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# How African-American Ex-Offenders Successfully Negotiate Their Socially Disorganized Environments into Which They are Returned After Incarceration: As Reflected in Their Own Words

Tisha M. Smith  
*St. John Fisher College*

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# How African-American Ex-Offenders Successfully Negotiate Their Socially Disorganized Environments into Which They are Returned After Incarceration: As Reflected in Their Own Words

## **Abstract**

Prison reentry has been defined as all of the preparations undertaken to ensure a proper return to one's community after serving time in prison. There are number of autobiographies, as well as considerable academic research, on the experience of incarceration and the resulting barriers to prison reentry, but little research that has explored the process of release, the long-term effects of having been imprisoned, and the ability to achieve and maintain post- release success. Much of the criminological and psychological analyses examine programs or processes to determine if they are correlated to successful prison reentry without considering what the ex-offenders, themselves, have to say about their prison, life-course, and reentry experiences. This research project sketched the carceral (experiences while incarcerated) of 10 African-American, formerly chemically dependent, men who reentered the city under examination, after serving time in a State Department of Corrections. This research project also addressed the social and personal circumstances the ex-offenders experienced after their release from prison into socially disorganized communities, explored how ex-offenders were able to negotiate their communities, and identified what cultural resilience factors were useful in helping these individuals to move successfully from prison to the community. Using a directed-content analysis, four themes emerged. The qualitative interviews with the ex-offenders yielded four essential components of a successful reentry process: 1) self-reliance/self-control, 2) help from others, 3) altruism, and 4) disavowal of stigma. The research participants validated the Cultural Resilience Model to the exclusion of the category related to racism.

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How African-American Ex-offenders Successfully Negotiate Their Socially Disorganized  
Environments into Which They are Returned After Incarceration:

As Reflected in Their Own Words

By

Tisha M. Smith

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Dr. Dianne Cooney Miner

Committee Member

Dr. Cynthia McCloskey

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education  
St. John Fisher College

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## **Dedication**

This research project is dedicated to my parents who are the embodiment of resilience. I have been fortunate to have had the guidance and instruction by two educators who led by example. I can only hope that moving forward, my parents will continue to be a source of support and encouragement.

I am thankful that I have been guided by Dr. Dianne Cooney Miner, Dr. Cynthia McCloskey, and my friend and mentor Dr. John Klofas. I thank you for helping me throughout this research project and encouraging me to deliver a quality research product that contributes to the field of criminal justice.

Over the course of my educational career, I have been blessed to have had dedicated and wonderful teachers and professors. I am thankful for everyone's help and guidance throughout my education. This research is a testament to the power of education and reflective of how many people have helped me learn and grow over the years. I am forever grateful for everything you have taught me over the years. I can only hope that I will be the same type of educator you have been to others.

This project would not have been able to come to fruition without the men who agreed to participate in the interviews. I thank you all for trusting me with your stories and allowing me to delve into your worlds for the purpose of gathering research data for this project. I thank you for allowing me to share your stories with the world. It is through your example that others will be able to benefit from the kindness you have shared and

hopefully gather strength to become successful in their reentry processes. I wish you all peace and love.

I am thankful to all of my friends and family for their continuous support and encouragement throughout my educational career. I am looking forward to seeing you all again.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Tisha M. Smith is currently a Primary Therapist IV for Unity Health System Parkridge Chemical Dependency in Rochester, NY. Ms. Smith received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice in the year 2000 from the Rochester Institute of Technology. She also received her Master of Science Degree from the Rochester Institute of Technology in 2003. She came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2010 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Smith pursued her research in prison reentry under the direction of Dr. Dianne Cooney Miner and Dr. Cynthia McCloskey and received the Ed.D. degree in 2013.

## **Abstract**

Prison reentry has been defined as all of the preparations undertaken to ensure a proper return to one's community after serving time in prison. There are number of autobiographies, as well as considerable academic research, on the experience of incarceration and the resulting barriers to prison reentry, but little research that has explored the process of release, the long-term effects of having been imprisoned, and the ability to achieve and maintain post- release success. Much of the criminological and psychological analyses examine programs or processes to determine if they are correlated to successful prison reentry without considering what the ex-offenders, themselves, have to say about their prison, life-course, and reentry experiences. This research project sketched the carceral (experiences while incarcerated) of 10 African-American, formerly chemically dependent, men who reentered the city under examination, after serving time in a State Department of Corrections. This research project also addressed the social and personal circumstances the ex-offenders experienced after their release from prison into socially disorganized communities, explored how ex-offenders were able to negotiate their communities, and identified what cultural resilience factors were useful in helping these individuals to move successfully from prison to the community. Using a directed-content analysis, four themes emerged. The qualitative interviews with the ex-offenders yielded four essential components of a successful reentry process: 1) self-reliance/self-control, 2) help from others, 3) altruism, and 4) disavowal of stigma. The research

participants validated the Cultural Resilience Model to the exclusion of the category related to racism.



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

This dissertation examined the post-incarceration experiences of African-American men who have reentered a mid-sized city in the Northeast U.S. after serving prison sentences in the New York State Department of Corrections (NYSDOC). The study was based upon the responses of ex-offenders elicited from qualitative interviews. The first chapter of this dissertation provides the background of the study, statement of the problem, the theoretical rationale for the study, the purpose, and the significance of the study. In addition to the sections previously mentioned, the subsequent chapters of the dissertation are outlined.

### **Problem Statement**

According to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, Black (non-Hispanic) males have an incarceration rate of 4,749 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents. Black males are incarcerated at a rate that is more than six times higher than white males (708 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents), and their incarceration rate is 2.6 times higher than that of Hispanic males (1,822 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents) (West, 2010). In 2010, at the national level, Black men accounted for 841,000 inmates under federal or state jurisdiction. In New York State, the rate of incarceration has steadily decreased by 19% since 1999. The number of inmates in the New York State Department of Corrections custody peaked in 1999 at 71,538 and has decreased by 18% since then. In 2011, the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services (NYSDCJS) identified that the

inmate population was 56,315 (New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services, 2011). Black men accounted for 50.5% of the inmate population in New York State.

Of the inmates released to parole in New York State in 2002, (n = 16,530) 48% were African-American (New York State Department of Correctional Services, 2003). The inmates under parole supervision in the state under examination have been identified as being 93% male: 52% Black, 27% Hispanic, and 21% are identified as White. One-third of the parolees are 16-30 years old, another third are between the ages of 31-40 years old, and the last third are 41 years and older. <sup>1</sup>

after release from the State Department of Corrections, a significant portion of the inmate population (15%) in New York State have reentered the area of the mid-sized city under examination. In a 2003 report drafted by the New York State Department of Corrections, an estimated 923 men were paroled to the city under examination and approximately 80% were Black. Although no official data has been published indicating the amount of post-incarceration parolees who have reentered the city under examination since 2003, estimates have shown that the rates have steadily increased, and the amount of people reentering the city under examination in 2010-2011 was approximately 1,100 inmates, according to Elizabeth Wilks, the New York State Deputy Director of Reentry (personal communication, February 2, 2012).

The New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services (2009) identified that 24,520 offenders were released from the New York State Department of Correctional

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<sup>1</sup> New York State and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons identify race by using the terminology Black, Hispanic, and White. For the purposes of this study, the racial composite will solely focus on African-Americans. The racial constructs for the purposes of this project will be limited because the theoretical framework for the project will be homogenous and focus on the unique cultural resilience factors for African-Americans so as to not dilute the data pool with the cultural references of other cultures (Afro-Caribbean, African, or Latino).

Services in 2006. Of the released prisoners, 2.9% returned to prison for a new felony within one year following release; within two years, 7.6% of parolees returned to prison, and 10.7% were returned by year three of their release from prison. The NYSDCJS (2009) further identified that the rates of re-incarceration after release from prison were substantially higher for post-release supervision rules violations. In 2006, 18.4% were returned to prison for a rules violation within one year of release, 27.5% were returned to prison within two years of release, and 30.5% were returned to prison for a rules violations within three years. Of the released inmates on post-release supervision (parole), 51% were identified as Black, 24% White, and 23% were identified as Hispanic, according to a 2010 report from the New York State Division of Parole (NYSDP) (2010).

Approximately 80% of parolees in the city under examination returned to the NYSDOC within three years of release due to committing a new crime or violating the conditions of their parole. Given the daunting statistics on recidivism and the return to the correctional system, a segment (20%) of the reentry population has maintained the ability to remain free of criminal justice system involvement and warrants further scrutiny (Klofas & Porter, 2010). The migration patterns of parolees in the city under examination illustrate a clustering of parolees in the city under examination and those that do not reenter the city under examination moved to outlying suburban or rural areas of the county, wherein the city under examination is situated.

Of those paroled to the city under examination, 89% reentered socially disorganized communities. Socially disorganized communities are plagued with high crime rates and heavy concentrations of parolees and probationers (Klofas & Porter, 2010). The communities in the city under examination that have high concentrations of

minority residents, heavy population mobility, and high poverty rates dominate what has been called the “Circle.” The Circle is an area that forms an “O” shape around the city under examination and has been an area of increased police presence and is home to a large amount of community-service providers that have sought to remedy and ease the plight of the residents in the community. Traditionally, socially disorganized communities are not bastions of law-abiding behavior or collective civil participation nor are they considered the places to which people migrate. Given that a majority of the parolees that reenter the city under examination are concentrated in an area known for its violence, high rates of poverty, and other social ills, one would not equate success with the communities that are disorganized and violent. There exists a small segment of people reentering the community after incarceration who are able to remain free of criminal activity despite the pervasive violence in the community. This project focused on those ex-offenders who have reentered the Circle after incarceration but who have managed to stay out of the criminal justice system after their release from prison. Additionally, this project focused on the protective factors and cultural-specific resilience factors the ex-offenders employed in an effort to remain out of the criminal justice system despite their socially disorganized environments both during pre and post incarceration.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

Much of the extant literature on prison reentry focuses on how prison reentry is an insurmountable task and how a majority of ex-offenders finds it difficult to navigate the communities to which they return after incarceration. It is only through the exploration of the communities to which ex-offenders reenter and the individualized innate and external



sources of resilience that those who manage to not to return to the criminal justice system can be thoroughly understood.

The theoretical basis for this study was a combination of the Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942) and the Cultural Resilience Model (Utsey et al., 2007).

The Social Disorganization Theory (1942) has been used to explain the existence of crime in communities and is among many criminological theories that seek to explain why crime exists. Criminologists and theorists have claimed that society plays a role in the development and continuance of crime. Social upheaval due to population shifts, poverty, neighborhood deterioration, illicit drugs, and the lack of institutions meeting the needs of the community in an effort to stem the tide of the mounting social problems in the community create atmospheres ripe for crime and delinquency.

### **Social Disorganization**

The Social Disorganization Theory (1942) attributed crime and delinquency to an absence or breakdown of communal institutions (e.g., family, school, church, and local government) and communal relationships that traditionally encouraged cooperative relationships among people (Jensen, 2003). Stereotypically, communal institutions have been thought to be the basis of protective factors from engaging in high-risk activities. Historically, criminologists have focused their research efforts on individual deficiencies or sociological explorations of crime. Both explanations consider personal or situational influences in delinquency, but the dominant factor has been the social determinants of crime and delinquency (Shoemaker, 2005).

The culture that is created in communities that are categorized as disorganized is one of apathy, criminal activity, criminal victimization, low educational attainment, and a host of other social ills. Of the people who live in those communities, a segment of the population falls prey to the societal ills and become incarcerated, and after concluding their sentences, a majority of the people reenter the communities that they left behind when they were incarcerated. Many ex-offenders reenter these disorganized communities that do not have the institutions or service providers that are able to help the offenders learn how to become law-abiding citizens. The lack of informal and formal systems allows for the continuance and furtherance of crime. The cyclical nature of crime is able to thrive because of the lack of cultural mechanisms that force the inhabitants of the community to seek another means for survival or earning, and/or they fail to develop social mechanisms or formal mechanisms that will stop crime from occurring in the community. When examining the dysfunction of disorganized communities, racial disparities often tend to surface. Even as crime continues to decrease in certain arenas, African-Americans are at an increasing risk of incarceration and subsequent weak attachment to the labor force, which—in turn—reinforces Black disadvantage and involvement in crime (Pettit & Western, 2004). There exists considerable social inequality between neighborhoods and clear evidence that concentrated disadvantage is linked with the geographic isolation of minority groups (Sampson & Bean, 2005).

The city under examination is a mid-sized city that has a population of approximately 208,000 people. Criminologists have indicated that prisons have become the leading source of immigration into the city under examination (Klofas & Porter, 2010). In the year 2000, census data indicated that White people accounted for 48.4% of

the population in the city under examination, and Black people accounted for 38.5% of the population (United States Census Bureau, 2002).

The minority population in the city under examination has historically been made up of people that migrated to the area for migrant farm work and not for the manufacturing jobs that were prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. The Box Company was the city's largest employer for many years; however, the jobs that were available at the Box Company were highly skilled manufacturing jobs, and they did not attract the migrating minority populations.

The city under examination maintains a unique history with regard to race relations. The city under examination experienced urban race riots in 1964. These riots sparked the larger riots that occurred in the United States during the Civil Rights era. The growing racial discord of the 1960s represented the larger social dichotomy of a city that had traditionally been one of the "haves" (White city) and the "have nots" (African-American and minority inhabitants of the city). The poverty rates for the city under examination have steadily risen over the years, and creating an underclass that has forced people into the outer suburbs and out of the area altogether. The poverty rate (persons living below the poverty level) for the city under examination in the year 2000 census was listed as 14.2% (United States Census Bureau, 2002).

The median household income for the city in 1999 was \$27, 123; and for New York State, the median household income in 1999 was \$43,393. The rate of home ownership in the city in the year 2000 was 40.3%; and in New York State, the rate was 53% (United States Census Bureau, 2002). The city under examination fared below all of New York State in areas that measured economics, housing, and educational attainment.

The high school graduation rate in the city is 45.5 (Loudin & McClendon, 2007). The graduation rate is reported to be the lowest of the five largest school districts in New York State. (Yonkers – 66%, Syracuse – 48.4%, and Buffalo – 54%).

Criminal justice researchers have often categorized the city under examination as a city with increased levels of violence that, in some cases, rivals the crime rates of other cities of similar size and population. Despite living in areas of high crime rates and poverty approximately, 20% of the ex-offenders that return to the socially disorganized communities in the city under examination do not fall prey to the adverse conditions that surround them. The parolees no longer engage in the maladaptive behaviors that are prevalent in their communities, and they have maintained a unique position among the ex-offenders reentering the community—they have not reengaged in crime and returned to the criminal justice system. The unique qualities that the 20% of reentering ex-offenders maintain can be attributed to a sense of internally or externally provoked resiliency.

### **Cultural Resilience**

A full understanding of the culture and cultural processes requires both the historic/traditional and dynamic perspective. Culture comprises the values, norms, rules, and ways of life that we get from the generations before us *and* how every new generation interprets and adapts these to their own lives and society (Gunnestad, 2006). A U.S. Surgeon General report indicated that African-Americans, in comparison to their White counterparts, were more likely to live in poverty, experience prolonged unemployment, be incarcerated, become homeless, live in high-crime neighborhoods, and

have fewer financial (or other) resources (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services , 1999).

African-Americans are inclined to experience greater stress than their European counterparts, as they have to suffer the annoying micro-aggressions that their environments breed (Norman, 2008). African-Americans have to contend with being ignored for service, assumed guilty for anything negative, treated as inferior, stared at because of their color, ridiculed because of their color, ridiculed because of their hair texture, poverty, and/or their lack of educational attainment. Predominant theories with regard to coping and resilience are rooted in an ethnocentric European worldview; however, researchers have called for additional research on coping and resilience studies focused on ethnic minority populations. Understanding the factors that predict risk and resilience in African-Americans requires an appreciation of the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and practices unique to the African-American community (Utsey et al., 2007).

Internal and external coping resources for African-Americans have been derived from strategies borne out of centuries of negotiating racism and oppression, maintaining a strong religious and/or spiritual orientation, and include supportive social networks (Utsey et al., 2007). A significant amount of research has been conducted with regard to the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and practices of African-Americans and the effective coping strategies of African-Americans that result in positive adaptive outcomes in situations of risk and adversity (Utsey et al., 2007; Utsey et al., 2000). Researchers have attributed the facilitation of adaptive responses to stress and adversity to cultural-specific coping strategies, which have been in keeping with the research that has been conducted on resilience. The participants in this study are African-American males who have

successfully reentered the community after being incarcerated, and the cultural resilience model was used to develop a series of questions that lend toward a better understanding of the protective factors and resilience-inducing elements they feel helped them remain out of the criminal justice system despite their negative circumstances/experiences.

A small amount of research with regard to concept of cultural-specific coping strategies exists, and researchers have called for additional research to be done in the field. The Cultural Resilience Measurement Model (2007) is a continuation of the predominant theories of resilience; however, the model explores resilience using a cultural-specific framework (specific to African-Americans) that explores the development of positive adaptations to environmental stressors using four areas of consideration.

The four areas that researchers focused upon were not exclusive to African-Americans; however, researchers noted that by focusing on research participants of single cultures, the research could yield results that indicate that there are cultural factors with regard to resilience that have not been previously considered in the field of resilience study. The four areas researchers used in the development of the Cultural Resilience Model (2007) were: quality of life, risk indicators, traditional factors, and cultural factors.

This research project combined the aforementioned theoretical concepts, the Social Disorganization Theory (1942) and the Cultural Resilience Model (2007) and purposely selected the core concepts from each of the theoretical constructs in an effort to develop the qualitative interview questions. The Social Disorganization Theory (1942), asserts that disorganized communities are characterized by poverty, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility, weakened social stability, and weakened social controls lead to

the inability of communities to solve problems, which in turn, lead to crime. Furthermore, socially disorganized communities experience the development of criminal values and traditions that replace conventional ones and that are self-perpetuating.

The Cultural Resilience Model (2007) asserts that cultural resources tend to shape and influence coping and resilience and help to develop the cognitive responses that facilitate the adaptive responses of African-Americans in times of stress and adversity. The combination of the Social Disorganization Theory (1942) and the Cultural Resilience Model (2007) make for a richer exploration into the resilience among the African-American research participants in this study.

The research methodology involved coding of the data from the qualitative interviews, and the responses were analyzed based upon the themes that emerged. The analysis is known as a directed content analysis. The process used to describe the phenomenological in a conceptual form is known in research circles as a *directed content analysis*. The content analysis was operationalized on the basis of previous knowledge (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The directed content analysis approach is a research method for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts, and a practical knowledge guide for action (Krippendorff, 1980). The purpose of the directed content analysis in this study was to examine the existence of cultural-specific resilience in a group of African-American men who have reentered the community from the New York State Department of Corrections and to analyze their thoughts about their socially disorganized communities. The men reentered neighborhoods in which there was strife and upheaval,

and they have remained free of the criminal justice system despite the adverse conditions into which they came home after incarceration.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This research project sought to explore the thoughts of post-incarcerated African-American men with regard to their perceptions about their reentry experiences (successes and failures). The qualitative interview questions were developed using the conceptual framework of the Social Disorganization Theory (1942) and the Cultural Resilience Model (2007). The answers solicited from qualitative interviews were analyzed using a directed content analysis in an effort to identify the themes that emerge from the qualitative interviews.

