here. By then I done managed to get in the driver's seat and I was tryin' to run him over is what I was tryin' to do. I guess I was just so drunk.

Donna's act of attempted violence was spurred after having been taken advantage of by a

presumed drug dealer. With no money and no drugs, Donna sought revenge. As

mentioned earlier, because of their involvement in the illicit drug market, drug users and

dealers are less likely to rely on the police and more likely to resort to violence to resolve their own disputes (see Jacobs, 2000; Black, 1983).

Additionally, negative life events, such as a break up, also served to further exacerbate some women's criminal careers. Jane, a white 46-year-old woman, stated, "me and the dude I was living with…we had split up. And then he had a bunch of drugs and then we just got high." Likewise, Whitney, a 42-year-old white woman, said, "I had my divorce and I went to Jefferson County to get my divorce and didn't think I was going to drink....And I fell right back into my way….Stealing, driving illegally, smoking marijuana, doing a little meth, not reporting in [to my parole officer]." Asked why she committed these crimes she responded, "I didn't care anymore. It was easier to get high and drink. It was easier to drink, which leads to the other stuff." For Whitney, her divorce led her to drink, resulting in her involvement in a number of illicit activities.

These findings lend credence to Agnew's (1992) general strain theory of crime and delinquency, which suggests that deviance is an adaptation to stress. Agnew argues that three social-psychological sources of strain result in crime: the failure to achieve positively valued goals (e.g. monetary success, popularity with peers), the removal of positively valued stimuli (e.g. the death of a parent, the loss of a romantic partner), and the confrontation of negatively valued stimuli (e.g. insults, physical assault). The current findings lend support to the latter two deviance-producing strains in which women in the sample, especially whites, described returning to crime following the death of a parent, divorce or break-up, and an argument or disagreement. According to Agnew's general strain theory, crime may serve as a method to alleviate strain or manage the stress that the individual experiences.

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Falling Back into Old People, Places, and Things

It was not just women's drug and economic motivations and negative life events that led them to recidivate. Returning to "people, places, and things" were cited as reasons for taking pathways back into crime for nearly one-quarter of incarcerated women. This pattern was slightly more common among Black women, as two-thirds of African Americans and one-third of white women reported this as a reason for recidivating.[64] For some, going back to old familiar neighborhoods and people "triggered" their involvement in crime, particularly drug-related offenses. Jamilla, a 32-year-old Black woman, said "going back to the same neighborhood [and] being around the same people" motivated her decision to revert to drugs. Likewise, Tia claimed that returning to "old people, places, and things" impacted her decision to sell drugs. Asked how, the 28-year-old African American women stated:

> Because it's basically, like, when I got out, people knew that I can get
> money, you know what I'm saying. As far as getting – selling drugs over
> the other side, they would just be, like, throwing dope at me, be like,
> "here," you know what I'm saying. "You can make you some money off
> these."

For Tia, revisiting her old neighborhood and "seeing the fast money" increased the temptation to resort to drug dealing. Her statement that people were "throwing dope" at her suggests that she perceived herself as not seeking to get involved in the illicit drug market. But with no physical distance between Tia and her old criminal world, she quickly reestablished old criminal ties, and returned to her old criminal ways. Jane, a 43-year-old white woman, described the situational context surrounding her relapse:

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[64] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.658$, chi-square = 0.196).

> I had made parole in 2004 and then I was doing good. And then I had
> transferred to Springfield to be with my oldest daughter because I was
> sick, see, from doing all the drugs. So I got there and then I was doing
> real good. I completed all my classes and everything. And then my mom
> wanted me to come back there [to St. Louis] when my oldest brother had
> passed away and then she didn't have nobody now, you know, but me
> left…And so I kept telling her I didn't want to come there [to St. Louis], I
> didn't want to go there because I was going to get locked up as soon as I
> got there, because I knew as soon I got there, I'd run into somebody I
> know and I'd get high. And that's about kind of, like, what happened.

Recall, after Jane and her live-in boyfriend split up, she relapsed. However, it was only after she went back to St. Louis that she ran into an old friend and, ultimately, used drugs within 48 hours of her return to the city. For Jane, avoiding familiar people, places, and things required getting away from the entire city of St. Louis. She found it necessary to stay away from her neighborhood and the people with whom she used drugs. Although she managed to stay drug-free for a period of time, Jane was unable to stay clean upon later returning to her former criminal world, spurred by a family obligation.

Each account reveals the ease of reestablishing relationships with old peer networks upon returning to preincarceration neighborhoods. In some cases, women placed themselves in high risk situations by seeking out old friends. Immediately following her release, Melissa, a 44-year-old white woman, admitted, "that night [itself]…I got high." She explained: "Didn't plan on it, but I did. Because I went to see some old friends who I hadn't seen since I've been incarcerated. And I knew they get high." And Rachelle, a Black 26-year-old woman, claimed the reason she ended up riding in a stolen vehicle was because she "got it from one of the 'lil guys" with whom she associated. For some, contact with old friends who used drugs undermined their self-control to stay clean. Jamilla, a 32-year-old African American woman, said "wanting to fit in" with her drug-using friends was one reason, among others, that she relapsed. At

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the time she was constantly "thinking about them" more than herself and about "making them happy."

Findings from the study suggest that, for some women, neighborhoods play a role in shaping their social networks. Several women claimed that returning to a criminal environment increased exposure to deviant peers. Results are consistent with prior studies demonstrating that when offenders are removed from their old neighborhood, then recidivism decreases, largely by altering social relations. For example, Sampson and Laub (2003) find that residential change provided desisting offenders with the opportunity to sever ties with unsatisfactory peer and family relationships. Also, a number of studies have documented lower recidivism among offenders who distance themselves from criminal peers (Warr, 1998; 1993; Reiss and Farrington, 1991). This is not surprising given that criminologists have recognized that interaction with deviant peers is one of the strongest predictors of deviant behavior (Warr and Stafford, 1991; Matsueda and Heimer, 1987). Warr (1998: 212) even concludes that "changing patterns of peer relations over the life course – what might be called 'peer careers' – are essential to understanding criminal life-course trajectories." Overall, offenders seem more likely to recidivate when their criminal social networks are geographically based.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the factors that led incarcerated women to reoffend following their discharge from prison. More than one-third of Black and white women I interviewed had returned to prison for committing a new crime, and more than one-half had returned for a technical violation. Despite the large number of women who were reincarcerated for violating their parole, the vast majority admitted to having reengaged

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in crime, although they did not get caught for their offense. This chapter reveals five salient factors that incarcerated women identified as reasons for recidivating. First, drug motivation served as a main reason for reoffending. The desire for drugs was described by women as a dominant reason that led them to commit economic crimes. Drugs and criminal participation were everyday activities that women engaged in, despite the risk of getting caught and going back to prison. Women's accounts revealed their perception that criminal involvement served as an alternative route to make money to support their drug addiction.

Second, the vast majority of women admitted that they received some type of substance abuse treatment. These findings lead one to question why, then, most women still had not overcome their drug habit once released from prison. Several limitations must be noted. The available research data lacked measures of magnitude of substance abuse among incarcerated women, and the length, time, fidelity, and intensity of treatment programming. Individuals with more serious drug problems are more likely to fail to complete treatment; however, the dichotomous measure of drug use employed in the study fails to capture the nature and magnitude of drug addiction. In addition, the available data did not include the different forms of treatment programming that women received. Studies have shown that in-prison treatment followed by outpatient drug treatment is most effective (Wexler et al., 1999; Inciardi et al., 1997). Yet, in the current study it was impossible to ascertain the measure of the treatment programs given the available data.

Third, economic motivation was commonly cited as a reason for recidivating among African American women who engaged in crimes that were both related and

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unrelated to drugs. Prostitution, forgery, theft, and drug dealing were common economic crimes in which Black women participated. Many women became attracted to the criminal lifestyle because they perceived criminal activity as a path towards attaining "fast money." For many, the desire for "easy money" was likely tied to poor economic conditions and the desire to attain the American Dream. As noted in chapter 3, the economic marginalization of a subset of women motivated their initial involvement in consumer-based crimes. But the persistent structural disadvantage that many poor African American women face coupled with the stigma of having a criminal record often prompt Black female ex-offenders to continue with criminal behavior in order to attain material success. African Americans strongly subscribe to the goal of the American Dream (Hochschilds, 1995); however, when the means to acquire economic rewards are blocked or limited, then the likelihood of criminal involvement increases (see Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001).

Fourth, facing negative life events caused many white women in the sample to resort back to crime. Those unable to cope with the challenges of life retreated to drug use or other forms of illegitimate activities. Experiencing a negative crisis led to feelings of frustration, hurt, betrayal, and depression. As I showed in this chapter, these feelings set the stage for involvement in deviant behavior. Crime served as a coping mechanism to manage strain for many women. Recall in chapter 3 that over one-third of incarcerated women initially turned to drugs to cope with negative life events. Findings show a continuous cycle of women resorting to drugs to medicate their feelings, which have impacted their ability to successfully desist from crime.

Finally, reoffending was not just reserved for those who were motivated by money or who experienced negative life events. Both African American and white women described that their return to old "people" and "places" led them to do criminal "things." Specifically, returning to old familiar neighborhoods and people triggered addicts' involvement in drug-related offenses. Returning to the same residential neighborhood appeared to amplify exposure to criminal peer networks, which increased women's probability of recidivating.

This chapter revealed that subsequent offending is a common occurrence among inmates returning home from prison. However, not all former prisoners succumb to temptation and recidivate. In fact, some manage to avoid criminal activity all together. The following chapter explores the process of desistance among former offenders.

CHAPTER SEVEN – THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW: PATHWAYS OUT OF CRIME

In continuing to explore the reentry of women into St. Louis, it is essential to look at the reasons formerly incarcerated offenders choose to abstain from crime and the methods they use to sustain crime-free behavior. Of primary concern are the questions of *why* and *how* women desist from crime. Understanding the factors that lead to desistance is particularly important in shaping intervention that diminishes the risk of reoffending among those already involved in crime (Sampson and Laub, 2001). Despite its significance, several scholars suggest that desistance remains poorly understood (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Farrington, 2001; Farrall and Bowling, 1999). Although it has been commonly accepted that most offenders eventually desist from crime (Shover, 1996; Mulvey and Aber, 1988), less is known about the motivators and methods that lead former prisoners to the process of desistance.

Early work on desistance theory emerged from attempts to explain the age-crime relationship (Goring, 1919; Quetelet, 1833) and most of these studies rely largely on all male samples and identify specific causal factors. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1940) argue that maturation is the key factor in explaining desistance from crime. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990: 136) suggest that "[c]rime declines with age. Spontaneous desistance is just that, change in behavior that cannot be explained and change that occurs regardless of what else happens."

While many scholars maintain that maturational reform is the most influential explanation of the desistance process, others argue that age alone cannot explain change (Rutter, 1996; Sampson and Laub, 1992). As described in chapter 1, a commonly cited

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explanation of desistance is Sampson and Laub's (1993) age graded social control theory, which asserts that informal ties to social institutions, like marital attachment and commitment to stable employment, can aid in the process of reform for male offenders. They argue that individuals with strong bonds have higher stakes in conformity and more to lose from social sanctions; thus, they are less likely to engage in criminal behavior.

Other researchers posit that desistance is not merely a product of external forces of social control, but rather a result of human agency. To better understand the processes that facilitate reform, some desistance theorists have focused on these pathways as a function of the individual's self-identity, choices, and lifestyle (Giordano et al., 2002; Shover, 1996). Emerging from symbolic interactionist theory, research on these cognitive and behavioral shifts suggest that the impact of "turning points" (i.e. marital attachment and job stability) on an individual's life may vary depending on the actors' level of awareness about their problems, motivation and openness to change, or interpretation of events (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001).

While some researchers state that structural transitions (i.e. getting married and finding a job) alone explain reform, others maintain that a personal decision to desist, in and of itself, produces behavioral change. However, some scholars claim that neither structure nor individual action alone can adequately explain the underlying mechanisms of desistance (Sampson and Laub, 2005; Farrall and Bowling, 1999). Refining their earlier work, and using a life-course perspective, Sampson and Laub (2005) contend that both structural support and human agency are important elements in constructing trajectories over the life course. They conclude that "[c]hoice alone without structures of support, or the offering of support alone absent a decision to desist, however inchoate,

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seems destined to fail" (Sampson and Laub, 2005: 43). In other words, both changes in societal forces and an individual's resolution to change are implicated in the process of reform.