This research project explored the nuances of their post-incarceration experiences and successful reentry processes from the participants' perspectives in an effort to ascertain information about their resilience and the protective factors with regard to coping through adversity. This project was done in an effort to inform the reader, illustrate that successful prison reentry is possible, inform the reader of the nature of resilience among the participants in the study, delineate the risk factors the participants encountered both pre and post incarceration, and present potential areas for research..

### **Research Questions**

The current research project focused on the following questions:

1. How do African-American males negotiate their socially disorganized communities post incarceration?



2. What cultural resilience factors do post-incarcerated African-American males feel contributed to their ability to remain out of the criminal justice system for three or more years?

### **Significance of the Study**

The research findings from this study provided insight into the the experiences of African-American men who have served time in prison and have successful reentry processes. Given that a study of this kind is unique to the qualitative body of research on ex-offenders that are of this demographic, a current picture of prison reentry was warranted. This study can inform the community at large, correctional officials, law enforcement professionals, and the reentry community. It served as a tool to ascertain whether or not policies, procedures, and existing reentry practices are adequate, relevant, and responsive to the needs of the ever-growing population of African-American men reentering their communities.

### **Definitions of Terms**

**African-American:** A person of African descent who is born and raised in the United States.

**Black:** A member of a racial group of African, Caribbean, or Latin decent.

**Ex-offender:** A person who has completed his/her sentence after being remanded into custody by a court of law. A person served time in either prison or jail.

**Incarceration:** Institutional detention in jail or prison.

**Men:** Twenty-years-old and older.

**Negotiate:** The ability to live, maneuver, and respond to life stressors.

**Prison:** A place for the confinement of persons in lawful detention, especially persons convicted of crimes. A place or condition of confinement or forcible restraint. In the United States, the federal government, state governments, and private companies operate prisons.

**Prison reentry:** A holistic approach to helping ex-offenders succeed in the community, ensuring public safety, reducing criminal victimization, and reducing recidivism rates. The reentry process can include chemical dependency treatment, educational activities, obtaining healthcare, securing safe housing, and/or vocational educational training (Petersilia J. , 2003).

**Return:** To go back or to reintegrate.

**Social disorganization:** Social upheaval, which is due to population shifts, poverty, neighborhood deterioration, illicit drugs, and the lack of institutions meeting the needs of a community in an effort to stem the tide of the mounting social problems in the community, and it creates an atmosphere ripe for crime and delinquency. The Social Disorganization Theory (1942) attributed crime and delinquency to the absence or breakdown of communal institutions (e.g., family, school, church, and local government) and communal relationships that traditionally encourage cooperative relationships among people (Jensen, 2003).

**Success:** One's ability to remain out of the criminal justice system post-release (from jail and/or prison)

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided the introduction, background, the dissertation research questions, significance, theoretical rationale, and purpose of this study. Chapter 2

presents a review of the literature related to this study. Chapter 3 provides the research design methodology that was used to collect and analyze the data for this study. Chapter 4 provided a discussion of the research findings and Chapter 5 delineates the implications of the research findings.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

This chapter provides an empirical exploration with regard to the topic of African-American ex-offenders and their reentry experiences and processes. Databases used to locate relevant studies on the topic of African-American ex-offenders and prison reentry were Pro Quest, JSTOR, Academic Search Complete, and ERIC. Searchable words and terms were African-Americans and reentry, prison narratives, prison experiences, chemically dependent offenders, chemically dependent prisoners, successful prison reentry, coping, resilience, and reentry and racial issues. The review revealed relevant studies in four areas:

1. Relevant trends with regard to barriers to reentry for both male and female ex-offenders
2. Successful reentry processes for both male and female ex-offenders
3. Prison narratives: Experiences of prisoners and their firsthand accounts of their lived experiences
4. Relevant trends with regard to recidivism and desistance

### **Defining Desistance**

Desistance has been defined as the long-term abstinence from crime among individuals who have previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending – it is the purposeful engagement in the purposeful process of change (Maruna S. , 2001). Among the criminal population, the term for desistance is “going legit” (legitimate). The

reason for the “transformation” (offending to desistance) is something that has created much debate in the criminal justice community.

**Desistance research.** Criminologists have often explored the concept of the “hardened criminal”—the person who would be characterized as the chronic, incorrigible criminal fated to a life of criminality. It was often suggested that criminals were unable to be reformed. Early positivists in criminology suggested that criminals were natural-born and ape-like, biological throwbacks incapable of behavioral reform (Rafter, 1997). There exists a modern school of criminologists that still believe in the hereditary interpretation of crime. Glaser (1964), noted that despite the shifts from hereditary to environmental interpretations of crime, there still is a tendency to think of the person whose experiences make him (or her) a criminal as distinctly different from the non-criminal. Additionally, theories for the explanation of criminality vary from multiple causations to differential association to containment, and yet, they all seem to imply that when the totality of influences making for criminality exceeds the totality of influences making for non-criminality, the person becomes a criminal (Maruna S. , 2001). The process of criminality increases at a steady rate, and it is not readily or quickly reversed.

In 2001, criminologist Shadd Maruna, sought to conduct desistance research by studying both what he termed as “desisters” and “persisters” (those who continued criminal activity) after they were released from prison. His study was called the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS). The LDS is considered the seminal research when exploring criminal desistance. The LDS was an empirical analysis of the phenomenological or socio-cognitive aspects of desistance (Maruna S. , 2001). Maruna (2001) was able to isolate the ways in which members in the two groups differed in their

worldviews and self-perspectives in an attempt to specify the cognitive adaptations and self-schemas that help ex-offenders “make good” and stay that way (Maruna S. , 2001). Fifty-five men and 10 women were interviewed for the project. Thirty were classified as desisting, and 20 were classified as persisting (in crime). Fifteen were excluded and did not meet the criteria for either group, and they were excluded from the quantitative analysis portion of the project (the excluded interviews were included in the qualitative portion of the mixed-method study) (Maruna S. , 2001). The mean age for the desisting group was 30.7 years and the mean age for the persisting group was 30.6 years. The interviews included a standardized personality trait questionnaire, a criminal behavior checklist, and a social background survey. Maruna (2001) shared that the focus of the interviews was to allow the participants to tell their story. Maruna (2001) opted to add ethnographic research to the research project and interviewed people in chemical addiction programs and halfway houses in Liverpool, England.

The LDS (2001) concluded with observing that it was difficult to classify ex-offenders as desisters or persisters and that the participants in the study lay somewhere in between both categories in a “gray area.” When focusing on those that were categorized as “desisters,” there was often an acknowledgement of having committed a crime, but “that was not the real me.” In addition, the desisters spoke of having emerged from tragic pasts and coming through the muck and mire of criminality and drug addiction as people who have been transformed and were resilient. There were repeated statements by the research participants as having the need to give back to “save just one life” or “help someone who was in their position.” Unlike other desistance research, the research participants did not couch their desistance in terms of “burning out,” “being tired of drug

use or criminal activity,” or “being beaten down.” Instead, the participants opted to describe their desistance in terms of “renewal,” “rejuvenation,” or “becoming the people they were meant to be.” The research concluded with the finding that by “going straight,” the ex-offender was actually committing the ultimate act of rebellion by transforming desistance from an acquiescence to authority into a rebellious act (being resilient despite the negativity and criminality). In addition, the ex-offenders who desist from criminal activity and drug use can simultaneously preserve their identities and change their behavior (Maruna, Carvalho, & Porter, 2004).

**Aging-Out.** There has been no systematic effort made to specify the social mechanisms that might operate to return the stigmatized deviant to the “normal” and acceptable role in the community (Trice & Roman, 1970). Criminologists of late have focused on the “age-out” perspective and have concluded that most criminal offending starts in a person’s early teen years and stops by the age of 30 (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

Of the criminologists who have examined the age and crime relationship, the vast majority of them have identified that the “age-crime curve” has remained unchanged for the last 150 years; however, detractors have concluded that the age-crime curve only explains a portion of the issue of desistance (Maruna S., 2001). The age-crime curve could be defined as when criminals mature, they become more adept at not getting caught by the criminal justice system, or they spend more time being incarcerated and therefore are not rearrested. Moreover, older criminals may slow down in their criminal offending and manage to go undetected by the criminal justice system, or they become involved in less-risky types of criminal activity like white collar offending (Maruna S. , 2001).

Elizabeth Wilks, Deputy Director of Reentry Services for New York State, indicated that she believes that the aging-out theory of crime undoubtedly plays a role in desistance from crime and the lack of recidivism (E. Wilks, personal communication, February 2, 2012).

Matza (1964) was among the first to illustrate how widespread the phenomenon of desistance from crime contradicts the majority of sociological theories of criminal behavior, and his departure from existing theories was revolutionary (Maruna S., 2001) (Maruna S. , 2001). Matza asserted that criminological theories vastly over-predicted criminal behavior because they fail to acknowledge the temporary and contingent nature of criminality. Matza proposed that criminologists should view one's engagement in criminal activity as something that criminals sporadically drift in and out of during certain periods of their life course. Matza's research allowed for a host of other criminologists to consider that criminality was not just an innate trait, specifically situational, the byproduct of one's social environment, or one's familial upbringing or lack thereof (Maruna S., 2001).

**Desistance as a maintenance process.** The continuation of the process of desistance and the subsequent lifestyle changes one needs to make in an effort to maintain his/her crime-free lifestyle has been categorized as a maintenance process by criminologist Shadd Maruna (Maruna S., 2001) When considering desistance, some researchers have discussed the reasons for the non-engagement of crime as a process that one goes through, and they have likened it to the 12-Step Process in chemical addiction. One of the basic premises for the 12-Step Recovery is that one is "always" in recovery. Similar to the concept of always being in recovery, one is always in a state of trying to



not engage in criminal activity (Maruna S. , 2001). Amodeo et al. (1992) posited that negative or avoidant motives, such as fear of arrest, physical deterioration, familial breakup, or job loss, might be the most common incentives for not engaging in drug use; however, developing a sense of purpose in life or a commitment to achieving some sort of success in life may be the influential thing that helps people maintain their sobriety (Maruna S. , 2001). Similar to the concept of maintaining one's sobriety, it has been suggested that people may cease to engage in criminal activities for the same reasons. Understanding the existence of desistance from a maintenance process model forces the question of how do people stop engaging in crime instead of focusing on the "why" of why people engage/not engage in crime. By focusing on how people maintain a non-criminal lifestyle, the paradigm of criminal justice research has been shifted.

**Facilitating the maintenance process.** Ex-offenders who reenter their communities are faced with a host of challenges. How to facilitate ex-offenders' reentry into the community after periods of incarceration has been the subject of significant consideration, especially over the past decade when prison reentry has emerged as a "hot topic" with regard to the sociology of crime and punishment and criminal justice studies (Trimbur, 2009). Maruna (2001) deemed the process of dealing with one's reentry, a "maintenance process." With two-thirds of all released prisoners reincarcerated within three years, recidivism has tremendous social, economic, and political consequences, as resources are difficult to allocate toward helping to address the problem and associated ills (Trimbur, 2009).

Prison administrators oversee the release of more than 600,000 men and women into American communities each year (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004). The number of

prison releases, nationally, has grown more than four-fold in the past 25 years, placing a tremendous burden on states across the country (Naser & LaVigne, 2006). It is believed that the cumulative effects of the restrictive sentencing structures and penalties enacted in the 1980s and 1990s and of the *War on Drugs* and the *War on Crime* have forced the reconsideration of the policies that govern incarcerated people and that prevent them from getting out of prison/jail—or at least getting out with much hope of success (Pettus & Serverson, 2006). Flaherty (1990), suggested that the renewed emphasis on prisoner reentry is not a new phenomenon, and in fact, some criminologists have argued that the interest in prison reentry dates back to colonial American society (Monkkonen, 1990). Ex-offenders now face barriers to community reentry similar to those faced in the early 1700s, when townships were able to ban individuals considered to be “vicious persons” from living in the community (Flaherty, 1990). Given the historical concerns with regard to how ex-offenders reenter communities, an effort has been made to study the cost, the effectiveness of interventions, which type of interventions and services to offer, and the barriers faced by communities and ex-offenders themselves.

The effects of isolation and stigmatization from society have been described by one criminologist as having severe and persistent effects on the ex-offender. Petersilia (2003) refers to it as the “domain of stigma.” The domain of stigma can best be described by recognizing that reentering ex-offenders are marginalized when they reenter their communities of origin, and they are often excluded from employment, and as a result, they are less than likely to adhere to law-abiding behavior. Ex-offenders who suffer from the stigma of incarceration often tend to believe that holding on to connections from their criminal past is a necessity.

If offenders are reentering neighborhoods that do not/cannot provide access to the range of services that are crucial for reentering into the broader community, it stands to reason that they will be less likely to succeed in their post-release transition and more likely to recidivate (Hipp et al., 2011). In 2008, the United States reached a pivotal point in its history of incarceration, The Pew Center on the United States found that more than 1 out of every 100 American adults is incarcerated—that is 2.3 million people on any given day (Herrschaft et al., 2009). Given the stark figures of mass incarceration, it has become necessary to study the effects of incarceration that interfere with the reentry process in an effort to ameliorate the societal problems that arise with the increased amounts of ex-offenders reentering communities across the country.

**Social theory of desistance.** Another school of thought outside of the maturation out of criminal activity focuses upon the Social Bond and Informal Social Control Theories. The Social Bond Theory suggests that varying informal ties to family, employment, or educational programs in early adulthood can partially explain changes in criminality over ones' life course (Maruna S. , 2001). It has been asserted that as people grow older, they gain access to other types of achievement and experience social satisfaction, and in doing so, they become less dependent on their (negative) peer-group support (Trasler, G. B., 1980). Sampson and Laub (1993) bolstered the assumption in the criminal justice community that one's social bonds provide individuals with a stake in conformity and a reason to "go legit" (Maruna S. , 2001). Supporters of the Social Bonds Theory assert that when one does not have the attachment or bonds with positive informal social controls, he/she will continue their criminal activity and he/she does not have as much to "lose" (Maruna S. , 2001). Additional researchers who have followed the Social

Bonds Theory have added to the field of research by expanding the theory. Some researchers have asserted that ex-offenders may obtain a job or a spouse; however, those things alone do not create an environment whereby the person would desist from crime, because each of those things requires additional work and commitment. For example, Rutter (1996) indicated that marriage, as such, has no predictable effect on whether or not a person will reoffend. It would depend upon what sort of person one marries, when one gets married, and the sort of relationship that is achieved. Laub and Sampson (1993) further postulated that desistance depends on not only the existence of social attachments but also the perceived strength, quality, and interdependence of these interactions.

**Desistance and phenomenological theories.** Phenomenological criminology is an attempt to understand criminal decision-making through an examination of the ex-offenders' self project—the self image they are hoping to uphold (Toch, 1969), the ends they aim to achieve (Shover, 1996), and their strategies for creating meaning in their lives (Irwin, 1970; Shoham & Seis, 1993). Leibrich (1993) attributed desistance not to the social bonds one has formed or to aging out of crime but to major cognitive shifts. The cognitive shifts refer to the way one thinks about and interprets his/her life. A person has to change from within, and once he/she makes the necessary move to change the way he/she perceives his/her past, present, and future in order to desist from criminal activity (Maruna S. , 2001).

The theories of desistance vary in scope and are intertwined with the notion that an ex-offender may be required to experience some sense of personal success in the “straight” world before he/she realizes that he/she does not need to offend to regain a sense of personal agency (Maruna S. , 2001). Criminal justice research has shifted to

explore the interactions and processes of ex-offenders once they have reentered the community, and that has given rise to the field of *reentry research*.

### **Definition of Reentry**

Prison reentry has been defined as being all of the activities and programming conducted to prepare ex-offenders to reenter communities safely and live as law-abiding citizens (Petersilia, 2003). Reentry needs are considered to be anything that is included with the identification of one's needs while incarcerated/planned for while incarcerated—up to and including the services obtained when the offender has reentered the community. The processes that serve to assist an ex-offender's reentry into society generally pertains to conventional involvement in social institutions, such as family, school, work, and various social service and civic organizations (Delisi, Hochstetler, & Pratt, 2010).

**Reentry demographics.** It has been estimated that over 1,600 people exit federal and state prisons across the country each day (Petersilia J., 2003). Planning for their reentry back into the community takes place both before and after one's incarceration. The programming inside the correctional facilities is one facet of a prisoner's plan to reenter the community. The holistic approach and planning for a prisoner's reentry to the community is known in the field of criminal justice as the *reentry process*. The reentry process involves a holistic approach to helping ex-offenders succeed in the community, ensuring public safety, reducing criminal victimization, and reducing recidivism rates.

**New York State incarceration rates.** According to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, Black (non-Hispanic) males have an incarceration rate of 4,749 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents. Black males were incarcerated at a rate that was more than 6 times higher than white males (708 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents), and their incarceration rate was 2.6

times higher than Hispanic males (1,822 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents) (West, 2010). In 2010, on a rate of a national level, Black men accounted for 841,000 inmates under federal or state jurisdiction. In New York State, the rate of incarceration has steadily decreased by 19% since 1999. The number of inmates in the NYSDOC custody peaked in 1999 at 71,538 and has decreased by 18% since then. In 2011, the NYSDOCJS (2011) identified that the inmate population was 56,315 (New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services, 2011). Black men accounted for 50.5% of the inmate population.

Of the inmates released to parole in New York State in 2002, (n = 16,530) 48% were African-American (New York State Department of Correctional Services, 2003). The inmates under parole supervision in New York State have been identified as being 93% male: 52% Black, 27% Hispanic, and 20% are identified as White. One-third of the parolees are 16 to 30-years-old, another third are between the ages of 31 and 40 years old, and the last third are 41-years-old and older. <sup>2</sup>

A significant portion of the inmate population (15%) in New York State have reentered the Western New York State area after release from the New York State Department of Corrections. In a 2003 report drafted by the New York State Department of Corrections, an estimated 923 men were paroled to the Monroe County area and approximately 80% were Black. Although no official data has been collected to indicate the amount of people who have reentered the city under examination since 2003,

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<sup>2</sup> New York State and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons identify race by using the terminology Black, Hispanic, and White. For the purposes of this study, the racial composite will solely focus on African-Americans. The racial constructs for the purposes of this project will be limited because the theoretical framework for the project will be homogenous and focus on the unique cultural resilience factors for African-Americans so as to not dilute the data pool with the cultural references of other cultures (Afro-Caribbean, African, or Latino).

estimates have shown that the rates have steadily increased, and the amount of people reentering the city under examination in 2010-2011 was approximately 1,100 inmates according to Elizabeth Wilks, the New York State Deputy Director of Reentry (personal communication, February 2, 2012).