Despite the developing body of scholarship examining the process of desistance among male offenders, little is known about why and how women desist from crime. For the most part, mainstream criminology remains largely inattentive to women's experiences. While studies have explored issues of crime and desistance among men, it begs the question as to whether such theories are applicable to women (Daly and Chesney-Lind, 1988). Currently, there remains a lack of studies focusing on women and crime and how gender may shape criminological theories more broadly (Messerschmidt, 2006; Giordano et al., 2002).

Limited research on women's pathways out of crime has prompted scholars to explore the desistance process among women. Some researchers have found few gender differences between men and women who desist from crime (Maruna, 2001; Jamieson et al., 1999; Baskin and Sommers, 1998; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998; Sommers et al., 1994; Eaton, 1993). For instance, Jamieson and colleagues (1999) assert that maturation, transitions, changed lifestyle, and relationships all play an important role in crime cessation for both young men and women. Similarly, after conducting interviews on violent women offenders who desisted from crime, Baskin and Sommers (1998) claim that the process out of crime is similar to those associated with desistance among men, which include: 1) recognizing problems associated with criminal involvement (e.g. socially disjunctive experiences, delayed deterrence); 2) restructuring of the self (e.g.

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public announcement that offending will stop, new social identity); and 3) maintenance

of the decision to stop offending (e.g. new social networks).

Notwithstanding such findings, evidence also suggests that the patterns of

desistance may vary across gender. Although informal bonds, such as marriage and

employment, have been used to explain men's cessation from offending, empirical

research suggests that these factors may have differential effects on female offenders'

desistance from crime (Giordano et al., 2002; Li and MacKenzie, 2002; Simons et al,

2002). Recently, King and colleagues (2007) show that marriage only reduces criminal

involvement for women with moderate propensities to marry; marriage had no deterrent

effect for women with low capital in the marriage pool. Among a study of male and

female offenders sentenced to shock probation, Alarid and colleagues (2000) discover

that women who are married to or living with a male significant other are significantly

more likely to participate in drug or property crimes. Furthermore, work by Griffin and

Armstrong (2003) reflects the complexity of the relationship between marriage and

criminality. While women probationers cohabiting with a man are less likely to commit

non-drug offenses, they are more likely to participate in drug-related activities.

Yet, research also suggests that family and children may serve as a driving force

towards change for women (Alaird et al., 2000; Jamieson et al., 1999; Daly, 1998;

Steffensmeier and Allen, 1996; Leibrich, 1992). Giordano and colleagues (2002) reveal

that neither marriage nor employment is strongly related to the likelihood of desistance

for women. Rather, their study shows that women are more likely to describe religious

transformation and their children as reasons for desistance. Similarly, Graham and

Bowling's (1995) study show that desistance occur more abruptly for young women than

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men and is often linked to childbearing. In assessing patterns of gendered desistance, Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) reveal that the presence of children and a "straight" (clean criminal record) best friend increases the likelihood of desistance from illegal earning, highlighting the role that familial and social relationships can play in shaping desistance among women.

Similar to marriage, the research on employment and desistance has been mixed. While there is some evidence that attachment to work can dissuade women from committing crimes (Simons et al., 2002; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998), most have difficulty securing a job immediately following their release from prison (Mallik-Kane and Visher, 2008; Schram et al., 2006). This is further complicated by women's low levels of education and previous work experience, lack of childcare, and discrimination (Golden, 2005; Greenfeld and Snell, 1999). In addition, social capital varies by gender (and its intersection with race/ethnicity), as evidenced by the persistence of employment stratification (Browne and Misra, 2003) and the differential effects of the welfare state on females and their children (Hays, 2004).

While current desistance studies have revealed some similarities and differences across gender, few qualitative studies have examined the underlying mechanisms of desistance for women. Only a handful of research has explored the desistance process from the perspectives of female offenders (Leverentz, 2006; Giordano et al., 2002; Katz, 2000; Baskin and Sommers, 1998; Sommers et al., 1994). I attempt to add to this small but growing body of research by exploring the motivators for desistance and the methods and resources women use to maintain desistance.

FINDINGS

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To examine the circumstances and processes involved in desistance from

offending, I first investigate 15 former women offenders [65] (two-thirds of these women

were Black and one-third were white) motives for choosing to avoid continued

involvement in criminal behavior, followed by the strategies they used to maintain

desistance. When asked their reasons for abstaining from criminal offending, the women

in the study discussed a range of factors that motivated their decision to take pathways

out of crime. Most women reported that the fear of imprisonment and threat of sanctions

affected their decisions to desist. A number of females stated that they wanted to stay

connected to their children and reestablish their parental roles. Some claimed that they

simply lost the desire to continue a criminal lifestyle, which was associated to

experiencing personal deterioration and hitting "rock-bottom." Similar to the previous

chapter on incarcerated women's motivation for reoffending, there were a number of

common circumstances across paroled women's stories regarding the reasons they

terminated their criminal behavior. In fact, the reasons noted here rarely stood alone in

paroled women's accounts of why they stopped offending. Figure 3 illuminates the

extent of the overlapping factors that affected these women's decisions to move out of

crime.

Motives for Desistance

Avoid Imprisonment

To begin with, when asked about the reasons they chose to terminate their

offending behavior, two-thirds of desisters in the sample asserted that they sought to

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[65] In order to be included in the desistance sample women had to meet three criteria: 1) not returned to
prison for committing an offense two to three years post-release; 2) self-report that they remained crime
free since their last release from prison; and 3) had three or more arrests at the time of their last
incarceration.

avoid imprisonment. This pattern was commonly mentioned by Black women, as 73 percent of African American women cited this as a reason to cease their criminal behavior compared to 27 percent of white women.[66] Janelle, a 37-year-old Black woman, stated, "I don't want to go back to prison." And Jackie, a 38-year-old African American woman, said, "I don't never want to be handcuffed again." Likewise, Jessica, a young white female, asserted, "I don't want to get into trouble." In response to why she did not engage in crime, Cleshay, who was a 41-year-old African American woman, questioned: "Why should I? Who wants to go back to jail? No ma'am." And 49-year-old Terwanda, an African American, said that prison is "no place for a human."

Many African American women dreaded the possibility of reincarceration because they did not want to endure the rigid control and surveillance that characterizes correctional facilities. Cleshay noted, "just being incarcerated with somebody telling you what to do, when to do it, when to piss, when to shit. You know, everyday for five and a half years, that's a lot to wake anybody up." Likewise, 38-year-old Trina said, "I don't like for nobody to tell me nothing to do, tell me what to do, and what I'm not going to do as an adult." Because of hyper-surveillance, previous studies have demonstrated that incarcerated women are more likely to be cited for minor rule violations and be punished more severely for them (McClellan, 1994). Some critics contend that the regime of control in women's prisons, which consists of considerable scrutiny, amounts to infantilization or treating women like children (Belknap, 2001; O'Brien, 2001).

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[66] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.409$, chi-square = 0.682).

Increasing security and supervision at the WERDCC over the past few years was also cited as reasons for not engaging in crime. Gloria, who was a 44-year-old woman, explained:

> Prison changed from the first two times I was there. It's called controlled movement now. It used to be free. You could just walk out the door and stay on the yard all day and all night but now you can't. So you practically locked down all the time and you constantly get counted. That made me just want to be at home, just want to be at home. I'm not going back to prison again...I'm scared. I'm on parole.

Gloria's comments about the WERDCC having "controlled movements" and being constantly counted highlight the changing institutional context in women's correctional facilities. In recent decades, criminal punishment has undergone a fundamental transformation, resulting in a "new penology" (Feeley and Simon, 1992). The advent of the new penology has changed the meaning of female imprisonment, as this "new culture of crime control" has been concerned with identification, classification, and management of prisoners (Garland, 2001). The growth of women's prisons and the move towards gender parity in corrections has resulted in a growing number of women being subject to disciplinary regimes similar to that of male correctional facilities. Such changes in penal ideologies and practices have led to a reconfiguration in women's prison experiences (Kruttschnitt et al, 2000). For instance, 44-year-old Alissa, noted multiple themes, including the belief that prison controlled and dehumanized her as an African American woman:

> I looked at where I was at and what I was in and I seen myself living like an animal. I saw myself as a monkey in a cage and all the white people do is feed me three meals a day. I refuse to allow myself to be dehumanized, humiliated. I refuse to live my life like an animal again because I don't see prison as prison. I see prison as a cage. A dog cage, or monkey cage. It's an animal cage period. I refuse. I will not live my life like that anymore. I refuse…You don't go home until the white man say you can go home.

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In her accounts, Alissa explained how the prison system not only controlled her, but left her feeling powerless and dehumanized as a Black female. These findings are consistent with qualitative research suggesting that women's race/ethnicity shape their prison experience (Bosworth and Carrabine, 2001). Because of her incarceration experiences, Alissa was adamant that she would not return to prison. She, and several desisting women in the study, said they refused to subject themselves to the humiliation and deprivations of imprisonment.

Women in the desistance subsample reported that evading reincarceration was a primary motive for making the decision to cease their criminal lifestyle, a pattern consistently found in the research literature (Shover, 1996, Cromwell et al., 1991). In their study, Amodeo and colleagues (1992) suggested that avoidant strategies, such as fear of arrest, among others, is the most common reason for not drinking, which can serve as a powerful catalyst for change. The threat of sanctions and the desire to avoid the consequences of imprisonment were frequently discussed among desisting women in the study as reasons for going straight. This has also been found in studies on males (Shover, 1996; Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986). Here we see that criminal justice sanctions and the pains of imprisonment serve as deterrent factors, which are related to women's decision to halt their offending behavior.

Stay Connected with Children

In addition to the desire to avoid the consequences of imprisonment, the presence of children can serve as an important stake in conformity. The majority of females on parole have children. In the current sample, 87 percent of desisting women reported having children at the time of their last incarceration and 77 percent had minor children.

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Yet, only 50 percent of these mothers had custody of their underage children prior to their last incarceration.[67] While few women were the primary caregiver of their minor children prior to their last incarceration, 27 percent of women who were in the process of desistance discussed the risk of being separated from their children served as a reason to stop offending. This pattern was similar across race, as 50 percent of Black and white women cited their children served as a reason for changing their criminal ways.

Rebecca, a 38-year-old white woman, who had been convicted of forgery, said that doing time in prison was "basically, a reality check. I was away from my kids for three years. I missed a lot of their life in those three years. And what I did to help take care of them prior was not worth being taken away from them for three years." Brianna, a 32-year-old Black female who was convicted of theft, concurred: "I also made my kids a promise that I would never leave them…when I went to prison I left my kids. So when I came home I promised them that I will never go away again." Bridget, a 26-year-old white woman previously convicted of forgery who had a job and her own place, said, "I'm proud of the things that I do…and I wouldn't want to jeopardize it for anything, or my daughter." Earlier, Bridget stated, "I don't want to go back" to prison; however, in addition to this reason Bridget was not willing to risk losing all that she had, including her daughter. Likewise, Trina, a Black 38-year-old woman who was convicted of theft, explained when she made the decision to stop her offending behavior:

> So mentally [prison] had me like, "I can't keep going through this. I can't
> put my kids through this. My kids need me"…I want my kids. I got to get
> my kids back. And if I don't get my attitude and get myself together and
> make up mind that's this is something I don't want to continue to do –

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[67]This is not comparable to the national population where two-thirds of mothers in state prisons reported living with their children in the month before or just prior to their incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008).

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come in and out of prison – then this is gonna be a career thing for me. And my kids is not going to – you know they going to have a mother but a part-time mother 'cause half the time I'm at home, half the time I'm out on the streets stealing or I'm either incarcerated. And they staying with this family member or that family member. So mentally it worked on me and I think Jennifer that's how I came to the conclusion by me being a child in the juvenile system I didn't want my kids to grow up and be children without they parent.

Trina, like several other women, discussed the importance of being in their children's lives and reestablishing their parental role. This is consistent with existing theoretical research, suggesting that attachment to children have strong positive effects for women (Alaird et al., 2000; Daly, 1998; Steffensmeier and Allan, 1996) and childbearing serves as a motivating factor for change (Giordano et al., 2002; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998; Grahman and Bowling, 1996). Research suggests that children provide high levels of social satisfaction and attachment for women (Edin and Kefalas, 2005) in the same way that marital relationships do for men. Motherhood has strong social credence, and the development of a prosocial identity around children appears to be an integral part of reform. From a control perspective, children can change routines, affect peer relationships, and engender strong attachment.

With that said, it is important to note that the vast majority of recidivists did also have children; yet, they failed to desist. Specifically, 82 percent (compared to 87 percent of the desistance sample) had children and 89 percent (compared to 77 percent of the desistance sample) had minor children. While more women in the recidivism sample were mothers of underage children, only 38 percent (compared to 50 percent of the desistance sample) reported having custody of their children prior to their incarceration. It may be that attenuated ties between mothers and their children prior to and during incarceration disrupt the potential role that children could have on the process of

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desistance. In addition, recall in chapter 5 that a few women reported feeling overwhelmed and unprepared with the obligations of motherhood, which impacted their ability to successfully reintegrate. This, in turn, may impact women's decision to recidivate rather than to desist from crime. For example, in a qualitative study exploring women and recidivism, Schulke (1993) finds that nearly one-third of women mentioned the desire to provide for their minor children as a reason for continuing their criminal behavior. Consequently, for some, motherhood may contribute to the likelihood of recidivism.

Lost Desire to Commit Crimes

The decision to desist from crime was also preceded by a loss of desire to engage in risky illegal behavior. In particular, two-thirds of women mentioned this as a reason to cease criminal behavior. This pattern was cited more frequently among Black women, as 70 percent reported losing the desire to commit crimes compared to 30 percent of white women.[68] For these women, they described simply not wanting to live a criminal lifestyle. Sandy, a white 34-year-old woman who was convicted of robbery, said, "I have no desire to live that way." When asked what changed her mind, she stated, "Me. I don't want to associate with them kind of people, them kind of things, or have that kind of result. I don't." Gloria, a 44-year-old Black woman who had been arrested 13 times and convicted of assault on a police officer stated, "I don't want to do anymore."

Likewise, Janelle, a Black 37-year-old woman who was convicted of robbery said "that's not the life I want anymore." Along similar lines, Rebecca, a young white female, attested, "I don't have a desire to commit any crimes." And LaToya, a young Black

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[68] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.699, chi-square = 0.150).

woman, simply stated, "I mean, that's not me." Jackie, a 38-year-old African American woman claimed, "I'm getting too old for that. I don't want to be handcuffed again. And I'm just tired. I'm tired. I don't like to be told what to do all the time." This growing sense of tiredness, as noted by Jackie, has been commonly cited among male offenders as a reason for desisting (Shover, 1996; Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986). For some women, they lost the desire to commit crimes because they "burnt out," aged out, or simply drifted away from a criminal lifestyle, which suggests a weighing of costs and benefits of crime.

Losing the desire to engage in crime was associated with experiencing personal deterioration and having a "rock-bottom" encounter, all of which motivated women's decision to exit crime. Most women's lives had been controlled by a compelling need for drugs. Several had severe drug addictions that took precedent over everything in their lives, which spiraled out of control until they were arrested, convicted, and incarcerated. A number of these women reported that they were delivered from the demons of drugs as a result of their incarceration. For example, Jackie, a 49-year-old African American female began using drugs on a regular basis at the age of 14 and dealing when she was 17 years old. She stated that "prison saved me." Asked how, she explained:

> 'Cause if I hadn't went to prison, I wouldn't have survived though. I wouldn't have made it. And people look at prison as a bad thing. Prison is not always a bad thing. Prison saved me 'cause this how bad I had – that last run, that's how bad I was. And somebody was gonna kill me or I was gonna kill myself.

And Cleshay, a 41-year-old Black woman who used drugs regularly for 25 years, said, "I feel, like if I hadn't been rescued, I probably would have died out there, in the horrors of active addiction…[Prison] helped change my life." Likewise, Bridget, a 26-year-old

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white woman, had used and sold methamphetamine for 10 years and stated, "[prison] saved my life I feel…Because of where I was right before I got locked up. I feel like that I was either gonna die or go to prison, one of the two, and I feel like prison saved my life. I was a junkie, and I was bad." As all three women noted, they were on a destructive path where death was perceived as imminent; however, it was imprisonment that prevented them from continuing to feed their drug habit.

I noted earlier that the vast majority of desisters sought to avoid imprisonment. Central to this theme was that correctional facilities were viewed negatively as a result of increasing punitiveness and control. Yet, this counters women's accounts that imprisonment helped redirect many of their lives. Findings revealed that drug addicts, in particular, were more inclined to admit having benefited from having been incarcerated and acknowledge that prison "saved" them, even though they simultaneously disliked being confined.

For some, the decision to avoid a criminal lifestyle came only after facing a life or death situation and enduring a rock-bottom crisis. This is further illustrated in the following exchange with Gloria, a 44-year-old African American woman who regularly used and sold drugs for almost 30 years:

Gloria: You have to hit rock bottom. Somewhere down the line you have to hit rock bottom. A lot of people I know that's in prison, same crime, haven't hit bottom. A lot of them just started. They think it's fun.

Interviewer: What was your bottom?

Gloria: My bottom was being sick and tired of being sick and tired of myself. Tired of hurting my mother. Another thing, my father got very sick with leukemia. I didn't know about it. He was in and out of the hospital the year before I got out. They didn't think he was gonna make, never thought he was gonna make it. I prayed, I prayed, I prayed. I just said, "Lord,

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> please just let me see my daddy again. I'll never, never, never, come back
> to prison again. I will not do anything wrong"…That was my rock bottom.

Gloria described the emotional impact of hitting rock bottom, which motivated her to halt her offending behavior. This experience of personal deterioration led to dissatisfaction with the direction her life was headed, contributing to her decision to change. It is important to note, however, that while many women described that doing time in prison led them to take inventory of their lives, for Gloria it was a combination of experiencing personal problems, social stress, and dissatisfaction with her own life that affected her decision to desist from a life of crime.[69] Gloria had been incarcerated three times prior without the incarceration experience breaking her; thus, it would be a mistake to interpret her motive for crime cessation as a result of doing time in prison. Rather, she came to acknowledge the problems connected with her participation in crime, and this gave her reason to desist from a criminal lifestyle.

A number of women made the decision to abstain from participation in crime only after they were incarcerated. It was in prison where they received help for their substance addiction, including drug treatment, individual counseling, and self-help groups in an effort to change their lives around. Imprisonment provided many women with a means of escape from the addiction, allowing them an opportunity to reflect on their past experiences and envision future goals for themselves. Cleshay stated that "[prison] helped me look at life on a whole new other level, a different aspect now. That life is real precious in value." And Sandy claimed, "[prison] made me look to see who I was 'cause

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[69]Shortly after Gloria was released from prison, her father died. While saddened by her father's death, she remained grateful for the opportunity to have been able to see her father. The following comments are illustrative: "But he died. It'll be two years in June. But I can say this much. I got to spend time with him because he could have died when I was in prison."

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I always wear [a] mask." Consistent with prior studies on men, the experience of imprisonment was identified as a catalyst for desistance (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Meisenheider, 1977).

Jackie, an African American woman, provided a much more layered analysis of her decision to abstain from criminal activity while she was imprisoned, tied to her own healing experience from being sexually assaulted. She noted that she was victimized as a child, and then shifted to holding herself accountable for her actions:

> I always felt like when I was growin' up that I was a victim because of stuff that I went through – I was being mistreated and all that. And I ran on that for a whole lotta years. Doin' people, going and stealin' people's stuff, takin' they stuff, just doin' people the way I wanted to do 'em because I had been sexually abused. My mama gave me away. And when I went to Vandalia [prison]…when I went there, I had time to heal from within…I had to start on the inside, and I learned how to be accountable and accept the things that I did and realize that I wadn't no victim. I was victimizin' folks because no matter what, I still knew right from wrong. So I grew up at prison.

A substantial body of research documents the link, like that described by Jackie, between childhood victimization and offending (Widom, 2000; Maxfield and Widom, 1996; Widom, 1989). While most former offenders in the study were victimized, several believed that prison provided them with an alternate pathway they could take in life, which contributed to their decision to desist. It was in prison where many drug addicted women got off drugs, allowing them to take stock of their lives. In Jackie's case, during her imprisonment, she came to recognize that her criminal activity was morally wrong and adversely impacted the lives of others. As such, her rock-bottom encounter coupled with an attitudinal change that crime is wrong, enabled Jackie to make the decision to terminate her offending behavior. Only after facing a life or death situation in which

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their lives spiraled out of control did several women decide to cease their criminal activity.

These accounts are rather suggestive. Overall, women clearly chose to quit the life of crime for rational reasons. This gives credence to analyses of the importance of rational choice models for understanding the reasons offenders desist from crime (Newman et al. 1997; Cornish and Clarke, 1986). A considerable body of research documents that when the expected payoffs for legitimate behavior exceed potential payoffs from criminal participation, offenders are more likely to go straight (Shover, 1996; Glaser, 1964). When asked why they stopped offending, former women offenders in the sample typically responded, "I don't want to go back to prison," "I'm tired," "I hit rock-bottom," or provided other rational reasons. While such responses are similar to what other researchers have found (Waldorf, 1983; West, 1978), what is particularly noteworthy is that, for some women, the expected payoffs they discussed were with regard to restoring relationships with children and family. Although these findings are certainly different from how cost and benefit are typically characterized, for these female desisters, the benefit of reestablishing familial relationships factored into their rational decision to cease offending.

It is not surprising to learn that many offenders decide that crime does not pay when languishing in prison. While the decision to desist appears rational on the part of offenders, Maruna (2001: 24) states that understanding the "rationality of such decisions, however, should not be confused with understanding the *process* of going straight and *staying* that way." Thus, while former offenders may provide rational reasons for

abstaining from crime, this is not the same as understanding how they desist from crime. It is to this question that I now turn.

Methods for Desistance

Among the subsample of desisting offenders, women brought a shared understanding of the reasons they chose to shift from a criminal lifestyle to a crime-free life. The motives that paroled women gave were tied to their attempts to avoid reincarceration, to stay united with their children, and some lost the desire to commit crimes, which was associated with experiencing personal deterioration and having a rock-bottom encounter. While it may not be surprising to learn the incentives for choosing to avoid crime since the risks are high and the consequences are great, it is important to understand the context in which desistance occurs. As noted, the initial reason for ceasing criminal behavior is the first step towards change. However, once the decision has been made to terminate offending, the second step involves actually desisting, and then sustaining the change. As Earls and colleagues (1993: 291) note, "the skills required for initiating behavior change are usually different from those required for maintaining it" (Earls et al., 1993: 291). Of central concern in this next section is this question of *how*: How do formerly incarcerated women offenders desist from crime and how do they continue nondeviant behavior in the face of challenges and obstacles?

Desisters in this sample described a number of methods used to take pathways out of crime. When asked how they managed to abstain from criminal activity, many asserted that they made a personal commitment to change. A few stated that securing a job was a means used to avoid deviant behavior. The majority, however, claimed that changing physical locations and social networks were necessary to maintaining a crime-

free lifestyle. Yet for others, eliminating, rather than changing, peer networks from their lives provided paths for desistance. In this section, I explore the strategies former women offenders used to avoid continued involvement in criminal behavior.

Individual Commitment to Change

To begin with, 40 percent of paroled women stated that making an individual commitment to change led them to sustain desistance. The resolve to abandon crime, however, was not common across race, as 83 percent of African Americans compared to 17 percent of white women cited this as a method to avoid offending.[70] For example, 44-year-old Alissa, a Black woman, said that she stopped committing crime by changing her "thought process period – from negative to positive." And, Terwanda, a 44-year-old African American woman, stated, "I changed my own life….It's within your heart to change yourself." Similarly, Bridget, a 26-year-old white former drug addict, explained how she managed to stay clean for six years:

> I'm the type of person that when I make my mind up, when I set my mind
> to doing something, I do it…a goal that I set while I was there [in prison]
> was one thing that I was not going to do, I was not going to use when I
> came home. I was not going to do it. And I haven't. I knew I wasn't.