Approximately 80% of parolees in the Western New York area returned to the NYSDOC within three years of release due to committing a new crime or violating the conditions of their parole. Given the daunting statistics on recidivism and the return to the correctional system, a segment (20%) of the reentry population has maintained the ability to remain free of criminal justice system involvement and warranted further scrutiny.

### **Barriers to Reentry**

Typically, literature on reentry focuses on topics such as barriers to reentry, “invisible” punishments, post-release supervision, recidivism and desistance, and evidence-based best practices (Trimbur, 2009). Criminologists who have focused their research on the topic of reentry have identified race as a significant factor when discussing the issue of reentry. Petersilia (2003) considered race to be the “elephant sitting in the room.” The issue of race is salient to the discussion of prison reentry because African-Americans comprise approximately 13% of the U.S. population; however, they make up nearly half of both the prison population and the offenders reentering the community from jail/prison (Resig et al., 2007). Of those released from prison in the United States in 2006, 93% were men: 37% African-American, 20% Latino, and the remainder were Caucasian and other ethnicities (Marlow & Chesia, 2009).

**Housing.** A vast amount of research has been done to explore the barriers to successful reentry processes for both male and female ex-offenders. Makarios, Steiner,

and Travis (2010) noted the housing concerns were highly prevalent and a strong predictive factor in whether or not offenders recidivated. Housing issues for ex-offenders is an issue that dominates the literature with regard to the obstacles to reentry. Housing, according to a 2001 Massachusetts report, was identified as the “linchpin” that holds the reentry process together and that without a stable residence (along with substance abuse treatment/mental health treatment and employment), the reentry process is daunting (Bradley, Richardson, & Oliver, 2001).

Makarios et al. (2010) concluded that there were no significant differences among gender when reentry and recidivism were considered. Makarios et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study in 2010 that examined demographic information obtained and maintained by the Ohio Adult Parole Authority. Demographic data of 1,965 male and female inmates/former inmates were examined in an effort to look at gender disparities with regard to reentry and recidivism. To be included in the research sample, the ex-offenders had to be under the supervision of the Ohio Adult Parole Authority after release and not serving time for a parole violation. The goal of the research was to determine whether or not there were gender-specific causes of recidivism. The demographic areas that were focused upon in the Makarios (2010) study were measures of education, employment, housing, and programming (pre and post incarceration).

The initial data for the research sample was gathered from databases, and the second part of the study involved tracking data on the inmates one year after release from prison. The authors of the research project noted that they were specifically interested in tracking the demographic information one year after release because previous reentry research indicated that the first few months after release is the most critical time for ex-



offenders and that it has been estimated that 44% of ex-offenders are rearrested within the first year after release from prison. According to the Makarios study, the instances of recidivism increase as the years post-release increase. For the purposes of their study, Makarios et al. (2010) opted to define recidivism as re-arrest for a new felony charge by the police department. The authors noted that their measure for recidivism was limited in that it did not measure the amount of antisocial or criminal activity by the people in the study, and they only used officially collected criminal justice data in their research study.

The study concluded that the demographics that were able to help one determine or predict re-arrest were sex offense, age, and gender. In addition to the aforementioned variables, the authors indicated that employment and housing concerns (specifically the number of moves in one year) were consistent predictors of recidivism across both genders in both models. The authors indicated that for every residence change, there was a 70% increase in the odds that a person would recidivate.

In a 2006 quantitative study examining people released from the New York State Department of Corrections (prison) and the New York City Department of Corrections (jail), an effort was made to determine homeless-shelter-stay determinations among the different released populations (Metraux & Culhane, 2006). Metraux and Culhane (2006) examined the incarceration histories and shelter-use patterns of 7,022 persons staying in public shelters in New York City. They matched records from the administrative databases from the NYSDOC in an effort to get their prison sample and the NYCDOC in an effort to obtain information on releases from jails—their jail sample. The data from both correctional systems were matched to the data obtained from the databases of the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS).

Demographically (in the shelter system), the two groups in the sample differed—the jail population was predominantly Black (60.4%), and the prison population was predominantly Hispanic (20.6%). The sample in the study was overwhelmingly male (81.5%). The identifiers used in the study were name, birth date, sex, and social security number. The authors opted to choose an index date of December 1, 1997.

The researchers used a descriptive and multivariate regression to assess how incarceration histories intersected with shelter-use patterns, whether or not people in the shelter system had recent histories of incarceration, and whether or not there were differences between those with recent jail sentences and recent prison sentences. Less than one-quarter of the research sample, 23.1% of the 7,022 persons staying in the shelter system two years prior to the index date (17.0%), had a jail release and 7.7% had a prison release.

The researchers concluded that the prison subgroup had about the same number of stays when compared to the jail subgroup—but their stays were shorter. The jail subgroup had short stays but stayed in shelters more frequently (both before and after their current stay). The patterns of municipal shelter use after incarceration indicated a series of implications not limited to the intervention strategies designed to address the issue of homelessness after incarceration. The research contributed to exstant research with regard to homelessness and incarceration that indicated that homeless shelters were being considered as part of an “institutional circuit” that acted as stable housing for subgroups of the populations within the community (Metraux & Culhane, 2006).

**Stigma.** Similar to experiences of ex-offenders in the U.S., ex-offenders were the focus of a 2008 study in the U.K., and the experiences of the research participants

matched those of those participants in studies conducted in the U.S. (Aresti, Eatough, & Brooks-Gordon, 2010). The five U.K. respondents reflected on life-course events and the changes they went through in and outside of prison. Four out of the five respondents were from urban cities in the U.K., and a majority of them served time for drug-related offenses. The study, again, focused on the topic of desistance, and the themes that were developed in the research were similar to the themes developed in earlier studies conducted in the U.S.

The respondents shared that they went through different periods of adjustment during their incarceration and after release. The changes reflected a “pro-social identity” and “self-change” (Aresti et al., 2010). The ex-offenders discussed their feelings of stigmatization at length and “epiphanies” that occurred that changed their thought processes and behavior. They desired a change in their lives and did not want to continue with illegal activity and desired never to return to the criminal justice system. Aresti and his colleagues (2010) noted that by working and trying to help others after release, the ex-offenders satisfied a need to belong, and by engaging in work that had a strong moral element, the men appeared to be maintaining a positive sense of self—which by its mere nature of belonging implies acceptance and therefore a belief that one is valued by others because moral behavior is appraised by society.

The negative side of reentry for the participants in the Aresti et al. study boiled down to several different themes; however, the one theme the respondents all agreed upon was the stigmatization that being an ex-offender brings. One respondent noted that the stigma was *ever present* and something with which he must contend all of the time. The respondents in the study all feared social isolation. They felt that the stigmatization

they felt would lead toward exclusion from jobs, educational opportunities, housing opportunities, and being limited in their ability to socially network- in the law-abiding segment of the community (Aresti et al., 2010). This finding is in keeping with research with regard to ex-offenders' perceptions of housing and reentry issues and research undertaken by criminologists seeking to examine barriers to successful reentry.

**Access to services.** A two-year quantitative study of California parolees identified that if offenders are reentering neighborhoods that do not provide access to the range of services that are important for reentry into the broader community, it stands to reason that they will be less likely to succeed in their post-release transition and more likely to recidivate (Hipp, Jannetta, Shah, & Turner, 2011). Noted reentry researcher, Joan Petersilia (2003), identified that accessing services after release from prison is necessary for the successful reentry of most, if not all, offenders released from prison. Hipp et al. (2011) based their research findings on a behavioral model of healthcare from public healthcare literature and postulated that in order for people to obtain the services that they need, they need to be close to the services and have a perceived need for the services offered by the providers. Coupled with their perceived need and proximity is the notion that once the person reaches the service provider, the person seeking assistance believes that his/her needs will be addressed in some way based upon what services the provider says they can provide.

Hipp et al. (2011) concluded that although racial and ethnic minority parolees (ex-offenders under community supervision) lived near more service providers, the providers were particularly impacted by increased demand for services and that sex offenders and those convicted of more serious crimes tend to live further away from community service

providers; however, the demand for services near them was heavy. Hipp et al. (2011), acknowledged that their research findings added to a body of research that was inconclusive. Hipp et al. (2011) examined the proximity of service providers to parolees in 2005-2006. The addresses of service providers and parolees were geocoded for the research project. The researchers specified “potential demand” as the number of parolees that lived within a two-mile radius of the service provider. Using data from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) from January 1, 2005 through December 31, 2006, the addresses of parolees were geocoded by latitude and longitude and the same was done for service providers in the community. The number of parolees during the two years in the study was 223,129. The service providers were coded into categories. Initially, the researchers categorized them into 13 different areas, and they opted to collapse them into four different categories: social services, self-sufficiency (financial/transportation/employment), family and housing, and linking with the community (community and networking services).

Demographically, the study consisted of data on 63,185 African-Americans, 63,109 Latinos, 1,409 Asians, and 7,578 Other races. There were 30,290 women, and of the entire sample of ex-offenders, and 22,066 people in the sample were registered sex offenders. The mean age was 35.6 for the sample. The offenses the ex-offenders were convicted of were broken down into categories, The mean was listed as 0.350 for property offenses, 0.329 for violent offenses, and for the total violations on record was 3.68. The mean for the types of service providers was self-sufficiency providers within two miles of a parolee’s address – 9.982, family and housing – 7.568, community networking – 5.867, and social services – 4.592.

The researchers concluded that minorities tended to have more services available to them, and the areas where they lived tended to have an increase in the amount of social service organizations. This finding was similar to previous research that suggested that neighborhoods with high minority concentrations have more services nearby. The researchers noted that the presence of a large amount of social-service community providers implied that all of the service providers were equally impacted; however, it must be considered that even though providers are located near people, people may not want the services that *they* provide.

An additional 2009 study in the State of North Dakota examined the issue of reentry by examining the effectiveness of a reentry initiative that focused specifically on violent offenders. A sample of prisoners who participated in the reentry program was compared to the outcomes of parolees who received traditional prison/parole services and were not involved in any type of reentry program (Bouffard & Bergeron 2006). The results of the study concluded that those who were involved in the reentry program were less likely to use drugs while in the program, have their parole status revoked, and had increased rates of referrals to community-based service providers than did those who received traditional services (Bouffard & Bergeron 2006).

Similarly, Sung, Mahoney, and Mellow (2010) examined the contextual and personal correlation of the lack of access to drug treatment among parolees. Responses from over 36,000 people who contributed to the 2006 National Study on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) were used to focus their research efforts on the prevalence, patterns, and consequences of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drug use among the survey respondents. Of the over 36,000 respondents to the survey, 411 respondents were used for

the Sung et al. (2010) study, as they qualified to be considered a “parolee” (12 months prior to the survey they were on supervised release, conditional release, or had been on parole). Measures of barriers to treatment were addressed by asking the question, “*Which of these statements explains why you did not get the treatment or counseling you needed for your use [specific substance]?*” and the respondents were presented with 14 options. The 14 options included traditional obstacles for medical services: (a) financial restraint, (b) lack of health insurance, (c) lack of transportation or physical distance from treatment sites, (d) lack of readiness or motivation for treatment, (e) unavailability of adequate treatment resources, (f) lack of pertinent knowledge or information, (g) fear of stigma associated with substance treatment, (h) fear of retaliation in the workplace, (i) unawareness of one’s own treatment needs, (j) confidence in one’s own ability to manage the “problem,” (k) distrust in treatment, (l) lack of time, and (m) the desire for confidentiality. Of the sample, 68.9% identified not being able to afford treatment or not having health insurance as the barrier to them getting the treatment they needed. The next two largest percentages for the barriers to treatment included lack of transportation and the category that specified that the respondent was not ready to stop using alcohol or illicit drugs. Sung et al. (2010) noted that the process of becoming a drug-free, productive citizen requires continuous support from basic services such as housing, employment, healthcare, and family counseling. The researchers further shared that the successful reentry processes of the offender requires the development and reinforcement of a new lifestyle that can only be fostered and maintained where the ex-offender can be monitored and followed post- release (Sung et al., 2010).

**Chemical dependency.** Chemical dependency has long been thought to be a barrier to successful reentry. In 2010, Lindsay Philips sought to examine reentry qualitatively and conducted interviews with 20 individuals who were incarcerated in an urban prison system on the East Coast. She included men who were incarcerated at least one time before the interview with her and asked questions related to why they were not successful in their reentry attempt(s). All of the research participants had substance abuse problems, and all of the participants claimed that substance abuse was the primary barrier to their successful reentry processes. All the participants shared that their substance abuse issues were directly related to their inability to cope with life stressors, and in many cases, substance use was correlated with their continuance/resumption of criminal activities post-release. It has been identified that 73.6% of individuals in the criminal justice system have claimed to have identified substance use as directly correlated to their criminal behaviors and their repeated criminal activity post-release (Phillips, L., 2020).

An additional study of post-release drug use conducted by Nelson, Deess, and Allen (1999) identified that 46 out of their 49 research participants identified substance abuse issues as their primary barrier to successful reentry (Nelson et al., 1999). Bahr, Harker-Armstrong, Gibbs, Harris, and Fisher, in a study published in 2005, shared that 32% of their parolee sample (n = 51) indicated that they were not sure they could abstain from drug use after release and (n = 25) returned to prison within six months of release and attributed their return to their drug use issues (Bahr et al., 2005). Some of the offenders in the Nelson et al. study found drug treatment to be a positive experience, and others bemoaned drug treatment as a waste of time (Nelson et al., 1999).



Garland, Wodhal, and Mayfield (2011), also chose to interview former inmates about the barriers to their successful reentry processes. The interviews took place three months after their release. The focus group participants concluded that the motivation to change had to come from “within” and that in order to have a successful reentry, the reentering person needs to have an “epiphany” in order for services and programs to work. The Garland (2011) study addressed key issues that additional recent reentry researchers have touched upon—the issue of motivation and its relationship to the reentry process and/or therapeutic programmatic success.

Garland et al. (2011) concluded that substantial attention should be given to the influence of psychosocial strains with other reentry-related obstacles, and assessing the overall impact on social adjustment could considerably advance the academic understanding of prison reentry (Garland et al., 2011).

Understanding the drug-recidivism nexus of parolees takes on added significance when considering the fact that the largest and fastest growing segment of the parolee population (37%) served a sentence for a drug-related offense and that drug-involved inmates were more likely to violate their parole than those who were not (Sung, Mahoney, & Mellow, 2010). Drug-related offenses should not be used as a proxy measure of substance abuse; however, King and Mauer (2002) shared that in their analysis of incarcerated drug offenders, it was revealed that 68% of their research participants had used drugs in the month prior to their offense, and 41% were under the influence of drugs at the time of the offense (Sung et al., 2010; King & Mauer, 2002;).

Similar to the findings focusing on male ex-offenders, research conducted by Robins, Martin, and Surratt (2009) found that female ex-offenders were similar to male

ex-offenders with regard to substance-abuse issues. Robbins et al. (2009) concluded that women who went to therapeutic communities after incarceration in an effort to control their chemical addictions and in hopes of reuniting with their children were less likely to recidivate and have more successful reentry processes than those women who did not obtain assistance from their chemical addictions (Robins et al., 2009).

**Vocational/educational barriers to reentry.** A great deal of generated research has concentrated on the vocational/educational needs of ex-offenders immediately after release from prison. In these studies, financial (including the ability to find affordable housing) and employment concerns were the focus, and many examined either the ex-offenders' need to find work or the applicability of training received from the correctional services (Cordern et al., 1978; Dale, 1976; Eckland-Olson et al., 1983; Erickson, Crow, Zurcher Jr., & Connett, 1973; Hattem, Normandeau, & Parent, 1982; Liker, 1981; Maguire, Flanagan, & Thornberry, 1988; Orsagh & Chen, 1988; Pearce, 1970; Waller, 1974; Wengard, 1984; Garland et al., 2011; Aresti et al., 2010; Freudenberg et al., 2005; Garland et al., 2011).

**Lack of support.** Social isolation and associated feelings were examined by drawing upon data from 208 male (work release) inmates (Delisi et al., 2010) in a Midwestern state. The quantitative research sample was selected from 480 potential candidates and where 43% of the male work-release population. Demographically, the sample was similar to that of the population of the unnamed state—the sample was 61% White, and among the state population of released convicts was 72% White.

Delisi and colleagues (2010) collected survey data and examined the mediating and moderating influences of social support on the links between inmates' perceptions of

prison conditions and the method through which their hostility was expressed. The survey instrument measured rates of hostility (dependent variable), and social support/demographic characteristics/self-control/prison discomfort were the independent variables in the research project.

The findings of the study were that three variables had significant indirect effects on hostility (age, race, and self-control) and prison comfort had no direct effect on hostility. Non-Whites had lower rates of social support, and as the rates of self-control increased, so too did the rates of social support.

The researchers concluded that by providing support to reentering ex-offenders, policy makers maintain the ability to provide services to assist ex-offenders and protect public safety. The researchers concluded their research by suggesting that, given the existing research that supports said assistance, policy makers should start with providing services that can enhance the chances of a person not returning to the criminal justice system and having a life free of criminal activity.

Despite research that illustrates the positive roles that families play in successful reentry, there is also evidence that shows that reintegrating/reuniting with one's family after release from prison can have a negative effect on the post-release experience of ex-offenders (Naser & LaVigne, 2006). Families are often financially strapped, as it is, and when considering reintroducing a reentering family member who has been incarcerated and the possibility they may need material support in addition to housing and shelter, the stress can damage already fragile and or tenuous relationships.

Naser and LaVigne (2006) studied the responses from 117 adult male prisoners reentering the Baltimore, MD community and 296 adult male prisoners reentering the

City of Chicago, IL (total sample n = 413) after incarceration. In an effort to examine the quality of familial relationships, the researchers used a scale developed in 1991. The Family Relationship Scale (FRS) (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991) consisted of 11 items that focused on whether or not the respondents felt that there was someone in the family with whom they could speak, spend time with, who understood them, could offer advice, or had someone from whom they could solicit advice. The FRS was administered three times: twice in the pre-release phase and once after release. The Family Support Scale (FSS) (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991) addressed the extent to which respondents had family members with whom they felt close and the degree to which they felt their family member(s) were supportive. The FSS was administered three times—both pre- and post-release and once during their incarceration.

The researchers concluded that ex-offenders relied on their families heavily after release and that the families shouldered a heavy burden, and they postulated that because of the heavy burden for families of reentering ex-offenders, social services should be designed with the whole family in mind and not just the reentering ex-offenders. Before their release from prison 55% of the participants indicated that they believed that their families would feature prominently in their post-release success, and after release, 80% of the participants indicated that their families would be an important factor in their post-release success. The researchers also noted that 86% of the research sample was Black, and of the remaining racial groups, 6.5% were identified as Hispanic or Latino. The most striking difference in the responses from the racial groups was that the Hispanic/Latino respondents were less likely to have their family support expectations met upon release. The researchers considered the responses of the Hispanic/Latino respondents as an area

that warranted additional research, because they surmised that the family structures and family relationships may be different due to cultural constructs. Similar to Nasser and Lavigne's findings (2006), Richie (2001) found that some familial relationships were difficult to navigate after incarceration. Richie conducted a study that incorporated interviews with 42 minority females who reentered low-income communities after their release from prison. Richie asserted that women frequently depended on family members who themselves had limited resources (Naser & LaVigne, 2006; Richie, 2001).

Bahr, Harker-Armstrong, Gibbs, Harris, and Fisher (2005) concluded that peer groups often negatively effected ex-offenders after they reentered the community. Of the 51 parolees they interviewed, a majority of the interview participants identified that their reincarceration was directly attributed to socializing with negative (drug using or criminally involved) friends, conflicted familial relationships, and having family members who were currently involved in the criminal justice system. Bahr et al. (2005) concluded that the overall network of positive family and friends helped make a more successful reentry into the community after serving time in prison (Bahr et al., 2005).

**Gender disparities.** A 2010 study by Scroggins and Malley, focused upon women under community-based criminal justice supervision, illustrated that incarceration does not marginalize women; a criminal record further marginalizes women, negatively affecting their chances for successful reentry in the absence of programs meant to address women's issues (Scroggins & Malley, 2010). Scroggins and Malley (2010) examined 155 reentry programs for women in the 10 largest metropolitan areas of the United States in an effort to determine whether or not the reentry needs of women were being addressed. Reentry programs in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Philadelphia,

Houston, Miami/Ft.Lauderdale, Washington, D.C., and Boston were analyzed based upon the areas that Scroggins and Malley identified through previous reentry research with regard to women.

The areas they focused upon were related to the barriers that women released from incarceration tended to face. Childcare, parenting issues, healthcare, counseling, substance abuse, housing, transportation, education, employment issues, and social support were some of the areas that Scroggins and Malley (2010) researched. They collected data on the services reentry programs claimed to provide and categorized them based upon the services they claimed to provide. The research project conducted by Scroggins and Malley found that there were many instances in which the female ex-offenders did not have their needs met, and some of the programs examined specified that they offered services that previous research had indicated was not needed by female ex-offenders. For example, in the area of education, previous research indicated that many female offenders had a GED or high-school diploma; however, a significant number of the programs that Scroggins and Malley included in their study offered referral to GED or high-school programs. The educational services were not needed, and the researchers concluded that a host of programs included in their study focused attention on the wrong demographic and offered services that went underutilized.

Scroggins and Malley (2010) completed a *content analysis* and did not perform program evaluations to determine if the services that programs stated they provided were, in fact, provided. They considered the content-analysis-only function of their research to be a limitation, and they acknowledged that they conducted their research based upon *broad* assumptions. The first assumption was that the female ex-offenders did, in fact,

need the services they shared that they needed and that the female ex-offenders met the requirements for the different programs merely because of their post- incarceration status. These assumptions were recognized as potential areas for future research. They also assumed that the categories they focused upon were justified because of previous research in the reentry field, and they were unsure if there were additional areas that they needed to focus upon because the area had not been discovered by the research community as of yet. The researchers concluded that there were services that women needed the most (based upon previous reentry research) and that social support services for women were the most-common service that was available for reentering women, and no fewer than four reentry programs per city studied offered services related to relationship building assistance, life skill development, and peer group development. Similar to the social support services, the data revealed that employment services were among the most available/provided services for reentering women and that overall the capacity and availability of employment services was sufficient to meet the needs of female ex-offenders in the cities in the study. The areas that needed additional coverage in the cities focused upon in the study were those of childcare, healthcare, counseling services, housing, and transportation (Scroggins & Malley, 2010).

Bui and Morash (2010) examined reentry by conducting interviews with 20 women (in a mid-sized southern state) who were classified as successful parolees- in that they had not been rearrested for new crimes or technical violations within one year of release, and parole records were checked again at 18 months after release to verify their “success.” By using retrospective interviews, the researchers were able to have the participants describe the broader context in which they shifted away from breaking the

law and captured their perceptions of how they interpreted the help they received from others—their social networks, their lifestyle, and their perceived cognitive behavioral changes. Half of the women in the study identified the importance of their familial relationships to their reentry processes; however, only five of the women (n = 20) identified that the support they received from their families involved housing and financial support, and it was noted that many of the women identified parole as part of their supportive network. The women were interviewed in 2007 and had to have served over one year in prison in order to be included in the research project. The time spent in prison ranged from 12 months to 12.5 years, and the offenses ranged from theft to homicide. The researchers noted that 38 women qualified to be in the study and that 20 women agreed to participate. The researchers shared that during the course of the project three women dropped out of the study and three other women who had served less than one year were brought into the study in an effort to maintain the target number of 20 female participants. At the end of the study, all but one of the women had successfully completed parole (one participant was rearrested). Of the participants in the study, 13 women had been released for three years or more, seven women were released for 21 months to three years. The criminal justice demographic data differed from the statewide data that indicated that 26% of women were rearrested within one year, 43% within two years, and 50% were rearrested within three years.

The women in the study identified negative familial relationships, both before and after incarceration; over half of the study participant (n = 11) identified growing up in families that were “dysfunctional” or “disadvantaged,” and five of the women identified being in abusive relationships before incarceration. Participants in the study (n = 7)



identified drug use and crime involvement *with* family members. Child custody issues (n = 4), familial alienation due to their drug use (n = 2), and intimate partner break-ups as a result of their incarceration (n = 11) were identified as issues with regard to the negative familial network discussion in the study. Conversely, the pro-social network discussion in the study focused on the relationships that the participants identified as getting better *during* and *after* incarceration. Of the women who indicated that they had relationships prior to incarceration (n = 15), six of the women reported being in new, more-positive relationships after incarceration, and two women shared that their (pre-incarceration) relationships were better than before incarceration. Post-incarceration drug use among the social networks of the women were reported by six of the participants and none of the six women reported that the drug use was common among their intimate partners. The participants noted that they received a significant amount of help from their families after incarceration. A majority of the participants received short-term housing assistance from their families (n = 13), and more than half (n = 11) described receiving long-term housing assistance, financial assistance, emotional, and various forms of material support from immediate and extended family members (Bui & Morash, 2010).

**Racial disparities.** Trimbur (2009), examined how ex-offenders of color conceptualized their political, social, and economic futures and how the conceptualizations related to the racialized, social-structural obstacles encountered upon reentry and decisions to re-engage in criminal activity (Trimbur, 2009). Trimbur, conducted four years of ethnographic research in a New York City boxing gym and conducted approximately 50 qualitative interviews of men of color who were ex-offenders in an effort to understand how they understood the process of reentry and how

their perceptions changed over the course of the four-year ethnographic segment of the study.

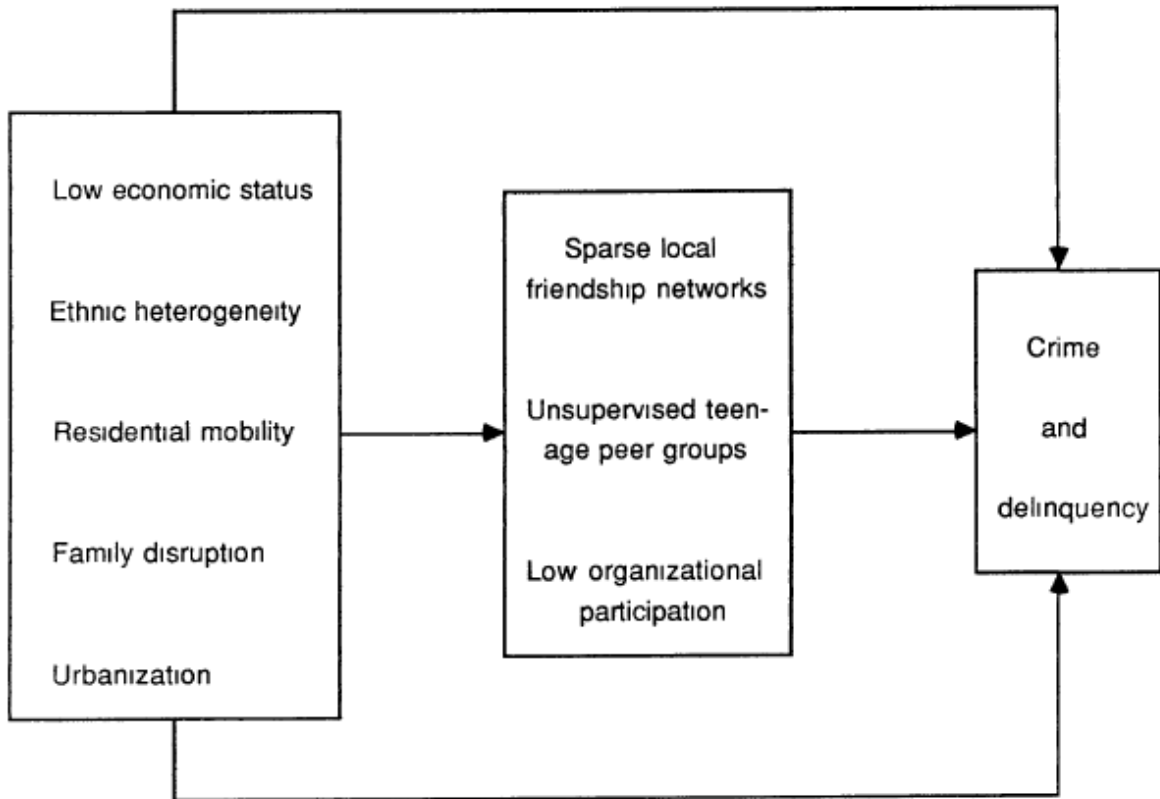
One of the more poignant segments of the research project was an interview with one of the participants who shared that he had hopes of going to school and becoming a pharmacist upon release from prison. When he left the prison and he began to research what one must do to become a pharmacist, he was less motivated because of the length of time it took to become a pharmacist, and he found out that he would be unable to obtain a license to be a pharmacist due to his felony conviction. Trimbur shared that the ex-offender gave up hopes of becoming a pharmacist and decided that education was not the secure means by which he might succeed, and he terminated his schooling.

Trimbur's (2009) finding was in keeping with previous research on educational attainment and reentry. Research has shown that educational attainment was one of the many difficulties that ex-offenders face when considering their reentry needs. The 1998 Higher Education Act makes students convicted of drug-related offenses ineligible for any grant, loan, or work assistance and represents an existing barrier to reentry, and it treats drug-related offenses differently than sex offenses (including violent sexual offenses), alcohol related offenses, and repeated offenses—which enable people to obtain both funding and professional licensure (Legal Action Center, 2004).

Trimbur's (2009) research findings were mixed. The men in the study took various pathways toward reentry. The researcher noted that some reentering men developed pro-crime identities and undertook criminal activity immediately upon release (because they reaped some benefits—money/crime/status), some reentering men engaged in therapy and religion in an effort to desist (from criminal activity), while others

attempted to find lawful work but reengaged in illegal economies when finding lawful work proved difficult (Trimbur, 2009). Successful reentry, as viewed by the participants who opted to desist from criminal activity after release was as an individualized process. The desire for changing their conditions came from within—it was a personal decision to change their angry, antisocial worldview and develop a strategy of law-abiding behavior and resilience despite obstacles. Many of the participants who opted for change relied on social supports to keep them focused and determined not to return to a life of crime. Reliance on social supports is in keeping with previous research on the value of social supports throughout the reentry process.

**Social disorganization.** The Social Disorganization Theory has been used to explain the existence of crime in communities and is among many criminological theories that seek to explain why crime exists. Criminologists and theorists have claimed that society plays a role in the development and continuance of crime. Social upheaval, due to population shifts, poverty, neighborhood deterioration, illicit drugs, and the lack of institutions meeting the needs of the community in an effort to stem the tide of the mounting social problems in the community, creates atmospheres ripe for crime and delinquency. This paper explores a theoretical explanation for crime known as the Social Disorganization Theory, it but sheds light on the problem of recidivism among people reentering into disorganized communities after they have been incarcerated. A graphical representation of the Social Disorganization Theory can be found in Figure 2.1.



*Figure 2.1.* A graphical representation of the Social Disorganization Theory—a causal model of extended version of Shaw and McKay’s (1942) theory of community systemic structure and rates of crime and delinquency (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Shaw & McKay, 1942).

For centuries, criminologists have conducted studies that explore the reasons for crime. Some of the studies that have been conducted have relied on human subjects while others rely on statistical information (crime rates/arrest rates/incarceration rates) that subsequently provided explanations for the existence of crime in society. Understanding deviance in society and the resulting fallout from criminal activity and victimization has driven criminologists to want to explain behavioral patterns in different segments of the

community. One such theory, the Social Disorganization Theory, has had both its supporters and detractors since its emergence in the field of criminology.

The Social Disorganization Theory attributed crime and delinquency to an absence or breakdown of communal institutions (e.g., family, school, church and local government) and communal relationships that traditionally encouraged cooperative relationships among people (Jensen, 2003). The Social Disorganization Theory was first developed by sociologists looking into the existence of crime in specific, underserved communities in the Chicago area in the early 1900s. The sociologists were affiliated with the University of Chicago and were known as part of the Chicago School of researchers and theorists that dominated many different arenas in academia at that time. The sociologists were particularly interested in explaining the patterns of delinquency and criminal activity in the areas heavily populated by ethnic minorities and immigrants. The Chicago communities they conducted their research upon/in were experiencing rapid growth (from the southern US and Europe) during the 1900s. The population shifts that subsequently changed the culture of the community and supported the concept that “disorganizing” or “disintegrative” forces existed subsequently contributed to a breakdown in the teaching and learning of the prior “social rules” that had inhibited crime and delinquency in European peasant society (Thomas, Znaniecki, & Zaretsky, 1918). Rooted in the theoretical underpinnings of the Social Disorganization Theory, a long line of research has emerged to suggest how community structural characteristics (e.g., ethnic heterogeneity, disadvantage, and residential stability) impact crime in communities (Boessen, 2010).

Old-World customs and societal norms that governed interpersonal/societal interaction were no longer capable of being upheld/observed because of the constant and ever-changing interplay and interaction between people of different cultural backgrounds. The continued rapid shift in population in inner-city communities meant that traditions and community life were in a constant state of flux, and it contributed to the dilution of Old-World concepts about the strength of communities and families. Further diluting the societal norms was the second-generation population that was not able to adhere to or resist traditional customs and norms and opted for assimilating to the American lifestyle—which often led toward a delinquent and non-conformist way of life.

Historically, criminologists have focused their research efforts on individual deficiencies or sociological explorations of crime. Both explanations considered personal or situational influences in delinquency, but the dominant factor has been social determinants of crime and delinquency (Shoemaker, 2005). One of the key concepts in the Social Disorganization Theory refers to the breakdown in conventional institutional controls as well as informal social control forces within the community (or neighborhood) or the inability of organizations, groups, or individuals in a community or neighborhood to solve common problems collectively. Criminologist Edwin Sutherland concluded that if the society is organized with reference to the values expressed in the law, the crime is eliminated; if it is not organized, crime persists and develops (Sutherland, 1939).

Capitalizing on Sutherland's research, criminologists Clifford Shaw and Henry D. McKay (1942) refined the Social Disorganization Theory and provided the field with additional reasons for the existence and persistence of crime in specific neighborhoods.

They developed a “Concentric Zone Theory” that asserted that urban areas were inhabited by “normal” people who were faced with dealing with “normal” situations under “abnormal” conditions (Jensen, 2003). Shaw and McKay’s research concluded the following: rates of truancy, delinquency and adult crime tend to vary inversely in proportion to the distance from the center of the city, and those communities that show the highest rates of delinquency show, as a rule, the highest rates of truancy and adult crime. High rates of crime occur in areas that are characterized by physical deterioration and declining populations. Shaw and McKay further stated that relatively high rates (of the aforementioned areas) have persisted in certain areas notwithstanding the fact that the composition of population has changed markedly (Shaw et al., 1929). Both Shaw and McKay, as well as the theorists who expounded upon the Social Disorganization Theory, have agreed that there is a disconnect and disinterest among residents of neighborhoods that can be termed as *disorganized*. Due to the lack of communication among neighbors, and residents’ lack of long-term interest in the well being of the neighborhood, internal and external social controls break down, and as a result, crime is able to thrive in the community (Armstrong, 2010).

***Criticism of the Social Disorganization Theory.*** Detractors contend that there are other mitigating factors when considering the reason for crime and delinquency in a community. Classical School theorists tend to believe that there is a personal reason that leads one to engage in criminal activity. Cesare Becarria argued in the 1700s that people do what they want to do because they derive pleasure from their acts, and they voluntarily choose to commit them. All people have access to reason and act on their own volition (Shoemaker, 2005). The Classical School Theory gave way to the modern theory of

Rational Choice. Rational Choice Theory rejects the societal role in crime and delinquency and delineates another way of looking at crime and delinquency in society by focusing on an individuals' motives for their behavior. Rational Choice theorists believe that people engaged in criminal activity look for opportunities to commit crime and weigh the pros and cons for committing the crime, and then they focus on the perceived risks in committing the crime (chances of getting caught and punished).

Detractors further believe that the theory does not account for police practices in the areas that have been categorized as disorganized. If the idea that crime occurs in disproportionate rates in areas prone to increased social mobility, drugs, crime, low educational attainment, and physical deterioration and leads to increased amounts of arrests and incarceration, one needs to consider that there would be a heavy police presence. The heavy police presence could imply that the decision to arrest and detain (people) would account for the existence of high rates of reported crime and skew the results of quantitative studies conducted on the inhabitants of the community in question (Warner & Pierce, 1993).

The culture that is created in communities that are categorized as disorganized is one of apathy, criminal activity, criminal victimization, low educational attainment, and a host of other social ills. Of the people who live in those communities, a segment of the population falls prey to the societal ills and becomes incarcerated, and after concluding their sentence, a majority of the people reenter the communities that they left behind when they were incarcerated. Many reentering ex-offenders reenter disorganized communities that do not have the institutions or service providers that are able to help the ex-offenders learn how to become law-abiding citizens.



The lack of informal and formal systems allows for the continuance and futherance of crime. The cyclical nature of crime is able to thrive because of the lack of cultural mechanisms that force the inhabitants of the community to seek another means for survival or earning and/or they fail to develop social or formal mechanisms that will stop crime from occurring in the community. When examining the dysfunction of disorganized communities, racial differences often tend to surface. Even as crime continues to decrease in certain areas of the community, African-Americans are at an increasing risk of incarceration and subsequent weak attachment to the labor force, which—in turn—reinforces Black disadvantage and involvement in crime (Pettit & Western, 2004). There is considerable social inequality between neighborhoods and clear evidence that concentrated disadvantage is linked with the geographic isolation of minority groups (Sampson & Bean, 2005). A trend in the migration of both White and Black middle-class residents, as well as industry and business, out of the large cities into suburban communities has resulted in even more deprivation, decay, and other conditions of social disorganization within the urban centers. This trend has left a population of the “truly disadvantaged” (Wilson, 1987) or an “underclass” with high rates of unemployment, welfare support, illegitimate births, single-parent families, drug use and abuse, and violence (Akers & Sellers, 2004).