Some women were determined to stop living a criminal lifestyle upon release from prison. This is evident in the account of Gloria, a 44-year-old Black female: "I came out of prison with a set mind on how I want my life to go forward. So I did it. I walked through [New Beginnings C-Star],[71] 11 months straight drug-free, non-stop, [and] graduated." Janelle, a 37-year-old African American, claimed, "one of my goals when I

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[70] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 ($p = 0.264$, chi-square = 1.250).

[71] New Beginnings C-Star is a not-for-profit organization that provides outpatient treatment and counseling for adults and adolescents who are chemically dependent. The goal of the organization is to promote sobriety through improved individual, family, and social functioning.

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came out – I just say 'Lord, I don't never want to go back to prison.' My mind was set up that I no longer wanted to do drugs. I no longer wanted to sell my body. I no longer wanted to be a victim or have victims." And Brianna, a Black 37-year-old woman, asserted, "I made myself a promise….I just made a vow to myself and God that I was going to walk parole down and just come on off of it."

In all of these accounts, women made a pledge to themselves to cease their criminal behavior. Once motivated to change on the inside, women took "agentic" steps towards desistance by changing their mindset and then following through with their commitment. A recent body of literature has highlighted the importance of individuals serving as agents of their own change. Maruna (2001) contends that people who go straight undergo a change in self-conception and that "recovery is an individual, agentic, and purposeful process." Like Maruna, Giordano and colleagues (2002) assert that cognitive shifts serve an integral part in the transformation process. Other investigations into desistance likewise have emphasized the role of personal commitment. Adams (1997: 334-335) states:

> Substantial and lasting changes in criminal behavior rarely come about only as a result of passive experience, and such changes are best conceptualized as the outcome of a process that involves significant participation by the offender, who, in many respects, acts as his or her own change agent.

Likewise, Baskin and Sommers (1998) claim that "forming a commitment to change" is the first stage of the desistance process. This marks the beginning of change, as without it desistance cannot occur. Making a personal commitment to change indicates a cognitive shift, which is a precursor to behavioral change (Laub and Sampson,

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2001: 41). All of these are necessary to begin the long-term process of desistance (Maruna, 2001).

Securing Employment

While some made subjective changes in their mindsets, structural transitions, like finding employment, were mentioned as a resource that a small subset of African American and white women used to abstain from crime. Specifically, 20 percent of desisters (three women) claimed that securing employment facilitated their pathway out of crime. Brianna, a 37-year-old Black woman who worked as a supervisor at a five star hotel, claimed she managed to stop engaging in criminal activity "by working jobs." She asserted, "I work a lot. I like to work, stay focused, and busy." Likewise, Rebecca, a white 38-year-old woman who worked as an EMT customer service representative said, "I work, and I have my own money, so there's no reason [to commit crimes]." Alissa, a 44-year-old African American who worked as a laundry attendant, explained the reason she stopped committing crimes:

> First of all, I don't even think about doing crime because I have a job. If it's something that I want, I work for my money. If it's something I want to buy, then I work. I work. I love working and I love getting a paycheck because I'm earning my money. I'm working for my money so I appreciate my money because I'm not doing silly things anymore.

Consistent with prior studies, there does appear to be a relationship between employment and desistance for a subset of women. All three women worked full-time at positions that they found meaningful, and they attributed their desistance to this. Both Brianna and Rebecca had good, quality jobs that they intended to stay at for a long period of time. Thus, it is not surprising to learn the role that employment played in their desistance. But interestingly enough, Alissa, who worked in a service sector job, also

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emphasized the positive effect that gainful employment had in her ability to avoid offending. For Alissa, it appears that even working at a menial job as a laundry attendant was rewarding. Although she does not plan to stay at her current job permanently, working has stopped her from committing crimes.

Studies have revealed that desistance is associated with gaining quality employment among male offenders (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Uggen, 2000; Horney et al., 1995; Sampson and Laub, 1993), and this study suggests the same is true for a subset of women desisters. Employment can contribute to desistance in a number of ways. First, employment provides an income that can increase financial stability, which may make criminal activity less attractive and less necessary (Holtfreter et al., 2004; Agnew, 1992). The three women who emphasized employment as a driving force in their desistance efforts were last incarcerated for committing economic crimes. Given the nature of the offense that led to their incarceration, it is easy to understand the impact of employment on women's ability to refrain from illicit activity. Because employment yields financial return, securing a job may make criminal involvement seem less appealing for some offenders.

Second, connections made through work can serve as "informal social controls" that inhibit offending (Laub et al., 1998; Sampson and Laub, 1993, 1990). Employment provides social bonds, which increase ties to conventional society. This, in turn, increases ones stake in conformity; thus, individuals have more to lose from social sanctions and are less likely to commit crimes (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Sampson and Laub, 1993). Commitment to work has the capacity to alter criminal social networks and

increase social capital by replacing criminal friends with conventional law-abiding peers (Coleman, 1990).

Finally, meaningful employment can lead to a redefinition of an offender's self-conception and lead to cognitive transformation (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001). Only a small number of women described that employment impacted their pathway out of crime. This low prevalence rate may be attributed to the entry-level positions that most women had. In all, three-quarters of women in the desistance subsample landed a job; however, the vast majority worked in low-level positions as housekeepers, daycare providers, cashiers, or worked in fast food restaurants. Given that most women had low-quality jobs, working may not provide them with an increase in self-esteem or self-worth, as it did for Alissa. Thus, employment becomes less beneficial from a control and cognitive transformation perspective (Hagan and Coleman, 2001).

These findings are consistent with other studies in the area, which have found that jobs have limited or no effect on desistance (Massoglia and Uggen, 2007; Leverentz, 2006). For instance, Giordano and colleagues (2002) found no relationship between job stability and desistance for male and female offenders, which they attributed to the lack of jobs that may serve as a social control function. This does not mean that employment cannot impact women's pathways out of crime, as a subset of female offenders in the current study did identify a link between employment and desistance. Yet, it may very well be that "many ex-offenders cannot find jobs that provide a sense of worth, financial stability, or meaningful and long-term ties to conventional society" (Leverentz, 2006: 137).

Changing Criminal People, Places, and Things

While gaining employment was described as beneficial for only small number of women, one common action that led many desisters to leave crime behind was to remove themselves from their old social worlds and old locations. This was perceived as necessary in order to avoid temptations that would facilitate continued involvement in crime and drug use. The vast majority of women used this strategy, as most moved to a different place of residence upon their release from prison. While they could have moved because of their family or to avoid trouble, findings demonstrate that 94 percent of women in the subsample resided in a different place than the one they lived in prior to their last incarceration.

Although former and current offenders are a transient population, 47 percent of desisting women did take several specific measures to sever ties with old associations. This was particularly common among Black women, as 71 percent reported changing "people, places, and things" compared to 29 percent of white women.[72] Asked how she managed to stop using drugs, Jessica, a 26-year-old white woman, replied, "I don't go around it. I keep myself out of environments. I change people, places, and things, I guess, in my life." Likewise, Bridget, a white 26-year-old woman explained:

> The crime I was into was drugs. Drugs was the *thing* and I just don't associate myself with the *people* and I mean if they come around me then I'm like, "hey," and, you know, it's time to go. No one knows where I live *(place)*, so if I run into people, usually it's at work or at the gas station or something like that.

And 37-year-old Janelle, an African American woman, said, "[t]hat old saying, change people, places, and things. I changed the way I live, [and] I changed the different peoples." When asked where she heard that saying, she replied: "That's a[n] old wise

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[72] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.464, chi-square = 0.536).

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saying I use to hear a lot of people [say]. Even I heard it again in my outpatient, my drug treatment program." The idea of replacing criminal people, places, and things was prevalent throughout former addicts' accounts, most of whom were taught this philosophy in treatment. Yet, even nondrug users adopted this viewpoint. Trina, a Black 38-year-old woman, provided a detailed explanation of how a former drug user taught her to apply this idea to her own life:

> A girl that was up there [in prison] taking treatment, she was my roommate and she's doing tremendous too….She said, "that's just like a drug addict. You have to change your people, places, and things." She say, "because if you don't, for me" she said, "it will start by me back to using. If I start hanging out with people that use, then eventually I'm not going to be strong enough to say, "I don't want to use." She said, "and the things"…Things was to her things that she used to do as a drug user. She said and the places you used to go [like] to clubs and to different people houses sitting up having social events but its got drugs and alcohol involved. So she said that's what it was for her. She had to change people, places, and things. And she said, "Trina I guarantee you, if you apply that to you, although you wasn't a drug user, you had an addiction and it was stealing." So she said, "if you change your people, your places, and your things, watch out. That'll help you." So I did.

As a result of this advice, Trina applied this framework to herself post-release. She continued:

> That was the first thing that came to mind before I was released. I sat down and made my goals out. People, places, and things. I put a circle around them. I said those are the things I'm going to have to change. If I want to set my goals and mean what I say, and nine times out of 10 when I mean what I say and I say what I mean, that's what it is. If I'm not coming back to prison, I know I got to follow these things in this circle. I got to change the people that I was hanging around with, I got to change the attitude of things that I was doing, and I got to change the places that I hung out at. And I did because I was just sick. I'm not going back.

Using a drug treatment ideology directed towards helping substance abusers overcome their addiction, Trina applied this to her own life. Though she never had a substance abuse problem, she did have an addiction – stealing – that was similar to that of a drug

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addict. Changing physical locations and social networks was perceived as necessary for Trina, and other former offenders, to maintain both sobriety and a crime-free lifestyle.

While some women replaced criminal people, places, and things in their lives, others changed one of the three components, which facilitated their departure from crime. For instance, Gloria reported changing criminal "people" in her life: "I know most of the criminals…so I don't deal with those people." And LaToya, a 33-year-old Black woman, reported changing "things." She stated, "I done slowed down, stopped a lot of things that I was doing...like, fast money, fast life, and all that." Beth, a 44-year-old white woman, who had been incarcerated twice for writing bad checks, explained how she limited her ability to access checks:

> I pay everything cash or money orders. If I don't have it I just don't even want to mess with the bank. Because I had where I could get a savings account and they already asked me, "do you want a checking account?" I said, "no, I don't want to have nothing to do." And the only reason why I get a savings account [is] so my disability check will go through there and not come to the house. And they ask me every time, and I say, "no, no, no."

In Beth's case, she changed the means by which she handled money by using cash or money orders, and the only reason she had a saving account was to receive her disability check. Thus, the temptation to write bad checks was diminished as a result of her not having a checking account. Both Latoya and Beth report changing "things" in their lives that they believed would tempt them to engage in illicit activity. Overall, most desisters replaced their old criminal social worlds with a conventional, law-abiding world as a means of maintaining desistance. This is a key finding: recall that women who recidivated claimed that one of the reasons for doing so was because they returned back

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to "old people, places, and things." For a number of recidivists, returning to a criminal environment amplified their exposure to criminal peers, resulting in recidivism.

Eliminating Peer Networks

Although many desisters in the subsample described *changing* old criminal peers who they associated with prior to their imprisonment, others chose to *eliminate* friends altogether from their lives. Specifically, 27 percent of women used social avoidance strategies in which an effort was made to keep to oneself in order to avoid the risk of getting in any kind of trouble. This pattern was more common among African American women, as three-quarter reported eliminating peer networks from their lives compared to one-quarter of white women.[73] Asked how she managed to stop engaging in crime, Alisha, a 52-year-old African American, said, "[I] just stay to myself and follow my rules….I like being by myself. I don't know. People do things." And Terwanda, a Black 49-year-old woman, noted, "I'm a loner. I'm a loner. Me, myself, and I. I'm a loner. The world is too corrupted today." Though some former offenders stayed to themselves, it was not uncommon to expand one's social circle to include family members. While Jackie, a 35-year-old African American woman, claimed that "I'm a homebody person," she also asserted, "[I stay] at home with my family, with my grandchildren or either my children." As we see in these accounts, some women avoided peer relations in an effort to sustain their desistance.

Even though several women on parole discussed cutting old ties, this was not always easy to do. For example, while Sandy, a white 34-year-old female, stopped

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[73] Using chi-square analysis, race did not achieve statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 (p = 0.680, chi-square = 0.170).

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socializing with her former friends because she did not "want to associate with them kind

of people," she demonstrated how difficult this was:

> I just stay at home and do what I'm supposed to do. It's hard sometimes.
> Like Friday, Saturday nights you just want to go out and just think that
> you need to do something. That's my trigger days you know. Instead it's
> like, "I'm bored again. It's the weekend I'm bored again." But I do go out
> and rent movies and sometimes [my boyfriend and I] go out to eat. But
> before it's like, "you're not hungry, why eat? Go get a high, you don't
> gotta eat." I don't know how I've managed but I have.

According to Sandy, despite doing what she was "supposed to do," she did

initially have difficulty in maintaining sobriety even after disassociating herself from her

former drug abusing friends. While Sandy was in the process of going straight, the

temptation to use drugs was still very much a reality. Even though she expressed

uncertainty about managing to stay clean for so long, removing herself from deviant

social networks appears to have made it more difficult for her to relapse. From a

differential association perspective, an individual commits criminal behavior because he

or she has learned "definitions" (motives, drives, rationalizations, attitudes) favorable to

criminal behavior that exceeds contact with definitions conforming to the law

(Sutherland, 1947). Peer networks play a significant role in offending behavior. Recall

that in chapter 3, peer relationships were strongly implicated in women's initiation into

drug use. While a considerable body of research documents offenders' attempts to

change social networks to facilitate the desistance process (Baskin and Sommers, 1998;

Mulvey and Aber, 1988; Stall and Biernacke, 1986), a few women in this subsample

disregarded peer relationships altogether.

However, there are some limitations to women's strategy for maintaining

desistance. First, there is the issue of distrust. Recall Terwanda's comments in which

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she stated "I'm a loner. The world is too corrupted today." Terwanda's belief the she could not trust anyone was not just cited by her, but echoed by several other females in the study. Many believed that if they let their guard down and had close peer interaction, then they made themselves more susceptible to engaging in deviant behavior. Thus, a common response was to distance oneself from everyone else. But another problem with this strategy is that women are more likely to feel disconnected from peer networks than in the past, which could lead to feelings of loneliness and frustration. Because some of these women did not replace negative peer networks with positive ones, there was always the possibility that some would resort to their old criminal behaviors.

Finally, while the majority of women resided in a place of residence different than the one they lived in prior to their last incarceration, more than one-third (38 percent) reported living in neighborhoods characterized by violence and drug activity. These findings are consistent with previous work revealing that returning prisoners typically reside in neighborhoods that experience significant disadvantage, characterized by high rates of crime, poverty, segregation, and limited services (Leverentz, 2006; La Vigne et al., 2004; Rose and Clear, 1998). More likely than not, returning prisoners are financially constrained from living in more stable and socially desirable neighborhoods. Consequently, those inmates returning to economically distressed neighborhoods following their prison release are more likely to recidivate at greater rates than those who return to more affluent communities (Kubrin and Stewart, 2006). High rates of removal and return of offenders can destabilize these communities, which can lead to higher crime rates (Rose and Clear, 1998), further increasing the likelihood of recidivism. Crime is a common feature of disadvantaged urban communities, tied to structural inequalities and

cultural adaptations that result from limited social, political, and economic resources (Anderson, 1999; Wilson, 1996; Sampson and Wilson, 1995). Because many released prisoners return to areas where violence and public drug use is common this strategy may be ineffective towards maintaining long-term desistance.

CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed the motives and methods women used to maintain desistance. There are several things we learn. First, women appear to provide rational reasoning for quitting the life of crime. The motives that paroled women gave for choosing to terminate their offending behavior were tied to their attempts to avoid reincarceration, to stay connected with their children, and "burning out" or hitting rock-bottom. This supports the rational choice model of desistance as women gave a variety of rational-sounding reasons for choosing to abstain from crime (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986). For a subset of women, the rational reasons they gave for not partaking in crime were tied to their desire to reestablish a relationship with their child(ren). Restoring parental roles was the expected payoff that they wanted to receive by making the choice to cease their criminal behavior. Although different from how the cost/benefit analysis is typically characterized, findings in the current study reveal that children are factored into some women's decision to desist. For some, children can serve as powerful catalyst for change (Giordano et al, 2002; Alaird et al, 2000; Graham and Bowling, 1995).

Second, understanding why people desist is different from understanding how people maintain abstinence from crime. Many Black and white women used a number of different methods to go straight and stay that way. In this study, the subjective

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experiences of desisters appeared to play a significant role in desistance, as a number of women expressed the importance of making a personal commitment to change on the inside. Findings are consistent with studies that have underscored the necessary importance of cognitive change to promote the process of desistance (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001). However, not all desisters in the current sample experienced a cognitive shift. It may be that some offenders have to first recognize the opportunity for reform. Rumgay (2004: 407-408) claims:

> Not only, therefore, must the opportunity be *available* in the offender's environment, but the offenders must *recognise* it as such, perceive it to be *accessible* – that is, within practical reach, bearing in mind previous experiences of failure – and *value* it as a desirable alternative to her present condition.

For some, this opportunity may exhibit itself in the form of work. A subset of women in the sample reported that employment aided in their efforts toward reform. These observations also coincide with other studies that have highlighted the role of structural correlates on desistance (Sampson and Laub, 1993). While desistance research typically focuses exclusively on desistance as the outcome of subjective (e.g. identity change) and social (e.g. employment) changes, the process of desistance may consist of a complex interaction between both factors (Bottom et al, 2004; Laub and Sampson, 2001). Given the role that both internal and external influences have on women's pathways out of crime in the study, it is worth further exploring the interplay of both factors in promoting desistance (see Kazemian, 2007; Farrall and Bowling, 1999).

Third, most women changed physical locations and social networks to maintain a crime-free lifestyle. The evidence suggests that changing patterns of peer relations is integral to reform. This, however, is not ground-breaking news, as a number of scholars

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have emphasized the role peer networks play in criminal and noncriminal behavior (Warr and Stafford, 1991; Matsueda and Heimer, 1987; Akers, 1985). Warr (1998: 212) states:

> The transition from criminal to conventional behavior (or vice versa), it seems, is not merely an individual conversion, but rather a social transformation that entails the destruction of old relations or social networks and the creation of new ones.

Warr's findings suggest that changing delinquent peers over the life course is necessary for understanding criminal life-course trajectories. In the study reported here, replacing criminal people, places, and things was a common strategy used to maintain desistance. While the majority of women resided in a different place of residence than the one they lived in prior to their last incarceration, the problem with such method is that drug use and violent activity were common occurrences in the current neighborhood they lived in. Thus, such a strategy may very well be ineffective to maintaining long-term desistance, as evidenced by the number of recidivists in the sample who claimed to have reoffended because they returned to familiar but criminal locations and social networks.

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In chapter 1, I argue that there has been a dearth of scholarly attention to the reentry process that so many inmates experience. Researchers have examined the predictive validity of recidivism and desistance, and have documented the overwhelming challenges to returning prisoners that result from having a felony conviction. For the most part, however, criminological research on reentry has been inattentive to the experiences of women and focused specific attention on men. Moreover, fewer studies have considered whether there is racial variation in women's post-release experiences. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to this body of literature by providing a nuanced analysis of the pathways Black and white women take into crime, the factors that facilitate and hinder successful reintegration, the reasons for recidivating, and the motivators and methods used to desist from crime.

In order to address the study goals, I located incarcerated and formerly incarcerated female offenders residing in the St. Louis metropolitan region who were willing to share their life experiences. Chapter 2 details the methodology used to capture the complexities of these women's lives. A multi-method research design was employed, which included the use of qualitative in-depth interviews, supplemental survey interviews, and an examination of official records. My goal in using multiple methodologies and data sources was to provide a means of triangulating the qualitative data, which is commonly employed to increase confidence in the validity and reliability of qualitative analyses (see Marshall and Rossman, 1989). It took approximately four months to conduct interviews with 50 incarcerated and paroled women, and the result was a rich detailed dataset that allowed for a thorough analysis of the reentry experiences

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among current and former female offenders and the interpretive lenses women brought to bear on such events.

In chapter 3, I examine the circumstances that led to women's initiation into crime, showing that there are distinct pathways that women take to drug-related and non-drug crimes. Consistent with what we know about female offenders, drug activity was common, with most African American and white incarcerated and paroled women reporting drug use in their lifetime. Of those women who were drug-involved, the vast majority had at least one member of their family who was drug addicted, indicating that women are more likely to use narcotic substances when members of their own family abuse drugs. While a number of former and current female offenders were exposed and introduced to drugs by family members, most also experimented with drugs because they sought acceptance from their peers and male partners, regardless of their race. In addition, Black and white incarcerated women were more likely to have experienced childhood victimization and resorted to drugs to cope with the physical and psychological pain of abuse compared to the parole sample. It was common for women who were serving time in prison to resort to illicit substances to numb feelings of loneliness, depression, and grief.

Moreover, women's pathways to non-drug related offenses were tied directly to economic motivation. Incarcerated and paroled Black and white women who had a substance abuse problem regularly engaged in crime for the purpose of supporting their drug addiction. Both samples of women occasionally engaged in criminal activity because they encountered economic difficulties and needed to support themselves and their children. But not all women's initiation into crime resulted as a means of economic

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survival. The desire for money facilitated the onset of offending for several current and former African American women offenders, which was tied both to the poor economic conditions they faced and their desire for monetary and material possessions.

In chapter 4, I detail the legal barriers and practical challenges to reintegration that incarcerated and paroled Black and white women faced post-release. Both groups encountered problems obtaining housing because landlords and property managers were more inclined to reject them due to their felony status. As a result, some resided in transitional houses or residential programs. The vast majority of current and formerly incarcerated females in the sample reported difficulty finding employment, as they described not receiving callbacks from employers and being barred from certain jobs they held prior to incarceration. If they landed a job, a few admitted to being terminated once their employer discovered their criminal background. Reestablishing familial and parental ties also proved to be difficult for both groups of women, making reintegration even more challenging. In addition, obtaining access to health care was a hurdle that was particularly common among incarcerated white women, and receiving drug treatment was challenging for both Black and white incarcerated women, which made their reintegration efforts increasingly difficult.

Building on the findings from chapter 4, in chapter 5 I investigate the factors that facilitate reintegration success among paroled women and the factors that led to reintegration failure among incarcerated women. Many African American parolees frequently cited that their families helped them to successfully transition from prison to the community, and some Black and white women reported that employment played a vital role in their reintegration efforts. Moreover, the majority of paroled women who

successfully reintegrated into mainstream society expressed the significant value of having access to external resources and support services, regardless of race. Most participated in community-based organizations that provided them with concrete assistance, which met their individual-specific needs. African American and white paroled women who made a successful transition to the free world also praised their parole officer for aiding them in their transition post-release. They underscored the positive relationship they had with their supervising officer, who had confidence in their ability to succeed and provided them with emotional support and access to resources.

Not all women who leave prison, however, manage to successfully reintegrate to mainstream society. The competing demands of parole left most incarcerated Black and white women feeling stressed and overwhelmed, making reintegration even more complicated. The presentation of negative support systems and unsupportive parole officers also hindered incarcerated women's reintegration efforts; however, this pattern was much more common among white women who were serving time in prison. These findings are consistent with earlier findings in which paroled women identified supportive families and parole officers as important resources in aiding their transition to conventional society.

In chapter 6, I examine the reasons incarcerated women recidivated, showing that drug motivation is a central cause for reoffending for both African American and white women. While the vast majority of females did admit receiving some type of substance abuse treatment in their lifetime, such treatment had not been sufficient to aid them in overcoming their drug addiction. Some were economically motivated and were attracted to the "fast money" that accompanies a criminal lifestyle. This pattern, however, was

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much more common among Black women, which is likely tied to their economic marginalization and their goal to attain economic success. Although incarcerated African American women were more likely to commit crimes because of their poor economic conditions, white women who were imprisoned were much more likely to turn back to crime because they encountered negative life events, such as the death of a loved one, a break up, or disagreement. The likelihood of reoffending was also heightened for both Black and white women who returned to old people, places, and things. For some, particularly drug addicts, returning to criminal people and familiar neighborhoods prompted them to do criminal things.