### **Chapter Summary**

The preceding literature review examined the existing literature with regard to prison reentry in the United States and abroad. The existing literature review provided information and data gleamed from both qualitative and quantitative research projects conducted over the last 30 years. The literature review illustrated a need to speak directly

to the ex-offenders themselves in an effort to determine what factors can be attributed to their success. Previous research has focused specifically on the barriers to reentry, and very little attention has been given to those members of our society who have reentered the community after serving time in prison and who have been successful (Lipsey, 1995; Uggen, 2000; Bushway & Reuter, 2002; Clear & Cole, 2000). Prior to this research project, it has not been known what contributing factors make for successful prison reentry and whether or not the factors can be replicated and incorporated into existing prison reentry programs and in the correctional system of the United States at large.

It would be useful to interview successful no longer chemically addicted ex-offenders to ascertain why the group is unique among those who have been released from prison and whether or not the community at large has a role in contributing to their success and the failure of others among their demographic. This research project contributes to a new awareness among the public, policy makers, and those who work in the criminal justice community and seek to provide answers to the age-old question of why some criminals can be rehabilitated and reformed and others continue the downward spiral of chemical addiction and involvement in the criminal justice system. The review of the literature supports the need for a qualitative research project whereby ex-offenders will be interviewed to obtain their thoughts about their experiences with regard to successfully reentering the community and not returning to the criminal justice system despite the existence of traditional barriers to successful reentry processes.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology**

This chapter summarizes the research design and methodology for the research project. An overview of the research context, participants, data instrumentation, and data analysis strategies has also been provided.

Approximately 80% of parolees in New York returned to the NYSDOC within three years of release due to committing a new crime or violating the conditions of their parole. Given the daunting statistics on recidivism and the return to the correctional system, a segment (20%) of the reentry population has maintained the ability to remain free of criminal justice system involvement and warrants further scrutiny (Klofas & Porter, 2010). The migration patterns of parolees in the city under examination illustrate a clustering of parolees in the city under examination and those that do not reenter the city moved to outlying suburban or rural areas in the county, which is the county wherein city under examination is situated. Of those paroled to the city, 89% reenter socially disorganized communities. Socially disorganized communities are plagued with high crime rates, and heavy concentrations of parolees and probationers (Klofas & Porter, 2010).

This dissertation project examined the processes and experience of prison reentry of African-American men. Prison reentry has been defined as being all of the activities and programming conducted to prepare ex-offenders to reenter communities safely and live as law-abiding citizens (Petersilia, 2003). There are number of autobiographies as well as considerable academic research on the experience of incarceration and the

resulting barriers to prison reentry, but little that explores the process of release and the long term effects of having been imprisoned and successful reentry processes. The purpose of this research project was to explore the reentry experiences of African-American men who have reentered the city under examination after incarceration and to develop an understanding of the cultural resilience factors to which they attribute their successful reentry processes and to examine their responses to open-ended questions with regard to their life-course reflections about reentering a socially disorganized community.

The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. How do African-American males negotiate their socially disorganized communities post- incarceration?
2. What cultural resilience factors do post incarcerated African-American males feel contributed to their ability to remain out of the criminal justice system for three or more years?

### **Qualitative Inquiry**

Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. He further shared that qualitative research is a process of research that involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants' setting, data analysis, inductively building from particulars to general themes (Creswell J. W., 2009). Qualitative inquiry also allows the researcher the opportunity to seek to establish meaning from of a phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants. Qualitative inquiry provides richer opportunities for gathering and assessing, in language-

based meanings, what the research participant values, believes, and thinks about social life (Saldana, 2009).

Unlike quantitative research where the researcher is distant, in qualitative research it is important that the researcher develop enough of a relationship with the participants to be able to really hear and understand what they are saying. Further, situating the research within context is central to qualitative inquiry and is considered a frame of reference for the participants, placing their experiences within and among others (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Qualitative research methodology seeks to describe the meaning of participants' experiences for those who frequently are marginalized or oppressed, allowing them to construct and reconstruct their identity as they tell and retell the stories of their lives (Elliot, 2005). Given that the purpose of this study was to focus on African-American ex-offenders and how they have been able to negotiate their socially disorganized environments post-incarceration, the qualitative method of inquiry is an appropriate way to gain insight into their reentry processes. By situating their stories within the context of their communities and cultural considerations as they relate to their thoughts about their reentry processes, the research participants created a deeper/richer understanding of the reentry process.

### **Research Methodology**

Using in-depth interviews provides one with the ability to capture the richness of the lived experiences of the research participants and combine them to develop a collective sense of meaning of the issue(s) being explored. Qualitative analyses add flexibility to the research effort, as the researcher can read through, in this case, interview transcripts ,and can identify patterns/trends and themes from the data (Farndon &

Borthwick, 2007). The research project involved face-to-face interviews, which has some distinct advantages over other interviewing techniques (phone interviews and online interviews). Davis, Bolding, Hart, Sheer, and Elford (2004), identified that face-to-face data produce more data than online interviews. They also discovered that face-to-face interviews added several non-verbal reinforcements such as eye contact and voice inflection for emphasis. Computer interviews were discovered to be heavily dependent on the typing skills, reading comprehension and capacity of internal reflection of the interviewee (Davis et al., 2004).

**Directed content analysis.** Sometimes, existing theory or prior research exists about a phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit from further description. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Existing theory or research can help focus the research question. It can provide predictions about the variables of interest or about the relationships among variables, thus helping to determine the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes (Mayring, 2000).

This research project combined the aforementioned theoretical concepts (Social Disorganization and Cultural Resilience Model (2007) and purposely select the core concepts from each of the theoretical constructs in an effort to develop the qualitative interview questions. Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay 1942), asserts that disorganized communities are characterized by poverty, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility weakened social stability and weakened social controls leading to the inability of communities to solve problems, which in turn, lead to crime. Furthermore, socially disorganized communities experience the development of criminal values and traditions that replace conventional ones and that are self-perpetuating.

The Cultural Resilience Model (Utsey et al., 2007) asserts that cultural resources tend to shape and influence coping and resilience and help to develop the cognitive responses that facilitate the adaptive responses of African-Americans in times of stress and adversity. The combination of Social Disorganization Theory and the Cultural Resilience Model (2007) made for a richer exploration into the resilience among the African-American research participants in this study.

The data from the qualitative interviews and the responses was coded and analyzed based upon the themes that emerge. The analysis is what is known as a *directed content analysis*. Directed content analysis is the a process used to describe the phenomenological in a conceptual form. The content analysis was operationalized on the basis of previous knowledge (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The directed content analysis approach is a research method for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts, and a practical knowledge guide for action (Krippendorff, 1980). A directed content analysis is a structured process. The process involves developing categories that are informed by theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The main strength of a directed content analysis is that existing theory can be supported or extended. By incorporating the Cultural Resilience Model (2007) and Social Disorganization Theory (1942), the directed content analysis can help explore and explain the contextual features of the phenomenon of prison reentry.

**Data collection and analysis.** Because the research involved using open-ended interviews as a source for the collection of data, the transcripts of all of the interviews were coded for emergent themes. A code is a qualitative inquiry and is most often a short

phrase or word that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2009). Coding has been described as a process involving two cycles. The first cycle are the processes that happen during the initial coding of data and has been divided into seven subcategories. Saldana (2009) identified the seven sub-categories as: 1) Grammatical. 2) Elemental. 3) Affective. 4) Literary. 5) Language. 6) Explorational. and 7) Themeing the data.

The second cycle of coding requires classifying, prioritizing, integrative, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building (Saldana, 2009). This project will rely heavily on values coding (Affective coding), which is the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a research participant's values, attitudes, and belief representing his perspective or worldview. Values coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies but particularly for those studies that explore cultural values and intrapersonal/interpersonal participant experiences and actions (Saldana, 2009). The social and cultural networks to which one belongs influence values within an individual (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Gubrium and Holstein (2009) posited that values are shaped by the individual's specific biography and historic period of existence.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that for effective data analysis, the researcher should become immersed in the data continuously writing notes and organizing the information by coding the data and offering interpretations generating patterns and themes and looking for alternative understandings ending by writing the final report.



Others suggest that qualitative data analysis is a search for broad statements about relationships across categories transforming data into findings with the final destination unique for each inquiry (Patton, 2002). Further, the aim of data analysis is to discover patterns by looking for themes, chunking together similar words, characters, time and space within the data providing manageable data to make sense of and build upon leading to a theoretical understanding of a phenomenon (Babbie, 2001). Further, by simultaneously collecting and analyzing data, one can constantly compare, adding questions as themes emerge and evolve (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

**Dependability issues.** The basic question addressed by the concept of trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is “how can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” According to Merriam (1997), the question of dependability is not determined by whether another researcher could replicate the results, but on whether the conclusions reached, are consistent with extant data and make sense. The trustworthiness of a study can be enhanced through the following indicators; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Credibility.** Credibility refers to the belief that the inquiry is being conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the research participant is appropriately identified and described and the results of the data are from the perspective of the participant rather than the thoughts of the researcher (Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006) . In addition, the researcher must be able to ascertain whether the findings can be confirmed by others Lincoln and Guba, (1985). An initial method of establishing credibility will be that the researcher understands prison reentry and is familiar with the communities that the

research participants reentered after incarceration. By establishing a familiarity with the subject matter and the context that the participants will refer to during the interview process, a sense of commonality can be established which will enhance the trust-level of the research participants. A second way to establish the credibility of the research project is to take the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and begin the process of looking for themes from different angles, and rival explanations rather than funneling the data to fit into preconceived assumptions and causalities (Patton, 2002).

In order to protect the soundness of the data, the researcher used a member checking process and revisited the results along with half of the research participants. Member checking was done to obtain additional thoughts of the research participants as it related to the data.

**Transferability.** Transferability refers to the degree to which the results may be applicable in other contexts or with other respondents using similar questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, transferability is the responsibility of the person doing the generalizing to another setting. Transferability can be enhanced by returning to the theoretical frameworks (Social Disorganization Theory (1942) and the Cultural Resilience Model (2007)) that established the perimeters and assumptions of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The rich and robust discussion that is anticipated from the data gathered from the research participants will provide a context for this study and provide the necessary information that will allow the reader to determine whether the findings of the study can be applied or “transferred” to a similar setting.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings can be confirmed by another, if they make sense to someone else, and are not based on the

biases, motivations, interests, and perspectives of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher will disclose her background information as well as a justification for the proposed study to the research participants before conducting the study and in the body of the research project.

### **Research Context**

The proposed research project will focus on inner city communities in the city under examination that will be categorized as socially disorganized and examine the ability of African-American male ex-offenders to negotiate their socially disorganized communities post-release. By focusing on the mid-sized northeastern city in particular, the community was able to be uniformly understood when exploring the demographics, census information, and the collective educational attainment of the ethnically heterogeneous, urban communities within the city under examination.

### **Research Participant Selection Procedure**

Qualitative research focuses on exploring the particular in depth, and makes use of a relatively small purposeful sample that will yield in-depth understanding (Patton, 2002). A small purposeful sample of African-American ex-offenders were selected to participate in the study. The sample was not representative of all ex-offenders who reenter the city under examination; however, the research participants were able to discuss their shared experiences as ex-offenders who have remained out of the criminal justice system for three or more years. The ex-offenders included in the proposed research were male and 18 years old and older. The ex-offenders had served time in the State Department of Corrections. One cannot study the universe, everything, everybody, every event all the time (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), rather a researcher must select

samples of sights, events, people and context to study. Purposeful sampling is a method of selection that leads to a deeper, richer, understanding of a phenomenon that is unique to a particular participant matter (Patton, 2002).

Approximately 10 ex-offenders were interviewed for this research project, as the goal of the semi-structured interviews was to achieve “saturation.” Saturation has been defined as the point in qualitative research when the collection of new data does not yield any additional new information nor does it shed any light on the topic being researched (Mason, 2010).

Some of the research participants were known to the researcher through professional affiliations. The researcher previously worked in the criminal justice field as a Program Coordinator for a jail reentry program in the Northeast and came to know some of the research participants as she was responsible for referring to community service providers that previously and currently employ some of the potential participants for the study. One potential participant was a direct subordinate of the researcher. The researcher does not have any supervisory connections to any of the potential participants at this time. Research participants were asked to refer potential research participants during the research project.

### **Ethical Issues and Informed Consent**

Social research takes place within a social context; therefore, researchers must take into account ethical and political considerations and the consequences of inquiry (Babbie, 2001). Two central issues that must be attended to when conducting research: (a) the participants voluntarily agree to be part of the study without fear of harm or

obligation, and (b) the participants will never be injured regardless of whether they volunteer.

A proposal for this study was submitted to the Saint John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB) in August 2012. The proposal was submitted anticipating an expedited-review status as the research project involves interviewing human subjects that have served their prison sentence and are no longer under community supervision or involved in the criminal justice system.

The informed consent form provided study participants with full disclosure of the study, proposed use of the data for a doctoral dissertation, an awareness of their rights to participate, an assurance of the confidentiality of the data, as well as assurances that no harm or damage would result to the participants as a result of the interview. Each participant was asked to sign the document prior to beginning the interview process. Participants were informed that all written materials and tape recordings will be secured in a locked box for the duration of the research study and a period of three years after the research project has been completed. All identifying information, including names, places of employment, and school affiliations were removed in an effort to protect confidentiality. The research participants were informed that the researcher and/or a professional transcription services would transcribe the audiotaped interviews. The research participants were also informed that the researcher is a licensed drug and alcohol counselor in the State of New York. She is considered to be a “mandated reporter” and the participants in the study were advised to refrain from disclosing their current participation in any illegal activities (i.e. Child abuse, elder abuse, or white-collar crime) and current illicit drug use, sales, or promotion.).

After IRB approval, interview participants were identified, sought, and asked to participate in the research project. Participation in the project was voluntary, and the research participants were provided with a \$10 dollar gift card for their participation in the research study.

### **Instruments Used in the Data Collection**

A qualitative interview guide and interview questions were developed for the proposed research project. See Appendices B and C.

### **Research Limitations**

The small sample size is not generalizable to all African-American men reentering communities after serving sentences in prison and the information they will contribute to the research project reflects their personal experiences. An additional limitation of the research project was reflected in the *values coding* that was employed in the development of the codes used in the data analysis. Saldana (2009) identified that values coding is a challenge for the researcher and that statements made by research participants can be coded in a number of ways and is dependent on the researcher's own system of values, attitudes, and beliefs.

An additional limitation for this research project was that the researcher was African American and was familiar with geographic locations the research participants described when describing their socially disorganized communities. The familiarity led to a lack of descriptive words when describing their communities because of the assumption on the part of the participants that the researcher knew the areas they were describing.

## **Summary**

This chapter described the qualitative methodology for the research project. A description of the research design, research context, data analysis, research limitations, and instrumentation were provided.

## **Chapter 4: Research Findings**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the reentry processes of African-American men reentering a mid-sized northeastern city after being released from the State Department of Corrections. The research project gathered information with regard to what cultural resilience factors-if any, they felt contributed to their ability to successfully reenter social disorganized communities in the city of examination after incarceration. In addition to learning about post-incarceration resilience, perceptions of their ability to negotiate their communities were gathered through qualitative interviews. The qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed for themes that emerged during the course of the interviews. Excerpts from the interviews supported the themes that emerged during the course of the research project.

### **Research Participant Demographics**

All of the research participants in this study were African-American men who had been released from the State Department of Corrections between the years 1983 and 2004. Upon discharge from the State Department of Corrections, half of the research participants reentered the northeast side of the city under examination, four research participants relocated to the west side of the city, and one research participant shared that he relocated to a blighted area on the east side of the city.

The research participants ranged in age from 48 years old to 67 years old. Not all of the research participants were able to recall the amount of arrests they had experienced



during their life-course. The estimated amount of lifetime arrests for the entire research sample was 130+. The average amount of years served during their last incarceration was 9.45 years. The average amount of years out of the criminal justice system was 16.6 years. The types of charges the participants served prison time for were robbery, burglary, criminal drug sales, criminal possession of stolen property, and homicide. The entire research sample had chemical dependency concerns before incarceration. Only half of the research participants were ever mandated to drug treatment. The conceptual framework used for this directed content analysis was that of Social Disorganization Theory (1942) and the Cultural Resilience Model (2002). The framework was used to answer two research questions:

1. How do African-American males negotiate their socially disorganized communities post- incarceration?
2. What cultural resilience factors do post incarcerated African-American males feel contributed to their ability to remain out of the criminal justice system for three or more years?

The answers to the research questions were coded for themes and categorized into two categories- self and other. The themes that emerged were either innate, from within the participants, or an external source.

### **Socially Disorganized Communities**

The research participants described their communities both pre and post incarceration. All of the research participants were born in socially disorganized communities, reentered the city under examination, and settled in socially disorganized parts of the city after their release from the State Department of Corrections. RP10, a 67-

year-old who served 22 years in the State Department of corrections and has been out of the criminal justice system for 16 years, shared why he moved to the city. He shared that while he was incarcerated, he began to contemplate what he would do and where he would go after his release from the State Department of Corrections.

I came to this town because I needed a change of scenery, life, and friends and everything else and I heard sometimes a geographical change could help people, so you know, I was resistant at the beginning, but eventually I decided to stay and I've been here ever since (RP10, p. 1).

RP10 grew up in Manhattan, New York. He described his neighborhood pre-incarceration.

Growing up in my neighborhood, it was a mixed neighborhood of people.

Everybody knew each other. Everybody knew each other's families. There was drug activity, there was stealing, and robbing as there was going on around the world, but it wasn't as plentiful as it is today because people had more respect for each other. They had more respect for their community and neighbors and we definitely had a lot of respect for our elders. We didn't do a lot of things in front of our elders. If we seen them coming, we would stop whatever we was doing that was negative and wait until they got by and politely greeted them. You know if they had packages, we would help them home with the packages, so it was a lot of different parts of growing up. The negative part took over when we started experimenting with different chemicals and we started losing some of our morals and principles. I think that's when the real thing just took off (RP10, p. 3).

RP10 shared that authorities in the prison informed him that he could not return to New York

City after he was released from prison. He was given the chance to choose from three mid-sized cities in the Northeast. RP10 described the city he chose.

It was like coming to a foreign country really, you know, for me- because it was so slow, there was nothing to do, no transportation, and the jobs wasn't too plentiful at that time but I got lucky and found a job but within four weeks and I think that's also what helped me to stay here (RP10, p. 1).

After reentering the city and completing his work-release program RP10 shared that he moved into an apartment on the city's Westside.

Army Street was like the ghetto street—that's what it was. The landlord was a slumlord. I moved into the property because I needed something fast, you know, because I didn't want to be placed in the shelter and so that was my purpose for moving in there (RP10, p. 5).