Finally, in chapter 7, I discuss the process formerly incarcerated women take to desist from crime. Women described several reasons for terminating their offending patterns. Most Black and white women said that they wanted to avoid imprisonment, opting to avert the deprivations of imprisonment. Children served as an important catalyst for change, as they were factored in some women's decision to stop offending. Here we see that the desire to reestablish relationships with their child(ren) outweighed the benefits of committing crimes, which lends credence to a rational support model of desistance. Some women, particularly drug addicts, simply lost the desire to commit crimes because they "burnt out" or "hit rock-bottom."

In this chapter I noted that making the decision to abstain from committing crime is different from actually desisting and sustaining the change. Formerly incarcerated women described a number of methods they used to maintain desistance. Many Black and white women cited the importance of making an individual commitment to change, indicating the first stage of a cognitive transformation (Laub and Sampson, 2001;

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Maruna, 2001). While many highlighted the importance of making these subjective changes in their mindset, a few who had last been imprisoned for committing economic crimes claimed that landing a job facilitated their pathway out of crime, regardless of race. In addition, for a large number of African American and white females in the study, changing their old social world to a conventional, law-abiding world was necessary for maintaining desistance. Although they could have moved for a host of reasons, findings reveal that most women resided in a different place than the one they lived in prior to their last incarceration. Results are consistent with earlier findings showing that the reason many incarcerated women recidivated was because they returned back to "old people, places, and things." While many desisters described changing their old criminal peer networks, others employed social avoidance strategies by eliminating friends altogether from their lives.

However, there are some limitations to the strategies that women used to sustain desistance. For example, their primary strategy for desisting – changing their old social location by moving – while it insulated them from their immediate criminal networks in the neighborhood, did not completely shield them from crime-ridden neighborhoods, as many resided in communities where drugs and violence was common. In addition, for those who eliminated peer networks completely from their lives, it came at a considerable cost because it further isolated them and prevented them from establishing prosocial and supportive relationships. Ironically, both of these strategies that women used to sustain desistance also placed them at potential risk of recidivating.

Recommendations

As an increasing number of women are separated from mainstream society, they will inevitably return to live with us. Although the goal of prisoner reintegration has taken a back seat to the goal of retribution, deterrence, and incapacitation in discussions of sentencing policy, direct intervention is necessary to help returning offenders successfully transition from prison to society. Drawing from my study findings, I conclude by providing recommendations to help women reintegrate into society as responsible and productive citizens and to improve their reentry outcome by reducing the risk of recidivism.

Access to Treatment

Providing effective substance abuse treatment to drug-involved women is critical, as the likelihood of recidivism increases when drug addiction problems are not addressed. As discussed in chapter 6, drug use was commonly cited by women in the sample as a reason for reoffending. Ironically, the majority of these women admitted to having ever received drug treatment, leading one to question why, then, most women still had not overcome their drug habit once released from prison. As noted in chapter 6, the available research data lacked measures of magnitude of substance abuse among incarcerated women, and the length, time, fidelity, and intensity of treatment programming. In addition, the data fails to capture the nature and magnitude of women's drug addiction or the different types of treatment they received. Yet, despite these study limitations, recommendations can still be made for drug-addicted women.

First, drug-dependent women who are admitted to prison should receive intensive treatment, as empirical evidence shows that women and men who participate in exhaustive drug treatment programs in prison do much better than those who do not

engage in such treatment (Wexler et al, 1999; Inciardi et al., 1997; Prendergast et al., 1996). However, in-prison drug treatment must be followed with outpatient or residential drug treatment. Well documented studies find that intensive in-prison treatment coupled with community-based drug treatment increases the likelihood of avoiding relapse (Wexler et al, 1999; Inciardi et al., 1997; Prendergast et al., 1996). Participants have a greater opportunity of breaking the cycle of dependency when they complete treatment programs lasting three to nine months (Gendreau, 1996).

However, recall in chapter 4 that incarcerated women had one overarching complaint about drug and health care treatment: getting access, resulting from delays in medical insurance, the high cost of treatment, and long waiting lists. Obtaining access to health care and receiving outpatient and residential drug treatment were all hurdles that were particularly common among incarcerated women, which made their reintegration efforts increasingly difficult. Thus, every effort must be made to ensure that women apply for health care benefits and set up appointments with service providers while they are in prison so that they will have medical coverage and access to services and treatment immediately following their release (see Travis, 2006). In addition, most drug treatment facilities typically have long waiting lists. Thus, it is not enough to simply give returning prisoners a list of outpatient or residential treatment facilities post-release. Instead, the correctional and program staff should locate a residential treatment center for women with a history of substance abuse and arrange to place them on a waiting list prior to their release (see Travis, 2006).

Yet, responsive substance abuse programming for women must also take into account their specific needs of managing family responsibility. Most will resume a

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parenting role following incarceration; therefore, attending treatment may prove to be difficult for many women. Thus, it is critical that residential drug treatment programs allow females to live with their children while they are completing the program (Utziel et al., 1998; Wobie et al., 1997). For those women who cannot or will not participate in community residential treatment, then outpatient treatment should accept children (Hall et al, 2001). Effort must be made to reduce the barriers that prevent drug-involved women from receiving community treatment. By incorporating family components in transitional programming there is a greater likelihood that women will have positive outcomes.

Finally, recall that many incarcerated women, especially white women, relapsed after being faced with negative life events. It was common for white incarcerated women to medicate their feelings when they encountered stressful events. Therefore, it is imperative that substance abuse treatment programs teach participants various ways to eliminate strain, as well as increase their ability to cope with strain through noncriminal means. Treatment programs should employ behavioral, emotional, and cognitive strategies to cope with stress, anger, and anxiety. When women are taught noncriminal means to handle life events, then they will be less inclined to resort to drug use when they encounter strain.

Increasing Positive Social Support

Social support has long been identified as a central factor to successful reentry among ex-offenders (Taxman et al., 2003; Cullen et al, 1999). Cullen and colleagues (1999) define social support as "the provision of affective and/or instrumental (or material) resources…[which] can be supplied in intimate or confiding relationships, but it

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also can be a property (cultural or structural) of macrosocial units." The quality and strength of such support is associated directly to the connections people develop with one another, which is dependent on the affective commitment with one or more caring adult, which is often established through kinship, friendship, and instrumental affiliations (Bazemore and Erb, 2004; Werner, 1986). As shown in chapter 5, family support served as a key factor that aided paroled women's transition from prison to the community, especially African American women. However, not all women have positive family support. Recall, LaToya's statement, "I know my family love me and my family will bend over backwards for me…[but] everybody's family is not like my family." LaToya's statement suggests that not all families are willing or able to support released prisoners. As we see in chapter 5, negative social supports, which include family members, hindered incarcerated women's reintegration efforts, particularly for white women.

Given these findings, it is important for correctional facilities to develop ways to facilitate family contact. One way to promote family ties is through the use of videoconferencing or teleconferencing, allowing two or more people from different sites to communicate through the use of audio and video telecommunications. This will provide offenders in prison to have face-to-face contact with their family wherever they are located. There are several advantages to videoconferencing. First, the use of videoconferencing will alleviate the burden placed on so many families having to travel long distances to visit their loved ones. Women's prisons are generally located farther from family members and friends, which makes visitation more difficult, particularly for the poor (Belknap, 1996).

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Second, visiting a correctional facility can be a particularly intimidating experience for children, invoking feelings of fear and anxiety. Yet, it is important to encourage rather than discourage maternal-child relationships, as the current study demonstrates that children can serve as a motivating factor for change among women. The use of videoconferences can reduce these obstacles, providing families with the opportunity to avoid prisons while still keeping in contact with their loved one who is serving time in a correctional facility. While I do not advocate that telecommunications be used for the purpose of replacing physical contact between people, at least it provides an opportunity for women in prison to stay in touch with their own families.

In addition to the use of videoconferencing, I recommend developing programs for families of inmates that foster healthy ties. These programs need to focus on strengthening relationships between incarcerated women and their family, as well as preparing both parties for women's return home. This requires identifying and working through family issues long before women are released from prison. Reentry counselors should also include families in the reentry process, as they need to be informed when incarcerated females will be released, the various parole conditions that must be met, and other details of the release process (Travis, 2006). However, families of returning prisoners face an incredible challenge, many of whom may not be able to shoulder the additional burden. Thus, effort must be made to help family members attend to the needs of returning prisoners through the help of social service agencies, as the family is an important institution that can assist in successful reintegration.

Aside from increasing social support among families, it is imperative that parole officers provide support to their clients. Recall from chapter 5 that paroled women who

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made a successful transition to the free world underscored the positive relationship they had with their supervising officer, who had confidence in their ability to succeed and provided them with emotional support and access to resources. On the other hand, unsupportive parole officers also hindered incarcerated women's reintegration efforts. Therefore, I recommend that parole officers receive training in establishing positive relationships and addressing the needs of all their clients. Since this may prove to be a difficult task for parole officers who have extremely large caseloads, it may be best to recruit more supervising officers in order to reduce the average number of clients they have. Although empirical evidence demonstrates that smaller caseloads result in *higher* recidivism rates (Petersilia and Turner, 1993), parole officers with smaller cases may be able to effectively build rapport with their clients and thus become more in tune with their clients' needs. When positive, trusting relationships are established then parole officers are better able to assist their clients and paroled women may be more receptive to receive their support, further increasing the likelihood of successful reintegration.

Improve Economic Conditions

Recall from chapter 4 that the vast majority of women faced challenges finding a job post-release. There are several ways to improve women's economic conditions following incarceration. First it is imperative to provide women with education and help them to develop skill-enhancing opportunities that will make them marketable in the employment sector. To increase women's chances of landing a job, correctional facilities should contract with specialized employment agencies and allow them to enter prison to provide jobs to inmates that will result in jobs on the outside (Travis, 2006). In addition,

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employment counselors should work closely with women to help them find a job long before they are discharged.

While education and job placement are a start, it is not enough to help women who are returning to economically distressed communities. As discussed in chapter 6, African American women in prison were more likely to have committed crimes because of their poor economic conditions. Thus, it is critical for community-based organizations to partner with economic development agencies and business organizations in order to provide more employment initiatives that will lead to economic advancement within the neighborhood where women reside (O'Brien, 2006). In addition, community-based transitional programs must be developed. Recall in chapter 5 that women expressed the significant value of having access to external resources and support services, which met their specific needs. These transitional programs should assist returning females with temporary housing, job placement assistance, childcare, health care, public transportation, referrals for treatment, and case management. Building and staffing community-based transitional programs, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods where women reside would also be beneficial to women in these settings. Overall, educating and training women coupled with bringing resources to their communities can help improve women's economic conditions, increasing their likelihood of successful reentry.

Conclusion

Reentry is the inevitable consequence of imprisonment that the majority of women who are sent to prison will experience. Returning female prisoners face many unique challenges during the reentry process, which impact whether or not they will succeed or fail. My goal in this dissertation has been to investigate incarcerated and

paroled women's understanding of the factors that both facilitate and hinder successful community reintegration subsequent to incarceration, as well as the patterns associated with recidivism and desistance. I also sought to consider whether there is racial variation in women's reentry experience. As the female prison population grows, which disproportionately consists of African Americans, it becomes imperative to understand how women manage post-release. This requires comprehensive policy attention. I have made recommendations that provide various approaches for addressing the multiple needs of women during reentry. As my research has shown, addressing the challenges women face post-release is imperative to improving their prospects for success.

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Table 1 – Neighborhood Characteristics of Respondents, St. Louis City, and St. Louis County

	St. Louis City	Respondents City Neighborhoods	St. Louis County	Respondents County Neighborhoods
Median family income	$32,585	$31,600	$61,680	$44,456
Percent Black	51.2	66.97	18.9	41.7
Percent female-headed household with children	12.4	15.81	7.4	11.57
Percent poverty	4.6	28.68	6.9	11.6
Percent unemployment	11.3	13.61	4.6	6.19

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

Table 2 – Characteristics of WERDCC and Parole Population and Matched Sample of Incarcerated and Paroled Women

	WERDCC Population		Incarceration Sample		Parole Population		Parole Sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Race								
Black	498	28	14	54	561	21	18	75
White	1297	72	12	46	2074	78	6	25
Age								
17 or younger	2	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
18 to 24	198	11	0	0	207	8	0	0
25 to 34	639	36	14	54	855	32	9	38
35 to 44	572	32	7	27	997	38	10	42
45 to 54	310	17	4	15	502	19	4	17
55 +	76	4	1	4	91	3	1	4
Marital Status								
Married	365	20	4	15	562	22	4	17
Separated	165	9	2	8	275	11	3	13
Divorced	418	23	5	19	629	24	4	17
Widow/widower	66	4	0	0	98	4	1	4
Never married	771	43	15	58	1027	40	12	50
Number of Incarcerations								
1	825	46	8	31	1272	49	12	50
2	422	23	9	35	824	32	7	29
3	212	12	4	15	304	12	3	13
4	136	8	1	4	125	5	0	0
5	86	5	2	8	46	2	0	0
6+	116	6	2	8	15	0	2	8
Offense Type								
Drugs	568	32	9	35	1011	39	7	29
Property/nonviolent[a]	644	36	15	58	1234	48	9	38
Violent	388	22	2	8	228	9	8	33
Sex	73	4	0	0	52	2	0	0
DWI	59	3	0	0	53	2	0	0
Other	65	4	0	0	0	0	0	0

a: The Missouri Department of Corrections has a nonviolent offense group as opposed to property offense. Nonviolent offenses are other offenses, including property offenses, public order offenses, other weapon offenses, and other traffic offenses.

Table 3 – Crimes Leading to Incarcerated Women's Reincarceration and Crimes Committed Prior to Reincarceration

Name	Reincarceration Offense	Crime Committed Prior to Reincarceration
Cara	Technical Violation	None
Lyn	Technical Violation	Drug use, theft, prostitution
Cherise	Technical Violation	Drug sales, prostitution
Felicia	Forgery	Theft
Lisa	Technical Violation	Drug use, prostitution
Rachelle	Tampering with motor vehicle	Tampering with motor vehicle
Christina	Technical Violation	Drug use
Melissa	Possession of meth precursor	Drug use
Tawanna	Law violation	Drug use, drug sales, forgery
Tia	Forgery	Drug sales, forgery, assault with a deadly weapon
Julie	Technical Violation	Drug use
Kristy	Drug possession	Drug manufacturing, drug Use, drug sales, theft
Stacey	Technical Violation	Drug use, theft, prostitution
Whitney	Technical Violation	Drug use, theft, driving illegally
Donna	Technical Violation	Drug use, driving illegally
Tara	Robbery	Drug use, robbery, assault
Shauna	Forgery	Forgery
Trisha	Law violation	Theft, forgery
Jenny	Forgery	Forgery
Patricia	Technical and law violation	None
Keisha	Endangering the welfare of a child	Drug use
Jane	Technical Violation	Drug use
Betty	Technical Violation	None
Carol	Technical Violation	None
Jamilla	Technical Violation	Drug use, theft, prostitution, assault
Toyin	Technical Violation	Drug use, theft

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Figure 1 – Sample Design

323 released on parole sentenced by St. Louis City or County

124 currently on incarcerated parole supervision

31 discharged

11 absconded

57

82 on parole supervision incarcerated at located in St. Louis

52

WERDCC

51 on parole did not return to prison

26 interviewed

24 interviewed

Figure 2 – Incarcerated Women's Reasons for Recidivating[*]

DRUG MOTIVATED

NEGATIVE EVENTS

Stacey
Tara
Keisha
Toyin
Kristy

Lisa
Christina
Donna

Julie
Whitney
Jane

Cherise
Trisha

Tawanna
Lyn

Jamilla

Felicia
Rachelle
Melissa
Jane

Tia

Shauna
Jenny

RETURN TO OLD
PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS

ECONOMICALLY
MOTIVATED

[*] Women's whose names are bold are African American.

Figure 3 – Paroled Women's Reasons for Desisting[*]

AVOID IMPRISONMENT

LOST DESIRE TO COMMIT CRIMES

Beth
Jessica
Alissa
Alisha

Cleshay
Janelle
Gloria
Jackie
Terwanda

Sandy
LaToya

Bridget

Trina

Rebecca
Brianna

RECONNECT WITH CHILDREN

[*] Women's whose names are bold are African American.

Appendix A – Survey Instrument for Prisoners

#:_____ Date: _____

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview. I want you to feel comfortable and relaxed. Your opinion and feelings are important to me. I will be asking you some questions to guide our discussion. However, I hope you will feel free to talk about your experiences fully even if or when a question does not specifically relate to what you have to discuss. You may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. There is not any right or wrong answers. Please ask me to repeat or rephrase a question if I am not making myself clear. In the first part of the interview I will ask you a set of questions and I want you to give me an answer. The second part of the interview will be more conversational and we will discuss some things in more detail. Do you have any questions before we begin? OK, let's get started.

1. What is your date of birth? _____/_____/_____

2. What is your race/ethnicity?
   ___White (non-Hispanic) ___ Hispanic ___ Other (please describe)

   ___ Black ___ Asian

3. What are the names of two intersecting streets near the home that you last lived in? _____

4. How far did you go in your schooling?

   ___ Some elementary school ___ Associates' Degree (2 yr degree)
   ___ Graduated elementary school ___ Bachelor's Degree (4 yr degree)
   ___ Some high school ___ Some graduate studies
   ___ Graduated high school ___ Obtained graduate degree
   ___ GED   (Master's, Ph.D., J.D. M.D.)

5. Were you employed 6 months before you were incarcerated? ___ Yes ___ No
   a. If YES, what type of work did you do and how many hours did you work per week?

Work	Full-time	Part-time (hours per week)	Seasonal (hours per week)

b. How did you find the job(s)?

_____
_____
_____

c. How long had you been working at your job(s) before you were re-incarcerated?

_____
_____
_____
_____

d. Did you get along with your supervisor? ___ Yes   ___ No   ___Somewhat
e. Did you get along with your co-workers? ___ Yes   ___ No   ___Somewhat
f. Did you have friends at work? ___ Yes   ___ No
g. How long did you plan to stay at the job? _____
h. What did you like most about the job?

_____
_____
_____

i. What did you like least about the job?

_____
_____
_____

IF NO:
   j. Were you looking for a job before you returned to prison?
   ___ Yes   ___ No
   If YES:
   k. How were you going about your search? (newspaper, word of mouth)

   _____
   _____

   l. How much time did you spend each week looking? _____
   m. Did you have any interviews? ___ Yes   ___ No
           If yes, how many? _____
   n. What kind of jobs were you looking for? _____

   _____
   _____

   o. If NO: Why weren't you looking for a job?

   _____
   _____

p. Did you receive state assistance? ___ Yes ___ No
    q. If YES, how long had you been receiving state assistance? _____
    r. How much financial assistance were you receiving each month from the state?
    _____
    _____

6. I am also curious about your personal relationships.
   Have you ever been married? ___ Yes   ___ No
   If YES: Are you currently married? ___ Yes ___ No
       If CURRENTLY MARRIED: How long have you been married? _____
       If NOT CURRENTLY MARRIED: What happened?
           ___ Widowed
              How long ago did your husband pass? _____
           ___ Separated
              How long have you been separated? _____
           ___ Divorced
              How long have you been divorced? ___
           ___ Other (please describe) _____
   IF NEVER MARRIED: Were you living with someone before you were re-incarcerated?   ___ Yes   ___ No
       If YES: Who? _____
       How long had you been in that living arrangement? _____

7. Are you currently involved in a (another) romantic relationship? ___ Yes ___ No
       If YES, for how long? _____

8. Do you have children?   ___Yes   ___ No
       How many are your biological children? _____
       How many are your step children? _____
       How many are adopted? _____

   If YES, how old are your children?
   GIRLS:
       Biological: _____   _____   _____   _____   _____
       Step: _____   _____   _____   _____   _____
       Adopted: _____   _____   _____   _____   _____

   BOYS:
       Biological: _____   _____   _____   _____   _____
       Step: _____   _____   _____   _____   _____
       Adopted: _____   _____   _____   _____   _____

   a. Did you have custody of all your children prior to your incarceration?
       ___Yes ___ No   ___ Some

b. If YES, who is takimg care of your children while you are in prison?

c. If NO, who has custody of your children? _____

    d. Why did you lose custody of your children? _____

    _____

    _____

9. Have you ever been diagnosed with a physical or mental illness? ___ Yes ___ No

    a. If yes, what is the illness? (PTSD, depression) _____

    b. Have you ever received treatment for your illness? ___ Yes ___ No

    c. Do you currently receive treatment for your illness in prison? ___ Yes___ No

    d. Do you think the treatment is helpful? ___ Yes ___ No

10. Have you ever used drugs? ___ Yes ___ No

    a. If yes, how old were you when you first used drugs? _____

    b. What types of drugs have you used?

    _____

    _____

    _____

11. Have you ever received drug treatment? ___ Yes ___ No

    a. If YES, are you currently receiving treatment? ___ Yes ___ No

        b. Are you required to participate in drug treatment or did you volunteer to take part in the program?   Required _____   Volunteer _____

        c. How often are the sessions?

        _____

        d. How often do you go? _____

        e. How long are the sessions? _____

        f. How long is the whole treatment program?

    _____

    b. Do you think the treatment is helpful? ___ Yes ___ No

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about different types of violence that you may have been exposed to and how often you have witnessed such activity. Have you ever seen a(n) …

11.

Exposure to violence	How often?	Who committed the attack?
Child Abused		
Physical Attack (of an adult)		

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Sexual assault		
Family violence		
Stabbing		
Gun shots		
Someone shot		
Drive-by shootings		
Seen someone killed		

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about whether or not you have been a victim of different types of crimes and how often you have been a victim. Have you ever been …

12.

Exposure to violence	How often?	Who committed the attack?
Abused as a child		
Physically Attacked (as an adult)		
Sexually assaulted		

Threatened with a weapon		
Stabbed		
Shot		

I will now ask you some questions about your family members and any involvement they may have had with criminal activity.

13. Have any of your family members ever used illegal drugs? ___ Yes ___ No
    a. If yes, who? _____
    _____
    b. What types of drugs did s/he use? _____
    _____
    c. Was s/he ever addicted to drugs? ___ Yes ___ No
    d. Has s/he ever received treatment? ___ Yes ___ No
    e. How old were you when you first realized this person(s) used drugs? _____
    f. Did s/he ever use drugs at home? ___ Yes ___ No
    g. If YES, how often? _____
    _____

14. Have any of your family members ever been addicted to alcohol? ___ Yes ___ No
    a. If yes, who? _____
    b. Has s/he ever received treatment? ___ Yes ___ No
    c. How old were you when you first realized this person(s) was addicted to
    alcohol? _____
    d. Did s/he drink at home? ___ Yes ___ No
    e. If YES, how often? _____

15. Have any of your family members ever sold illegal drugs? ___ Yes ___ No
    a. If yes, who? _____
    _____
    b. What types of drugs did s/he sell? _____
    _____
    c. How old were you when you first realized this person(s) sold drugs?
    _____
    d. Did s/he sell drugs at home? ___ Yes ___ No
    e. If YES, how often? _____

16. Have any of your family members ever been arrested? ___ Yes   ___ No
    a. If yes, who? _____
    _____
    b. What crime(s) was the person(s) arrested for?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    c. Has s/he been in jail or prison? ___ Yes   ___ No
    d. If YES, how many times? _____
    _____

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your experiences with the CJS.

17. What offense(s) were you charged with that led to your last incarceration? If the
    offense was a parole violation, what was the parole violation? What was the
    original charge?

    _____
    _____

18. Where did you do your time? Vandalia _____   Chillicothe _____

19. How long were you sentenced to prison? Year __ and months___

20. How much time have you actually done? Year __ and months___

21. When will you be released from prison? Year __ and months___

22. When were you last released from prison? Month ___ day ____year ___

23. How old were you when you were **first** arrested? _____
    a. (If under 18 years), have you ever been detained at a juvenile correctional
    facility? ___ Yes ___No
         b. If YES, how many times? _____
    c. How old were you when you were first arrested as an adult? _____

24. How many times have you been arrested as an adult? _____

25. How many times have you been incarcerated as an adult? _____
    a. How many times were you incarcerated for parole violations? _____
    b. How many times were you incarcerated for new offenses? _____

26. Did you have any money the last time that you were released from prison?
___ Yes   ___ No
    If YES, how much? _____
    Where did you get it? (check all that apply and give approximate amount)
        ___ family   ___ from the correctional facility
        ___ friends   ___ saved from prior incarceration
        ___ prison job   ___ Other

27. Did you have photo identification when you were released? ___ Yes   ___ No

28. Did the facility you were in give you or offer to give you any clothing when you were last released from prison? ___ Yes   ___ No

29. Did the facility you were in give you or offer to give you a bus or train ticket when you were released? ___ Yes   ___ No

30. Did they give you or offer to give you anything else? ___ Yes   ___ No
    If YES, what else did they offer to give you?
_____
_____

31. When you were last released from prison, did you ever try to … If yes, did you find it very difficult, somewhat difficult, or very easy to accomplish this goal?