Like some of the other research participants, RP8, a 61-year-old who served seven years on a Criminal Possession of Controlled Substance 3rd charge, shared that he needed to get out of the New York City area and relocate to the city in order to save his life and not return to his former drug use and criminality.

I wanted a change. I wanted a change. I knew in my heart that I could not stay clean living in New York City at that time, I couldn't. It was unfeasible you know, cause it (drugs) was so readily available you know what I mean- an abundance. I mean it was like everywhere you go there it is (drugs), you know.

Here, it was a little different, you know, now it's starting to get the same (a large

amount of drugs in the community) but anyway back then it was a little different, it was slower (RP8, p. 10).

RP8 got married in the city under examination and suffered setbacks in his life after he was released from prison.

The first place we moved was John Street and oh my God, I'd never seen so many mice in one apartment in all my life. It was dirty, it was like oh how could you live? Anyway we progressed from that point and started moving into better places and in a way it was really, her (his wife) and her family. Everybody in her family used (drugs). As a matter of fact, those that are still alive are still using (drugs). You know, she got pregnant and I had my daughter by her, which is one of the reasons why I stayed in the relationship. I stayed because of my daughter and I knew that I couldn't change her (his wife) but I would try to encourage her to stay clean and all of that but it didn't work. She got sick. She was on dialysis and she was too busy smoking (crack) at the table to go get her blood cleaned. She missed two appointments and her blood became toxic and it killed her, and believe it or not here's the weird thing about that I didn't smoke crack until after she died (RP8, p. 10).

RP2, a 55-year-old who served a total of 19 years in prison and has been out of the criminal justice system for 15 years, acknowledged that he had to develop an elaborate scheme in an effort to get paroled to the City of Rochester.

Despite the awkward situation he placed himself in, RP2 still said, "I'm telling you, when I relocated to the city it's the best thing that ever happened to me" (RP2, p. 14). RP2 shared that when he reentered the city in 1997, he lived on River Street and Far Park. He

described the neighborhood as the “hood.” “It was just like... I was oh shit, a ‘Little Harlem!’ It was just a little smaller and their community was more mixed, whites, and Puerto Ricans and everybody” (RP2, p. 15).

RP3, a 48-year-old, who served four years in prison for a Burglary 2<sup>nd</sup> charge shared that his family moved around the city a lot when he was growing up. He described settling into ethnically mixed neighborhoods. His mother tried to shield him and his siblings from the negativity in the neighborhood. They (he and his siblings) were permitted to play in the yard but they were encouraged not to venture into the neighborhood a lot.

We moved a lot! We moved a lot and I think we moved a lot because of my mom and my dad at some point separated. My dad was, you know, he drank a lot and stuff like that and so when I went to prison and came home I think my mom was staying out on Holler Street and my sister was staying off of St. Joseph Street-Lake Street in the Northeast part of the city (RP3, p. 6).

When asked what his community looked like once he reentered the city, RP3 was unable to describe his community.

To be honest with you I can’t say I knew of any of the social problems. I mean... I was disconnected. I saw myself as really being disconnected from community, society, and all that kind of stuff. I was kind of you know in my own world so to speak (RP3, p. 8).

RP7, a 48-year-old who served 4 ½ years for a Robbery 2<sup>nd</sup> charge and has been out of prison the longest of all of the research participants- 29 years, was raised in a housing project in the northeast part of the city and subsequently moved into houses in

the same area of the city under examination during his formative years. After he was released from the State Department of Corrections, his mother settled just outside of what he considered to be the ghetto. His mother settled on Napoleon Avenue on the west side of the city. "It was a decent inner-city lower middle class neighborhood-primarily Black people. We did not interact much (with the other races of people in the neighborhood). I don't think it was intentional. That's just how it was" (RP7, p. 2).

RP1, a 54-year-old who served 9 ½ years in prison for a Burglary charge, was raised in the west side of the city both pre and post incarceration. He shared that when he moved into the community as a young child, the community was mixed-race and that over time, other races of people moved out of the community and what was left were African-American families mostly headed by women and children who spent significant amounts of time in the street. After being released from prison, he shared that he recognized the tremendous social changes in the community. He described how he observed the lack of parental control and children who "thought they were grown (up) and disrespectful to their parents. It was crazy watching how the community changed like that" (RP1, p. 2). RP6, like RP1 settled in the west side of the city after his incarceration but was raised in a housing project during his formative years. His mother, during his incarceration, moved just a few blocks away from the housing project in order to "escape" the negativity and crime-ridden housing projects. He shared that initially the housing project was "ok, but it was an impoverished community, but as a child, it was just home" (RP6, p. 4).

The research participants described falling victim to their communities and social surroundings and that led to their involvement in crime and their subsequent chemical

dependency. They felt as if there were very few social controls in place that could have prevented them from falling prey to the scourge of drugs and being involved in criminal activity. None of the research participants described having social controls in the neighborhood or within their homes that could have changed their life course.

The themes that developed during the course of the interview process as they related to the success and ability to navigate their socially disorganized environments post- incarceration were self-control and self reliance, help from others, disavowal of stigma, and altruism. The research participants were able to describe their reentry processes, relate stories, and provide a window into their reentry processes.

### **Self-Control and Self-Reliance**

A majority of the participants attributed their lack of criminality (desistance) to themselves. They discussed their reentry processes and desistance from crime in terms of having made a decision and developed a plan about the course their lives would take after incarceration. The development of plans occurred at different times for the research participants. Some of the research participants discussed their reentry plans started when they were incarcerated, while others identified that their reentry plans did not take shape until after they were released from prison. For those whose reentry planning started after their release from prison, some of the participants shared that they relapsed on their drug of choice, had failed attempts in chemical dependency treatment, or were incarcerated in the county jail for engaging in criminal activity and then they began to contemplate their lives and recognized the need for change. Research Participant 6 (RP6) shared the following with regard to his incarceration:

It (his incarceration) kind of gave me time to think about what I want to do in life and would I want to continue going back and forth to jail or whether I wanted to make something out of my life. I made up my mind I was going to change my people, my places, and my business. So, I stopped hanging with a lot of the old friends that I had (RP6, p. 2).

When asked who or what helped him to develop his reentry plans RP6 said:

The influence on my way of thinking was being alone in those 4 x 8 cells you know, and I had a change -to really do a lot of soul searching and you know it was what I call my “wilderness experience.” But then, I think about it, I was locked down for 30 days, 24 hours you know? For the average person that might make you an animal being caged in like that but it didn’t. Like I said, I did a lot of crying you know what I’m saying because I was mad at myself for letting myself down and letting my family down for being back in there (prison). That was my major influence, you know? I wanted to change, you know (RP6, p. 2)?

RP5 was incarcerated for 10 years for a Robbery 1st charge and has been out of prison for 12 years. He related his reentry process to “learning how to walk again.”

I had to learn how to walk all over again. At first I had to start being honest with myself. I had to stop lying to me. Okay, I had to be honest with me, if I don’t know something I asked for help. I have to drop the tough- guy pride thing and then humble myself and break myself down to ask for help (RP5, p. 5).

RP5 shared that he recognized that he was getting “too comfortable” with his frequent incarcerations. He discussed his incarceration process by sharing:



I could have gotten institutionalized because I think I did at one point of a time because it was times that I went to jail and I said “well put me on the roof so I can be a trustee” and I’ll be able to use the phone, and I got comfortable. So every time I went to jail I asked them to put me on the roof because I know I could be more comfortable... Yeah, so that was being addicted to that, that’s being institutionalized because now you’re comfortable, but any time you’re comfortable in prison that’s insanity (RP5, p. 9-10).

RP5 shared that being “successful” in one’s reentry process is a choice.

It’s a choice because you can do something different because even though the system don’t offer you that much, once you put the drugs down, you got a choice. Because see a lot of African American males are going in (to prison) with an addiction, they come out with the same addiction, and if they ain’t got no help inside (the prison) they have to choose to get help on the outside in the community. But some of them don’t believe and don’t have any hope. Some of them don’t really want to change. You have to really want to change (RP5, p. 9).

RP5 shared that he thought “it all boils down to me. If I really want to do better I have to make that decision in me, in spite of all the opposing obstacles. I have to mandate myself to do that, that’s it. The system is not there for you” (RP5, p. 9).

Like RP5, RP9’s comments reflected a sense of self-determination and the need to rely on himself to enhance his life and alter his lifestyle. No one else could have instilled the willpower within him, he had to “dig deep” (RP9, p. 3). RP9 is a 58-year-old who served six years for a homicide charge and has been out of the criminal justice system for 23 years.

RP1 shared that he experienced a lot of negativity after he reentered the community and when asked to what he attributed his ability to successfully negotiate his community to, he shared “it wasn’t parole” (laughed) (RP1, p. 22).

Because parole to me... I thought parole was supposed to help you re-establish yourself in the community, but parole was really like a whacked dog. They’re just going to limit you into doing what they need you to do. If you went over right now to a computer and you looked up the parole website it’d talk about how they’re here to help and ...that’s bullshit, excuse my language. They beat you in the head. That’s what it is. Parole is a control organization, which they have their right by what society says. “We’re here to control and maintain that these parolees stay in line.” It ain’t about “we’re here to help you” because they’ll tell you go and get on welfare but some people that I know get on welfare because they don’t want you working cause you might do something at the job so they will say “I want you over here.” This is a control move you know? Is it good? Some people might need parole because it’s like if you don’t have the police, this whole (community)... it would be like the wild, wild west. So now, you got parolees out here running wild and a lot of people aren’t coming home rehabilitated. A lot of people coming home talking about catching up (where they left off in their criminality and drug abuse). I had to change myself (RP1, p. 23).

RP1 attributed his ability to reenter society successfully to himself. He was emphatic when he described his disdain for the correctional system.

Who helped me get back on my feet? I never gave up. I helped myself because that's what I did when I was in prison. I helped myself. I didn't wait for them to rehabilitate me! I rehabilitated myself (RP1, p. 4).

Like RP1, RP4 had choice words for his experience in the State Department of Corrections. RP4 described his treatment as "being dead while you are living" (RP5, p. 10).

Being incarcerated is like a living state of death! You're constantly being told what to do, what not to do, you can't use your own mind so to speak. To walk down the street or go shopping or whatever you want to do- all that's restricted you know, and you lose more than just your freedom cause you're treated like dirt in an American prison, you know, and that inspired me to stay out too, I didn't like that. I had to do something different with my life (RP5, p. 10).

RP 8 agreed with the other participants and shared that prior to reentering the community, he had done some soul searching and developed his own reentry plan. "I had already made up my mind that I was going to try to do the right thing, you know, for the right reason. I was doing the right thing" (RP8, p. 1).

RP8 went on to discuss how he planned to make changes in his life so that he could be more successful at his reentry process by sharing:

I really need to make a change in my life, a significant change, not just lip service and not "fake the funk." I had made up my mind that I was really going to change and I did. I made that significant change. When I got out I didn't hang around the same people, ladies, and things- I avoided them (RP8, p. 11).

RP6 shared that he thought he had to become more self-reliant when he left prison.

I never sought help, I never did. I'll be honest with you I'm just... when I made up my mind to do what I had to do I did it, you know? I didn't look back. I didn't seek no agencies for help. I didn't ask for no family members for help. I just did what I had to do. To be honest with you, there was people that never even knew that I was away (in prison). So, I was able to just go ahead and do what I had to do (to successfully reenter the community) (RP6, p. 17).

RP2 shared that he knew he needed to do something different when he was released from prison because "I better take that negative and turn it into a positive or else it's going to be a negative all over again" (RP2, p. 21). RP2, like many of the other research participants, shared that he had to change everything in order to become successful. He had many releases from institutions over a period of 19 years. It was his last reentry that proved to be the only one he considered to be successful.

RP1, like many of the other research participants described the "unnatural environment" of prison and his desire not to become "un-natural or animalistic."

I got tired of people of people yelling "on the chow"! (Go eat!) I was thinking, I'm not connected with that! You feed animals "chow." You "count up" cattle and now you are saying come back and let me "count you up," and then after I "count you up" I'm going to let you go out in the yard so you can run and play but don't go that far come back and let me lock you in. I connected that with being like an animal. Caged in and don't have no control. I needed to resume control over my life! I did that by not going back (to prison) (RP1, p. 27).

An overwhelming majority of the research participants shared that their decision to change and to become successful in their reentry processes was a result of becoming

“sick and tired” with the cyclical nature of their criminal activity and subsequent incarceration.

I didn't want to play with it this time, you know, I was tired of going back. All those days sitting in that cell by myself and I had a chance to really see my future, but I got tired of looking at my past. My past was just eating me down because I couldn't imagine how I ended up letting myself get that way. One thing that I feared more than anything was... I seen guys who was losing their mothers and stuff in there. I feared that, you know what I'm saying, I feared it, I don't know what I would do if my mother (choked with emotion) - if something happened to my mother (RP6, p. 18).

RP2 shared, “I just got tired of the cycle and they say sometimes you get to a point and you just get tired. I got “sick and tired.”

When asked about the cliché of “being sick and tired of being sick and tired,” RP2 laughed and stated:

It's so true, I got sick and tired of being sick and tired, I mean I used to... somebody used to tell me that before you pick up (drugs) the next time, play that whole picture all the way through and I used to play the whole picture all the way through. When I used to play the picture all the way through, oh shit, no don't do it...because I played the picture all the way through. I started seeing the results, I've been there, done it and I'm 55 years old, I'm too old for this ole' nonsense. I mean it took me a while (to learn the lesson and heed the advice), but I'm tired, you'll mess around and get knocked out trying to give me some drugs today. I don't play that (laughed) (RP2, p. 23)!

RP 5 described his reentry process. RP5 described his disdain for his incarceration and what he perceived to be a lack of services in the State Department of Corrections.

Yeah, I was tired of getting high; you know what I'm saying? You only can do so much. Can't no treatment or nothing stop nobody not if you ain't tired, because that's pretty much what it was. I got tired. I got tired of going to jail. I got tired of sleeping on the floor. I got tired of eating on the little chicken trays (in prison) on Sunday. See, once you get tired of something, you'll try something different.

But... what was really wrong was, what stopped me from trying something different I was scared of changing because I would think people would look at me different, you know what I'm saying? That's pretty much what it was, I was scared of change, and that's what a lot of people's problem is. They don't want to stop getting high because they did it for so long and they don't want nobody calling them "square, chump, oh man you can do this, you can do that"- peer pressure (RP5, p. 3-4).

RP1 related a story about being sent to solitary confinement in February of the year he was to be released. He was to be released in August of the same year. He shared that he decided that he needed to become more introspective and figure out away to survive what he considered an "unnatural environment."

Out of the whole nine years, I'd never been in the box, that was an experience.

But when I went in (to prison)... being that I do have some kind of intelligence, I knew that I wasn't going to let that box beat me up. So, I said to myself, "I'm going to get me some rest. I'm going to read my Bible. I'm going to do my pushups." That did it for me! The box was no joke! When I went to the board and

I thought they was going to hit me (not grant him parole) because when you go to SHU (Special Housing Unit- Solitary confinement) they don't look at that too favorably. They asked me if there was anything I wanted to say and I said "let me go home, I've had enough!" I honestly had enough! (Laughed and shook his head) Egg pizza? Yellow oatmeal! I never saw any of that- I never heard of that kind of food. I really never ate prison food because when I was first up there I found a worm in my food- it was actually a caterpillar! I showed it to the CO (Correctional Officer) and the CO told me to show it to the sergeant and the sergeant told me "don't tell nobody cause everybody will want one." Then the next day, I saw a roach crawl across the table! That's was it! I was out of my nature. I was thinking, I'm a good person, I'm a good caring person and you done locked up a puppy you know? This puppy wants to stay a puppy, this puppy don't want to come out angry, and come out like a pit pull! I know if I start acting like a pit bull the only way you're going to control me is to put me down. But... that core in me is the core that was in me from the beginning, from birth, you know. I had to stop being who I wasn't. I said to myself, "You're not this killer, you're this caring person!" So, once you realize that you are this caring person, anything I did in my life prior to my criminal activities was about helping and giving, I was not going to let prison take that from me. I was just tired and wanted to go home (RP1, p. 30)!

### **Help from Others**

Both RP2 and RP8 learned that they were HIV Positive during their last incarcerations. Both men shared that they felt that their status helped make their reentry

processes better and easier than those of others because they were provided with services over and above what other people like themselves received when they reentered the community.

RP2 related his story of being informed of his status by sharing:

In 1990, the Board of Health from the prison town was going around and they was advising everybody to take the HIV test and I knew that I had put myself at risk by the way I was living out in the street. So, I went and took the test and a week later, the person that gave me the test called me back down there and she told me I was positive and then dumped me like that. They (the Board of Health) were just going from facility to facility- they weren't from the facility so they couldn't stay and educate me and so they just told me my status and left me like that (RP2, p. 3).

When asked what was going through his mind after he was informed of the positive HIV test, he shared:

I'm thinking I was getting ready to die. I wasn't trying to tell anybody from the facility my status because I didn't want anybody to know because I didn't want to be, what's the word? Ostracized. But if somebody had started making fun of me I'd a killed their ass. (laughingly) (RP2, p. 3)

RP2 provided further insight as he reflected on his life and present ability to maintain a sober non-criminal lifestyle. He shared that he felt that his HIV positive status helped him get the services he needed to successfully reenter the community.

Actually, it might sound a little strange, but the fact that I'm HIV positive is one of the reasons why I'm sitting here today. I got hooked up with agencies that help



people that's living with the virus and anytime I was going through anything, I had those agencies to fall back on, so if it wasn't for the virus I don't know what I'd be doing today. I can't really, wow, I don't think that I had any problems with agencies that didn't help (his reentry process). I didn't get discriminated against for housing or employment or ... because of my status I pretty much had a pass. I didn't have too many problems with agencies the last time (he was released from prison) (RP2, p. 6).

RP8 related the story of how he ended up reentering the city after being incarcerated and informed that he had a positive HIV diagnoses. His story mirrored that of RP2 in that he agreed that he received more assistance when he reentered the community than others and that could have positioned him to do better than other people reentering the community.

RP8 related the story of how he came to the city instead of returning to New York City. Similar to RP2, RP8 relocated to the city from the New York City area.

The reason why I came to the city is because I'm HIV positive and I've been HIV positive since 1986 okay, and it just so happened that the city had the only HIV specific halfway house in the state at that time, okay. So, I came here to get into a program that had a HIV specific halfway house-I went there. It was called Dawns Early Light at the time. So, I came to the city and got into Dawns Early Light, into the halfway house where I met my wife. I got a lot of help because of my positive status. Help that an ordinary person wouldn't have gotten, you know, so I did have that advantage and I took advantage of it. I used it, you know? I hooked up immediately with people that were HIV positive and organizations that would

help HIV positive people. Being HIV positive got me Shelter Plus Care,<sup>3</sup> you know, that type of thing. So, in that aspect yeah, it (reentry) was easy for me. It would have been a little more difficult (if he was not HIV positive). I'm sure it would have been (RP4, p. 4).

**Getting help with addiction.** A majority of the research participants discussed the importance of the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous (NA). A majority of the research participants described taking control over their lives and their reentry processes by assuming control over their chemical addictions by going to chemical dependency treatment and getting involved in self-help groups in the community.

RP8 shared there was a therapeutic value in the fellowship of NA that cannot be provided through individual therapy or drug treatment. RP8 was a proponent of getting help in the community through attending Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel. Another addict can help you where a psychiatric counselor can't -that hasn't lived through it, you know what I mean? My thing is that a curious mind is dangerous... somebody that's got 10 to 15 years clean... I wanna know how did you do that and I learn from that. I need to keep an open mind. I learn from that even though we have different lives, the one thing we have in common is the disease of addiction, and if they can overcome it so can I. So, I need to find out what they did and how they're doing it to stay clean. So, that was important to me, the

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<sup>3</sup> Shelter Plus Care is a program designed to provide housing and supportive services on a long-term basis for homeless persons with disabilities, (primarily those with serious mental illness, chronic problems with alcohol and/or drugs, and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) or related diseases) and their families who are living in places not intended for human habitation (e.g., streets) or in emergency shelters.

camaraderie, the fellowship of NA, people who are actually living clean, you know and not just faking the funk, you know what I mean (RP8, p. 6-7)?

RP5 agreed with RP8 and shared:

For me NA was the best thing for me. Getting a sponsor, getting a home-group, getting involved was important. I started to figuring out it was no longer the drugs that was my problem- it was me. I followed the program. The program said get involved and then they said the first step said it that we was powerless and our lives were unmanageable. My life was unmanageable! (Shaking his head). I didn't know how to manage money. I didn't know how to manage relationships. I didn't know how to manage friendships. The only friend I had was the drugs. I used to think if you don't have no drugs you wasn't my friend, you know what I'm saying (RP5, p. 4)?

RP5 acknowledged that he makes a daily decision to work on his sobriety. He pointed at the researcher and was emphatic when he shared his daily recovery routine.

I work on my sobriety every day. It's just like when you get up in the morning you put your clothes on. I get up in the morning I put my clothes on and I go to a meeting cause I need my medicine every day. Just like you believe in your faith, every day your faith is with you no matter what. If you go to sleep and when you wake up in the morning- that's how my recovery is. When I go to sleep and when I wake up in the morning. My wife is a recovering addict. She's got 12 years clean, I'm coming on nine (years clean). We both don't drink (alcohol). We don't let nobody drink (alcohol) in our household. We don't go to bars. See, we changed a lot of things. I learned how to live without a lot of stuff that I thought I

had to live with (in the past when he was actively using drugs). I don't need it no more, you know? I know the outcome of going to a bar and a party. I know the outcome of that. I know. I'm not outside at 9:00 pm at night unless I'm leaving work. It (NA) was a way out (of the chaos he created in his life). The way is out for me was NA because you first got to believe you got a problem, because if you don't believe you got a drug problem you ain't going to solve nothing (RP5, p. 7).

RP8 described having a drug relapse after his wife passed away from complications of her drug use and attributed his relapse to no longer attending Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

I think if I had stayed connected like I was originally to the rooms<sup>4</sup>, NA and the fellowship when my wife died, I probably would have stayed clean, I would have made it through, but because I chose to go on a religious zeal and not stay with the rooms, it didn't work and I relapsed (RP8, p. 1).

RP10 identified Narcotics Anonymous was an important factor in his ability to stop using drugs. He described how being involved with the organization provided him with what he thought chemical dependency treatment did not provide- camaraderie.

The meetings give you a chance to express yourself and identify with other people and realize that you're not unique, realize that you're not alone, realize that you're no different than nobody else because the main thing the meetings did for me was to stop me from comparing (himself to others). I used to compare my life with everybody else's and I realized that mine wasn't *that* bad. It kept me addicted, kept me thinking that I could continue doing what I was doing not realizing that I

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<sup>4</sup> "In the rooms": Slang term for being inside the rooms where self-help meetings are held in the community.

was truly killing myself every time I went out and did something (drugs). So, the meetings helped me to see that very clearly, you know, that I wasn't unique (RP10, p. 6).

All of the research participants described feelings of achievement and productivity after they reentered the community. The feelings of productivity came from several areas. Being able to obtain a job, working on their chemical addiction issues, restructuring relationships with family members, and proving to others that they were able to rehabilitate themselves were things that the research participants described as motivations for their forward movement and successful reentry processes.

I wasn't sure what...the only thing that I knew I was going to do was that I was going to stop doing what got me in there (prison). I came home and I stayed strictly close to my family. When I was doing work release my wife was pregnant with my son so I didn't get to see him being born. So, it was a lot of those things that really had gave me the time to really think. When I came home I was just was strictly with my family, you know? I felt that my family is not going to hurt me, they're not going to put me back in there (prison), so I'm going to stay as close to them as possible. I did find work through temporary agencies, but it was work, you know? I got me a couple jobs through temporary agencies (RP6, p. 3).

RP6 recognized the need to obtain a job shortly after he left prison and he shared that he was motivated because of the responsibilities he had immediately after returning home.

I got a job in environmental service, I worked there for about a year and then I left there. Then I worked construction for about two years and I didn't like that. I don't like working out in the cold. I went back to work for some temp agencies

for probably close to about a year after the seasonal help with construction and then I ended up being hired at Kodak. I was there for eight years. I ended up getting a medical layoff from there. But in the process...I came home I got married, I bought a house, you know, and there were some positive things that really showed me that there are a lot of finer things in life that I was missing out on. I always had my family. My wife and I have been together since high school. There was a time when I was going through my chemical addiction and criminal activity- that she did walk away from me for a period; but she ended up taking me back. I never say she came back-she took me back, you know, I always had that (RP6, p. 4).

RP1 shared that he was a popular basketball player in the community and he left to start a college career in basketball. When he reentered the community people in the community spoke negatively of him. He felt that the negative discussions in the community served to motivate him when he reentered his community.

A lot of people talked about it (his prison term and his subsequent chemical addiction), "Yeah, yeah, he thought he was all that on the basketball court. He was playing basketball and now he's playing baseball" - meaning base-ball -he's smoking cocaine. "He was a basketball star and now he's a base star," you know, stuff like that. It was true, I'm a realist you know, things that were true and stuff like that motivated me (RP1, p. 10).

RP1 discussed recognizing things about his upbringing that he appreciated after he went to prison. He shared that when he was younger he did not appreciate what he considered

a strict upbringing; however, once he was older, in prison, and dealing with a chemical addiction, his parents were right.

My parents were very strict. My mother was young when she had me, she had me when she was 14, okay, but they was hard workers and nobody in my family smoked or drank so they didn't know how I got caught up in it. So, they was more like they don't understand this here and it was like what did they do wrong or they thought they had did something wrong. The first thing I did when I was upstate (in prison) ...I wrote my father a letter and in that letter told him "yo, I appreciate the all of the whoopings you gave me because I wasn't out here dead. I wasn't out her robbing and killing people. So, there ain't nothing that you did" (that caused him to end up in prison or resort to drugs) (RP1, p. 19).

RP1 shared that he did not find out his "father" was not his biological father until he was 13 years old. A relative let the "family secret" out in the midst of a casual conversation.

There's six of us kids, and I wasn't treated no different- so I never knew that my stepfather was not my biological father. So, one day I was getting a whooping and I told this man (his stepfather) he couldn't whoop me no more because "you ain't my real daddy," and today, I still remember *that* whooping you know (laughing hard) (RP1, p. 5).

RP1 shared that he found out his stepfather had cancer while he was incarcerated and he was still alive when he reentered the community. When asked if his stepfather discussed the letter he sent from prison in which he thanked him for the way he raised him, he said "nothing was ever mentioned about that to this day. We are just that type of family. We could say something and just move on" (RP1, p. 20).

RP1 attributed his ability to successfully navigate his community post-incarceration to the work ethic instilled in him by his family members. He shared that he never thought about it until he was asked a question about it for this research project. For him watching family members work hard and having them encouraging him to work hard when he was young “kicked in when I left prison” (RP1, p. 5).

When I was like 8 years old, I remember my aunt. I have an aunt. She instilled work habits in us, she would say “if you want something out of life you got to work for it.” I saw my mother work at Municipal Hospital. I saw them come up when we were living in a one- bedroom house and there were three siblings and my mother and father. I saw my mother fall asleep in the hallway of that house and me, my brother, and sister slept in the bedroom in one bed. Then I saw my mother have a couple more kids and they moved from there to a two- bedroom house where they (my parents) had one bedroom and me and my brothers had a bedroom and my sister slept in the hallway. Then I saw my mother and father buy their first house. So, I had good role models. It’s (working hard) part of my personality, it’s part of who I am RP1, p. 5).

RP1 reflected upon having to rid himself of pride and impatience when he left prison. He discussed having to accept jobs he knew he was over- qualified for at the time in order to earn an income.

Parolees coming home- they want it now, they ain’t thinking that you’re holding me down (someone else is paying their way) when they get out of prison. I had to walk the walk. I had to bust down walls to get what I want. Some people want it right now. That’s why some people go back to hustling (selling drugs or operating



schemes) because they want that quick fix. I was willing to say “Hey, I worked upstate (in prison) for 5¢ an hour, why I can’t work for \$4.10 an hour” (RP1, p. 24)?

RP6 shared that he felt stigmatized by his criminal past and would lie or omit that he had a felony when he applied for jobs after he was released from prison. He went to work at a local nursing home in environmental service and subsequently lost the job after a year when they discovered that he lied on his job application.

I lost my job at the nursing home. I would never put down that I had a felony. So, what I would do is I would never say no (to the question about whether or not he had ever been convicted of a felony). I would always skip it. At the nursing home, I think I did put no. They said I did. I don’t think I did- but they say I did. So, I learned from that one. I’d leave it blank. If they came to ask me about it later, then they do. A lot of those employers to be honest with you, I found out that during the interview process, they tend to overlook the question, so I’d leave it blank. Later on I worked in a local school district as an aide and I ended up losing that job because I put yes to the felony question. I was like, “Wait a minute, I didn’t leave it blank before and lose a job. I said yes this time -they did a background check and I lost that job?” So, what happened was, I ended up going to get my Certificate of Good Conduct, so I have that. I just called the called the halfway house where I lived over here (at the Work Release Program). They pulled up my records and I got it (the Certificate of Good Conduct) within six months (RP6, p. 16-17).

RP6 shared that he always thought about his success and future when he was incarcerated. He shared that his mother only came to see him three times during the five years he was imprisoned.

She came to visit me one time. She made me cry for three days because I asked her, "Why you won't come see me that much?" She said I hate to see something that I birthed... I hate to come to place and see something that I birthed that I have no control over and then I have to leave you here. You know, when she said that to me it crushed me, you know what I'm saying? So, it was things like that that had me thinking (shaking his head, looking down at the floor, and voice quivering)... I knew I had to do better when I got out. I kept that on my mind the whole time after I reentered the community. I didn't want to see that look on her face ever again. When I came home, she was happy to see me and I wanted it to be like that forever (RP6, p. 18-19).

RP3 acknowledged that he too relied on his family after he reentered the community and was able to network in the community to land employment.

I slept on my sister's couch for about maybe six months until I was able to land some employment at the Center for maybe a year and then I ended up getting another job. Actually, I got the job at the Center, I think I might have been sent there through an agency- a temp agency. Because of my motivation to work and my good work ethic, they hired me. I was there for maybe about a year and then from there I actually met somebody on the job there, an older gentleman, who introduced me to the Lutheran Nursing Home and worked there in housekeeping for maybe about two years. It was during that time through conversation and

networking, I ended up with an internship. I was taking some classes at the community college for counseling and I ended up with a position a local intensive care halfway house as a residential assistant (RP3, 1).

RP4 acknowledged feeling a sense of success in staying out of prison, but he described a more depressing life (post-incarceration) than any of the other research participants. He and his wife opened what they call a “soul food eatery” in a blighted part of the community. The business is struggling and he stated that he was glad to have his wife’s support and financial backing for his business. He questioned his ability to make his business viable in the future.

I consider myself successful in terms of staying out, but even though I’m a business owner I don’t think... I don’t feel as successful as a business owner. I struggle daily here without pay. I’m not a successful business owner. I’m a success story in terms of not being a part of the recidivism rate okay. My wife played a big part in it and my own soul searching while incarcerated, helped me you know. I vowed that I wouldn’t if I had another chance- I was doing 17 to life. I didn’t have to ever get out. So, I prayed and asked God for another chance and if he’d give it to me- I would make it the best. So I kept my word, I didn’t reenter with any idea of getting back into trouble or breaking the law. That was gone forever. My wife means everything to me. She was there for me when my so-called family was not. She is my family and has my back (his wife was seated off to the side smiling and nodding her head) (RP4, p. 6).

RP5 acknowledged receiving help from two counselors at the Work Release facility he attended after he was released from prison. He shared that he had received

counseling and words of encouragement from them that helped motivate him to do what he needed to do to make his reentry more successful. “I got out and Ms. Victor and Ms. Mary who worked at the Work Release facility-those two ladies were like mentors. When I came home they helped me you know” (RP5, p. 5)?

RP10, shared that he too, had a counselor at the Work Release facility that mentored him and provided him with the counseling he needed to make his recovery and reentry successful.

I had a good counselor at the Work Release facility. She was an excellent counselor because she didn't take no stuff. She could see right between people's stories you know? She was dedicated to helping people. She told me look, “I know you've been messing up a long time but this is your time to do something different point blank,” and that was our first conversation, you know? That gave me a reason to try to do something different you know, because somebody was finally calling me on my stuff and letting me know that I was not special or different than anybody else in my predicament (RP10, p. 7).

RP2, a 55-year-old who served a total of 19 years in prison and has been out of the criminal justice system for 15 years, acknowledged that he had to develop an elaborate scheme in order to get paroled to the city. He shared that he did not wish to return to his neighborhood in Long Island, New York because he always got in trouble there and he needed to avoid New York City altogether.

While I was in prison I got hooked up with a woman that I couldn't stand but I knew for the purposes of relocating to the city- I had to have roots in this

community in order to get paroled to the city, so I used this woman for her address (RP2, p. 1).

RP2 shared that the woman he used now hates him and he does not blame her but he needed to have an address for parole, so he pretended that he was interested in her romantically. He justified using her.

Hey, she was using me! Because when I came home the money that I was getting from DSS (Department of Social Services) for rent and food stamps was going to her. She was able to save her damn money and spend all of mine and I... you know, that was, you know. I was paying my way and her way and I was like shit I could do this by myself and that was another reason why I had to get away from her ass (RP2, p. 15).

RP2, after reentering the community, shared that he attended a community presentation of people who shared their stories of being HIV positive. He approached one of the presenters after the presentation and confided that he too was living with the virus. The presenter referred him to a local organization that helped HIV positive members of the community.

Actually, it might sound a little strange, but the fact that I'm HIV positive is one of the reasons why I'm sitting here today. I got hooked up with agencies that help people that's living with the virus and anytime I was going through anything I had those agencies to fall back on, so if it wasn't for the virus I don't know what I'd be doing today. After I got out of drug treatment I went down to Health Services and I got connected with the doctors. I started addressing the fact that I was living with the virus. I got around other people who had been living with it and I started

to see that you could live with it and so I woke up....Meeting those people at that presentation saved my life (RP2, p. 5).

RP6 shared that after his grandfather passed away, his mother sued the people responsible for his death. RP6 was incarcerated at the time and his mother took the money from the settlement and purchased a house to get out of the housing project in which they had lived for 17 years.

In 1988, my mom ended up buying a house. She purchased the house in anticipation for when I came home. She wanted to take me away from the life in the projects to a home- to a home environment. We lived just outside of the projects on the Westside (RP6, p. 12).

RP7, also described his mother's support while he was in prison and out of prison. He acknowledged that though he ran away from home when he was younger, his mother would send packages, try to visit him, and wrote him letters while he was in prison. He described his relationship with her as tumultuous but he shared that he appreciated her support both before and after his incarceration. RP7 described going to the parole board and asking for his freedom.

I did not think I was going to get it (parole). A few weeks later, I got a letter and they told me I got an "open-date." I could go home at any time. I was happy and was ready to leave. One day they opened my cell and told me "Pack your stuff. You are going home." I did not have time to do anything. (Laughed). I got my stuff and when they opened the door. There she was. My mom was standing there (RP7 began to cry). We rode home, stopped at the store, and I remember I was eating grapes and just looking out the window. Even though, me and my mom

have a strained relationship, she was there for me, you know? She was there for me. I lived with her for a while after I got out (RP7, p. 10).

RP4 indicated that he did not have a lot of familial support. He rekindled a relationship with a woman he knew from the community shortly after his incarceration and married her while he was incarcerated. She moved to the small prison towns every time he was transferred to another facility throughout his 17 years of incarceration to be closer to him.

Well she and I right from the beginning decided it was us against the world so to speak and as long as we had each other that we'd be able to make it, you know. We did (make it), you know. That was very hard and tough times but love seems to always win it seems you know, and that's the one thing that we really had that was on our side you know. I owe everything to my wife (His wife was seated across the room during the interview) (RP4, p. 5).

RP10 acknowledged receiving help from a man in the community who was looking for employees. He shared that he was looking for a job and he wanted to be honest about his criminal history. RP10 was still on Work Release and he needed to report to the facility and get everyone to approve of any job that he obtained in the community. RP10 shared that he experienced a lot of hesitation on the part of potential employers, but one man helped him.

This one individual that helped me ...he gave me employment and he said "you know what I usually don't hire people that come out of prison on Work Release. I usually hire people after they've been out of prison but I'm going to give you a chance." He said "Well look, I want you to go back to the facility and have them call me. I want you to start Monday morning," this was I believe on a Wednesday

or Thursday. He said, "I want you to start Monday morning." So I went back to the facility and gave them the number and information and they called him and set it up so I could go five days a week to work (RP10, p. 7-8).

RP10 shared that he was so motivated after getting the job that he went to a local organization and obtained a mentor. RP10 shared that he found the mentoring invaluable.

I got a mentor, me and this fellow was working together for a while and that kind of helped me to see some different ways of doing things too, knowing that they (the mentor) had been out of prison for like I think seven or eight years at that time. You know, it let me know that I could do it (reentry) possibly, you know? I just needed to follow his lead and do some things he did and maybe I could stay out. So, that was another plus. But one thing I realized that as long as I didn't use (drugs) I wasn't going to jail, see I knew that part. If I don't pick up with drugs I won't be in prison because I'm not going to steal. I'm not going to be hanging out with the wrong people. That was one of the easy parts but I still had to work on attitude and behavior. I came out with a very harsh attitude you know, all the anger and you know? I was angry at the State for forcing me to come to the city and not go back home to New York City after I completed my prison sentence.

The mentor helped with that (RP10, p. 8).