	Goal	Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Very easy
a. restore relationships with family?				
b. restore relationships with children?				
c. regain custody of children?				
d. reestablish contact w/ old friends?				
e. be accepted socially?				
f. stay alcohol free				
g. stay drug free				
h. provide yourself with food				
i. stay away from criminal				

activity				
j. avoid a parole violation				
k. stay in good health				
l. make enough money to support yourself				
m. further your education				
n. provide yourself with adequate housing				
o. find a job				
p. find a job you enjoy				
q. keep a job				
r. other				
s. other				

32. Did you live in a safe neighborhood before you were incarcerated?
___ Yes   ___ No

33. Were there any types of problems in the neighborhood that you lived in? (Probe: gangs, drugs, crime) ___ Yes___ No
If YES, what kind of problems? _____
_____
_____

34. Will you be returning to the same neighborhood when you are released from prison?
___ Yes   ___ No

35. Were you stopped by the police when you were released on parole?
___ Yes   ___ No

a. If yes, how many times were you stopped?
_____

b. Why were you stopped?

_____
_____
_____

36. Overall, were you satisfied with your progress when you were last released from
    prison?
    ___ Yes   ___ No   ___ Maybe

    a Why or why not?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

Appendix B – In-depth interview Guide for Prisoners

Now I would like to continue our interview, but in a different way than we have been doing. Rather than asking you questions where I want you to choose an answer, now I'd like for us to be able to have a conversation about some things in greater detail. In order for us to talk without my taking lots of notes and to be sure to get everything you say, I will be using the tape recorder during the interview. You may ask me to turn off the recorder at any time. When I write up the final report of the study I may quote certain things that you say, but I will not identify you specifically. So is it okay that we keep going with the interview?

First, I want to talk a little bit about your initial involvement with crime and your history with the criminal justice system.

1. Can you tell me about the first crime you ever committed?

   PROMPTS:
   * What crime did you commit?
   * How old were you?
   * Why did you commit the crime? (i.e. peers, neighborhood, family prob., economic problems, boyfriend/partner, abuse, under the influence)
   * Did you commit the crime alone or in a group?

2. Have you been involved in any other criminal activities since you committed the first crime? (This may include crimes that you were not arrested for).

   PROMPT:
   * What type of crimes did you commit?

3. Have you used or sold drugs?
   * If YES, can you explain why you started using and/or selling drugs?
   * How did you get involved with drug activity?
   * Can you describe the first incident when you started using drugs?

4. Can you tell me about the **first** time you were ever …
      a. stopped by the police?
      b. arrested by the police?

   PROMPTS:
   * What crime were you arrested for?
   * Why were you engaging in that criminal activity? (i.e. peers, neighborhood, family prob., economic problems, boyfriend/partner, abuse)
   * What were you thinking about prior to committing this crime?

5. Can you tell me about the **last** time that you were …
   a. arrested by the police?
   b. stopped by the police?

   PROMPTS:
   * What crime were you arrested for?
   * Who was involved?
   * Where did the crime happen?
   * Why were you engaging in that criminal activity?
   * What were you thinking about prior to committing this crime?

4. Have you ever committed a crime with or for your spouse/intimate partner/significant other?

   PROMPT:
   * If YES, why?

Ask respondent about victimization experiences if she admitted she was victimized in the survey

Now, I'm going to ask you about your experiences in prison.

5. What is a typical day like in prison?

   PROMPTS:
   * Are there any things about being in prison that you like? If so, what?
   * Are there any things that you dislike? If so, what?

6. Do you participate in any **correctional programs**?

   PROMPT:
   * If so, what are all of the programs that you participated in?
   * What was a typical day in the course like?
   * What did you actually do?
   * How often did you attend these sessions?
   * How long did each session last?
   * How many weeks or months were you in the program?
   * What do you find helpful about the program?
   * What do you find unhelpful about the program?
   * Do you think the program can be improved to make it more helpful?
   * If so, in what ways?

7. Did you participate in any **prerelease programs** prior to your last release?

    PROMPT:
    * If so, what types of pre-release programs did you participate in?
    * What did you actually do?
    * How often did you attend these sessions?
    * What did you find helpful about the program?
    * What did you find unhelpful about the program?
    * Do you think the program can be improved to make it more helpful?
    * If so, in what ways?

8. Has doing time in prison changed your life? If so, how?

    PROMPT:
    * Have you **gained** anything from having done time? If so, what? How do you think prison helped you gain those things?
    * Have you **lost** from having done time? If so, what? How do you think prison helped you lose those things?

9. Have you ever received visits from your family and friends while you've been incarcerated?

    PROMPT:
    * If yes, who has visited you while you've been in prison?
    * How often do s/he/they visit?

10. Do you think your relationships with other people have changed because you have done time in prison?

    PROMPT:
    * If YES, in what ways?
    * If NO, why not?

11. Has doing time in prison had an affect on your ability to parent your children?

    PROMPT:
    *If YES, how?
    * What type of relationship did you have with your children before you were incarcerated?

12. Do you currently have a relationship with your children?

    PROMPT:
    * Can you describe what kind of relationship you currently have with your children?
    * Did doing time in prison make your relationship better or worse?

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13. How are your kids doing now?

    PROMPT:
    * Has s/he had any problems or difficulties since you've been incarcerated?
    * Have any of your children been in trouble with the law?
    * If YES, what kind of trouble have they been in?
    * Do they currently get in trouble with the law?
    * If YES, what kind of trouble have they recently been in?

14. Do you have a partner/spouse?

    PROMPT:
    * If NO, have you chosen not to get involved in a relationship?
    *Why?
    If YES, How did you meet?
    * How did you become involved?

15. Has your partner/spouse had any problems or difficulties since you've been incarcerated?
    PROMPT
    * Has your partner/spouse been in trouble with the law?
    * If YES, what kind of trouble have s/he been in?
    * Does s/he currently get in trouble with the law?
    * If YES, what kind of trouble has s/he recently been in?

16. How do your current friends compare or differ from your recent friends?

    PROMPT:
    * Do you associate with the friends you had prior to your incarceration?
    * Have any of your old friends been in trouble with the law?
    * Do they currently get in trouble with the law?
    * If YES, what kind of trouble have they been in?
    * How did you meet your new friends?
    * Have any of your new friends been in trouble with the law?
    * Do they currently get in trouble with the law?
    * If YES, what kind of trouble have they recently been in?

Now, we're going to talk in general about what you remember when you left prison.

17. Can you describe the first 24 hours when you were released from prison?

    PROMPT?
    * Who picked you up?
    * How did you get to your destination?
    * Where did you stay initially?
    * Who did you stay with?

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* What were some of your thoughts and feelings during that time?
* Did you feel prepared upon your release?
* What did you do in the first few hours you were out?
* Did you celebrate your release?
    *If YES, how did you celebrate?

18. Who did you spend the most time with when you first got out of prison?

PROMPT:
* What was it like for you to be with her/him/them?

19. Can you explain some of the obstacles that you faced when you were released from prison?

PROMPT:
* Can you give specific examples?
* How did you deal with these challenges?

20. How did you first get set-up with …

PROMPT:
* Housing? Food? Employment? Substance abuse? Child care? Peer support? Counseling? Mental health service?
* Were you able to support yourself when you first got out of prison?
* If YES, how did you support yourself?
* If NO, why weren't you able to support yourself?
* How were you being supported?
* Who informed you about this program?
*What types of needs did you have?
* How did you deal with them?

BRIDGE: Some people want to talk about their experiences, even when they have been negative.

21. Did you talk to anyone about your prison experiences when you got out of prison?

PROMPT:
* If so, who did you speak with?
* Why did you tell them?
* Did you tell other people (who didn't know that you were in prison) that you did time in prison? Why or why not?
* If yes, who did you tell?
* How did they react?
* How did you feel?
* Did you choose **not** to tell anyone that you did time?

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* Why or why not?

22. Was there any job that you wanted but because you had a conviction you were not
able to get?

PROMPT:
* If that happened, how did you know that was the reason?
* What did you do?

23. Were there other ways you felt like you were judged or labeled because you were
an ex-offender?

PROMPT:
* Can you give examples?

**Now, we're going to talk about some ways you may have broken the law when you
were last released from prison. Remember, everything you tell me is confidential
and will not be disclosed to anyone.**

24. What crimes did you commit when you were last released from prison?

PROMPT:
* Why did you commit the crime(s)?
* What do you think are the benefits of committing crime(s)?
* What do you think are the costs (sacrifices) of committing crime(s)?
* How often did you engage in criminal activity?
* Do you see yourself stopping your criminal activity in the future?
* What would stop you from committing crimes in the future?

**Now, we're going to talk about different types of agencies you may have been
involved with since your release back into the community.**

25. Were you involved in different agencies when you were on parole (i.e. mental
health, child protection, welfare)?

PROMPT:
* If so, what were the agencies?
* Why did you get involved in the agencies?
* Did you want to get involved in the agency or were you required to get involved
in the agency?
* How did you find out about the agency?
* How did you get involved in the agency?
* How long had you been involved in the agency?
* What did you find helpful about the agency?
* What did you find unhelpful about the agency?
* Do you think the agency can be improved to make it more helpful?

    * If so, in what ways?

26. Did you receive any type of concrete assistance during your time on parole? (i.e.
employment, counseling, job training, child care, mandatory programming).

    PROMPT:
    * Who provided you with the assistance?
    * What type of assistance did you receive?
    * Was the assistance helpful?
    * What did you find helpful about the assistance you received?
    * What did you find unhelpful about the assistance you received?

27. How would you describe your relationship with your last parole officer?

    PROMPT:
    * Can you give specific examples of how s/he helped you?
    * Can you give specific examples of how s/he made it more difficult for you?

28. Did anyone have a **positive** influence on your release when you were on parole?

    PROMPT:
    *Can you identify the person, groups of persons, or organizations and/or
    institutions that had a **positive** influence(s) on your release from prison?
    * How did this person, group, or organization and/or institutions have a positive
    impact on your release?

29. Did anyone have a **negative** influence on your release from prison?

    PROMPT:
    * Can you identify the person, groups of persons, or organizations and/or
    institutions that had a **negative** influence(s) on your last release from prison?
    * How did this person, group, or organization and/or institutions have a negative
    impact on your release?

**Now, I would like to ask a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and values
and about questions of meaning and spirituality in your life. Please give some
thought to each of these questions.**

30. Do you have any religious beliefs and values that you follow?

    PROMPT:
    * If so, please describe in a nutshell your religious beliefs or the ways in which
    you approach life in a spiritual sense.
    * Have your beliefs changed over time?
    * If so, how?

31. Do you have a particular political point of view?

    PROMPT:
    *Are there particular issues or causes about which you feel strongly?
    * Describe them.

32. Is there anything else that you can tell me that would help me understand your most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world, the spiritual dimension of your life, or your philosophy of life?

Now that you have told me a little bit about your past, I would like you to consider the future.

33. Do you have any plans or goals in the next month/year/five years?

    PROMPT:
    * If YES, what are they?
    * Why do you have these goals?
    * How long has this been your goal?
    * What do you think it would take for you to achieve these goals?
    * If NO, why don't you have any plans or goals for the future?

34. Do you have any fears about the future? (e.g. not finding a stable job, place to live, getting custody of children)

    PROMPT:

    *If YES, what are they?
    * What do you think it would take to ensure that this fear that you have does not happen?
    * If NO, why don't you have any fears?

35. Do you think you are going to go back to prison when you are released?

    PROMPT:
    * If YES, what would it take to keep you from going back to prison?
    * What, if anything, would bring you back to prison?

36. Do you think that other incarcerated women who were charged with the same offense as you will return to prison once they are released?

37. Is there anything that you would like to add?

TURN OFF TAPE