Three out of the 10 research participants discussed organized religion as being a key component of their reentry processes. RP7 converted to Islam while incarcerated, RP8 shared that he was a non-practicing Muslim before incarceration but began practicing his religion while incarcerated. RP6 shared that he was a practicing Christian when he was younger but his faith increased after incarceration and he was ordained as a



minister post-incarceration. Two other research participants (RP1 and RP2) identified being “spiritual” post-incarceration but claimed no affiliation with organized religion.

I became a Muslim while I was away (in prison). The Muslims at that time were the most visible in the prison and I was handed some reading material one day. I read it that night. I started asking questions and hanging out with the Muslims and I accepted Islam as my religion. What was most appealing- there was a lot that was appealing to me, but what struck me was the determination to want better for yourself and relying on my Creator to help guide every step that I took (RP7, p. 10).

RP7 shared that the Muslims prepared each other for their reentry processes. They role- played, they told stories about others who were successful and not successful in their reentry processes, and provided tips on how to handle the pitfalls that awaited them when they reentered their communities. “Whether you had 2 years or 50 years, you were prepared while you were in there (prison) for the day you got out” (Laughed) (RP7, p. 10)!

When I was in (there (prison) the Imam (leader of the Muslim community) would say that when you get out (of prison) the first place you need to go is the masjid (Arabic for mosque). “You need to get acquainted with the Islamic community” and that is what I did. I went to meet the brothers at the masjid and it was like being at home. I became the muezzin (Arabic for person who calls the community to prayer). I soon got a job taking care of the masjid and cleaning it. All of these years later, I am still a Muslim. It (Islam) changed my whole life (RP7, p. 11).

RP6 shared that he is presently an ordained minister in the Christian faith. He expressed that when he came home, he spent a significant amount of time in the church with his family because he felt that would protect him and keep him from indulging in the lifestyle that landed him in prison for five years. He shared that he got comfortable and soon started indulging in negative behaviors and drug use after he left prison and left the stability he found in the church. He soon returned to the church and acknowledged that God was watching over him throughout all of his criminal activity and drug use.

Yeah there was sometimes even in the midst of getting high that I was having these signs that, and I actually I say it was God. There were times where there would be a small voice to tell me to get out of the (drug) house. When I'd get out of the house a voice would tell me look over here or look over there. One time, I felt some vibes. I didn't feel comfortable. When the voice told me to leave- I left. When I got down the stairs it, (the voice) just told me to lift the pillow. I lifted the pillow and the couch was right by the door. There were two big machetes and these two guys were planning on robbing me (RP6, p. 5).

RP6 acknowledged repeatedly getting robbed or surviving potential robberies in the community. RP6 shared that he survived robberies even when he was in the height of his drug use and criminality.

There was a time when I did get robbed by like four or five guys and they almost killed me. There were times when I would have these... some people might call them premonitions, intuitions, or whatever, but to me it was the voice of God that was really directing my life and really watching over me. When you put yourself in dangerous situations sometimes, first of all you're cognitively very naïve to

what's going on cause you're so really tangled up in the danger that you are not really concerned about what's out there you know, especially when it's cocaine, you know, all you're doing is thinking about how to get high (RP5, p. 5).

RP6 shared that it was his Christian faith that helped him rid himself of hatred toward his father. He acknowledged that after his parents divorced when he was a child, he had a negative impression of his father. He felt his father abandoned him and the family. RP6 acknowledged that he felt that he would need to mend the relationship with his father when he reentered the community after prison in an effort to help him grow spiritually and adjust to life after prison.

There was a time where I didn't care if I talked to him (his father) or not, you know what I'm saying? Being a Christian, it really bothered me because I felt that it wasn't in the form of what I was standing for. For me to carry the hatred (shook his head and looked at the floor)... I still I haven't had a chance to tell him totally how I feel but ... (Voice drifting off and shaking his head) (RP6, p. 15).

RP8 shared that he was a non-practicing Muslim before he went to prison and while he was imprisoned, he stated to practice his religion more fervently. He recognized upon reentering the community that he needed more than his religion to help him refrain from using drugs and reverting to his criminality.

I was in the rooms<sup>5</sup> (Narcotics Anonymous) (NA) and I was doing good and everything but I got more involved in my religious organization and left NA alone. I thought that going off on a religious zeal would keep me clean but it didn't. I relapsed. I lost my connection with other recovering addicts and I

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<sup>5</sup> "In the rooms" is a slang term used for being inside the rooms of a self-help meeting in the community. The term is used interchangeably when referring to Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous.

couldn't go to the brothers in the mosque and tell them that you know "I feel like I want to get high you know," because they would just tell me "ah, brother just go make salat (prayer)." There was more to it than that (laughing and shaking his head) (RP8, p. 1).

RP8 shared that he started to practice his chosen religion- Islam, after meeting someone in prison. The other inmate encouraged him to read and study his religion and he decided to take the advice.

He (the other inmate) encouraged me to begin reading the Quran and begin making my salats (Arabic for prayer) on a regular basis and to begin studying and contemplating about my life itself. I began to look at other people differently too, you know? Like the guys that were around me, all they wanted to do was play cards or gamble or mess around while they were locked up, whereas, I didn't want to be part of that. I wanted to be more introspective. I wanted to study. I wanted to read. I wanted to find out what can keep my life together because I hadn't been too successful thus far, and I believed that the answer was a spiritual connection with the God of my understanding (RP8, p. 6).

RP1 shared that he was not part of any organized religion. He disclosed that he was a "spiritual" person.

You know, we are more spiritual creatures than anything. You know, whatever you choose to believe in, you are a spiritual person. It's like the flesh and spirit is fighting, you have to recognize that there is more to life than just the flesh. I have

come to realize that there's more to life than just the flesh. So the Serenity Prayer<sup>6</sup> is the best thing for anything. (God) Grant me the serenity... there's some things I can't change, I'm good with that. So, that core is important! I guess your core comes from your ancestors, you know what I'm saying? People make it through this thing (prison reentry) and they think it's because you know people were praying for you and I think that is true. People were praying for me (RP1, p. 31).

RP2, like RP1, felt that he was more of a spiritual person. He shared that he did not like organized religion because he had encountered too many religious "hypocrites" throughout his life.

I'm just going to say the God of my understanding has a plan for me and I haven't fulfilled that plan yet and until I do I'm going to continue to go through these trials and tribulations and come out on the other side smiling (RP2, p. 12).

### **Altruism**

Seven out of the 10 research participants opted to go into careers in which they cared for others and gave back to the community in some way. RP7 and RP 8 opted to become entrepreneurs and work in some form of customer-service in the community. RP9 shared that he is retired and he volunteers, occasionally, in the community.

RP1 disclosed that he had always worked in the human service field. He planned to reenter the community and get a job in human services.

I always worked in human service since I was a kid when I lied to the Board of Education because I was a physically big kid. I lied in order to get a work permit

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<sup>6</sup> God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference ( Alcoholics Anonymous)

and I always worked with people because I'm a compassionate and caring person and I care about people. It was real difficult finding a job. It was stressful but I had already made my mind up while I was in prison that I'm going a job helping other people. Just like we play games in life, I played games with them (potential employers). I started thinking they were not going to hold me down. When I found out they weren't giving me the jobs straight up- I went and volunteered and I came through the back door. I didn't give up, I didn't let them stop me (RP1, p. 2).

RP1 related a story about a time when he did get a job and he was there long enough to collect three or four paychecks. He shared that state officials informed his employer that he could not have the position as they were ridding felons of jobs similar to his in the entire state. RP1 figured that he lost his job because around that time a human services worker in the city was accused of raping a comatose patient in a nursing home.

It hurt real bad because I went right in (to the job) and got three or four paychecks and people were lovin' me! I got a raise within 30 days and then the state come back with their protocol- their procedure, "okay you got this record and you have gotta go!" They snatched the rug right out from under my feet. I never gave up, I helped myself because that's what I did when I was in prison, I helped myself. I volunteered from 2003 all the way up to 2007 before I even got paid for doing what I was doing. But, I stayed. I volunteered (RP1, p. 2).

RP1 now works in the chemical addictions field. He now has two jobs in the field. He is a Residence Counselor for an organization that operates halfway houses for chemically addicted adult men and women in the community. He is a residence counselor in the

intensive halfway housing program. He also works for another chemical dependency program in the community.

I'm in the human service field in addictions because -you can make it (through one's addiction issues). See, at one time I realized that the drug wasn't the problem, I was the problem and I just want to help other people get to the point where they see that they need the help. When they want the help, I am there for them. I won't put myself to think I'm better than them because I try to be an example (RP1, p. 32).

After hearing a presentation in the community by people with HIV, RP2 was exposed to an organization that went around the community talking about HIV to members of the community. RP2 was invited to join the volunteer team.

I was like, well I don't have too much work history so what's the best way to get into the workforce? I started volunteering. I started sharing my story in the community. I did that for like six years. By first volunteering and then having people come up to me later on and thanking me for sharing my story and then having people tell me to don't sell myself short because you have a lot to offer, I was able to develop my self-esteem. I've had people tell me positive things over and over again until I started believing it. I am helping them but they are also helping me. That is not why I do it. I do it to be of service to others (RP2, p. 5).

After spending six years volunteering in the community, RP2, obtained a job as an intensive case manager in a jail reentry program in the community. RP2 was hired primarily because of his background and ability to connect to the inmates in the jail.

They say “get in where you fit in” and I believe who better to work with a certain population than somebody that went through with that population has been through. I mean I don’t know about you but I was once where they were. I was the first case manager to get hired for that program-because of my criminal background. I knew that it took me two or three or four times to get it (reentry) and I just knew that some other people would have to go through something before they finally woke up and realized that (the criminal activity and chemical addiction lifestyle) hurt. I knew that that’s what happens because I lived it. So, I was able to help those that wanted the help. That was important to me (RP2, p. 15).

RP3 acknowledged his desire to get into the human service field started while he was incarcerated. He is now a Credentialed Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor (CASAC) and operates a housing program for men in the city.

I just believed that... I remember saying to God, in prison, that if you help me get myself together that I will be used as an instrument to help others to get themselves together.

While incarcerated, I was in the CASAC program and I became what they called a counselor assistant- a cadre. I did that for maybe about six months. I liked being able to help people. I saw that I had some skills in terms of being able to communicate and listen to people, so that’s what took me down that road. Plus, I found... I saw it as a way of being able to stay busy (RP3, p. 2).

RP3, based upon his own experience with dealing with problems securing housing after incarceration, wanted to open a housing program in the community that offered housing



to people dealing with chemical dependency issues. He researched models for housing programs and “tweaked” a model he thought would work in town. He then founded his own company.

I was working in the field (chemical addictions). I was working at different agencies and I remember thinking that based on some of what I went through and the clients as well- there was just this need based on the gap. Getting from one facility to another and then all the process involved with that, you know, and the wait-time and all that kind of stuff. It was like “man, there’s got to be a simpler process in terms of filling that gap,” you know. So, I started to look at different models and I looked at that Oxford model<sup>7</sup> and actually did some traveling to other cities and looked at that model and I thought yeah that’s the model. I thought “I’m going to bring that model back home!” We opened like eight houses in like a matter of two years. Four houses for men and four houses for women. What ended up happening was after we had been up and running about three years we started to, I started to experience challenges with managing the growth. I ended up getting sick at that time and because the people I hired didn’t have the leadership skills things kind of fell apart. So once things fell apart, I took a look at the model and I said well we’ve got to figure out how we can still have the peer to peer self-sufficiency piece, but I got to somehow change the financial structure of the organization. We changed our model and I came up with the Halfway House Company. I believe that addiction is treatable one day at a time and that an individual can reside in the community in a family like atmosphere! The Halfway

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<sup>7</sup> Oxford Model: Independent sober community-based living environments for chemically addicted people. Each resident of an Oxford Model Home contributes to the well-being of the community through chores and financial support: <http://www.oxfordhouse.org/userfiles/file/doc/manual.pdf>.

House Company would be the “umbrella,” the houses would have some self-sufficiency, and we would provide oversight to those houses. Those houses would still have house meetings, they would still have residential leaders, but they would all be accountable to the Halfway House Company and their staff members. So we restructured in 2005 and we’ve been under this model ever since. We incorporated as 501C-3 and everything (he says proudly sitting under a sign in the administrative office of The Halfway House Company) (RP3, p. 15).

RP5 shared that he currently volunteers in the community. He goes into the jail and is often called back to the Work Release Program to talk to young people who “don’t get it” (RP5, p. 7). He shared that two of his former counselors call him to work with inmates and he considers it a service to the inmates and a favor to the two counselors whom he loves and appreciates for their help when they counseled him upon reentering the community.

Yeah they’re still over there and they call me. “We need your help. We need you to come in we got some boys that don’t want to listen and we want you to talk to them.” I go over there and I talk and share my story with them. So, it’s like me changing my life for the better. They helped me and now I go back and help them. I’m representing whoever needs help. I’m not trying to single out nobody because this thing don’t... this addiction we have does not single out nobody, it takes anybody and everybody. So, anybody and everybody can use some help. I got the same help one day. I am just giving back what was given to me (RP5, p. 8).

RP6, is a CASAC and works for a local organization that offers chemical dependency treatment in the community. “Sometimes, when I see my clients, I see

myself. I knew I didn't want to be a statistic anymore and I want to help them not be a statistic (in prison or dead)! That is important to me" (RP6, p. 19).

RP8 currently works in an intensive halfway house in the inner city. He shared "I believe this is going to be my chosen profession" (RP8, p. 12). RP8 believes that his experience with addiction and reentry help shape his ability to work with people who are dealing with their addiction and consequences of their addiction and criminal behavior.

It's going to be my career because if I can make it out of the muck and mire of addiction, you know, I mean I'm not out of it, but if I am able to live with the fact that I'm an addict- a recovering addict... I can actually live without using (drugs) maybe I can help somebody else. Maybe. I think I have helped some people. I really believe I've helped people, and that is so gratifying for me to step outside of me and help somebody else to overcome the disease of addiction cause it's not easy, it's really not easy (RP8, p. 12).

RP10 shared that he was referred to Focus on the Inmates (FOTI). FOTI offered help to people reentering the community from prison and jail. He went to FOTI to obtain a mentor and soon started volunteering there. Subsequently, FOTI hired RP10 to work full-time for the organization.

They (a vocational training organization) sent me to FOTI .I went over there and I talked to a few people, as a matter of fact I talked with Joan Bush (a notable figure in the community who advocated for ex-offenders) and she said "well, maybe you could come over and help out once in a while you know." I figured I ain't got nothing else to do, so I went over to help out once in a while. I started going over there like three times a week, you know? When I would get off work, I

would go over there. When I was on my lunch break I would go over there cause it was not far from where I worked and that's how I started. So, I volunteered there like two years before they hired me and I worked there for 10 years (RP10, p. 10).

RP10 left FOTI and went on to create his own program to help reentering ex-offenders. He justified leaving the organization by stating he wanted to focus exclusively on reentering ex-offenders that were released from prison. He also felt that reentering prisoners needed services that were more comprehensive and that he was well-positioned to help them because he was once in their position.

I decided to start my own program. That was my purpose for leaving FOTI and I started Help for Offenders. I could continue to do the things that I wanted to do because I didn't feel that they were doing them quick enough for me (at the other organization). I wanted to do more for the prisoners. Just sitting there talking with them all the time was getting old. At Help for Offenders, we try to set up different things from when they get out, and that was the purpose of creating that program (RP10, p. 11).

RP10 shared that he envisions expanding the services offered at his new organization. The organization has set a goal to expand to opening up a halfway house specifically for reentering prisoners.

I didn't want to be like the other organizations you know? I didn't want to make all these promises but come through with nothing. You know, that's why I'm planning to open up a half-way house within the next, hopefully the first of the year. The halfway house is going to be a year process, you know? The residents

won't be working. Everything is going to be strictly programming- educational, vocational, and treatment programming. It will allow the clients an opportunity to get their life back on track. After a year, they should be able to sustain for themselves. I needed a place to go when I came out, I needed some extra help but I really didn't get it like I'm planning on giving it to other people. But I was lucky because I was able to filter out different organizations and go there and get information and kind of put myself in a position to get the help that I needed you know (RP10, p. 12)?

### **Disavowal of Stigma**

All of the research participants acknowledged their guilt and their subsequent felon status in society but none of the participants expressed allowing the stigma to prevent them from navigating the community and achieving esteem-able acts. All of the research participants expressed that their ability to negotiate their socially disorganized communities was proof enough of their strength and did not feel that they owed society anything other than their willingness and ability to remain drug-free and not return to prison by committing further crimes. There were outright expressions of rebellion against the popular belief that one's felonious conduct of the past would hinder their ability to progress in life moving forward.

RP1 acknowledged having naysayers and people who spoke ill of him. Shortly after reentering the community, he promised himself that he was going to work on his credit and own a Cadillac truck. Last year, he was able to purchase the truck. It was soon after he got the truck that people in the community began to speak ill of him.

(Speaking as if he were speaking to a naysayer in the community) You're mad because I'm doing what you know you should be doing. You're a hater! You're not really hating on me. You're hating on what I have, and you're hating on yourself and that you ain't doing it (being successful). So, that's why I don't take it personally. I've got people right now, telling my co-workers that I'm the biggest weed dealer in the city of because of my dreads, because of what I drive, you know, "he must be hustling to drive that" (Hummer truck). Why couldn't I have just pay off my debts and then go and get a co-signer or something and make payments on it? So, when people think that I'm full of crap I let them have that, but you know what? I don't give you that kind of space in my mind because listen, just end it and go on about your business (RP1, p. 28).

RP1 shared that he does not feel stigmatized by his criminal past and previous drug use. He shared that even though he did do negative thing, it was not who he was today.

If I'd never told you I was in jail or prison you'd never know. I'd tell anybody you know? (About my past) I'm no better than anyone, if I point one finger at you, one is pointing at me. The people I hang out with today are more positive people, and I hang out with a lot of people that haven't been where I've been. Like I said, I won't put myself to think I'm better than them because I just try to be an example (RP1, p. 32).

RP2 shared that he did not feel stigmatized (by his criminal past and drug addiction) nor did he feel that he owed anyone anything. He served his time, got out, got a job, helped others, and is taking care of himself.

I don't keep no secrets! I will tell anyone about my life and hopefully, it will inspire people to want better for themselves. I don't care what you think about me today! If you don't like me, you just keep your ass away from me that's the best I can tell you cause I'm going to keep it real. I don't keep no secrets (laughed) (RP2, p. 26)!

RP3 spoke about initially feeling stigmatized by his prison experience and drug use, but because of the support he had from his family and Narcotics Anonymous friends; he was able to overcome the stigma.

I wanted to be able to stand on my own as a man. I talked about it (feeling stigmatized), I talked about it a lot. Initially, it was like you had a big letter (pointed to his forehead). Now, I don't feel that way. I just talked it out and tried hard to do better in life and it worked (smiled) (RP3, p. 13).

RP4, like the other research participants, felt stigmatized by his chemical dependency and criminality; however, he shared that he felt that being an African-American male in this country was more stigmatizing than his experiences related to his drug use and criminality. He regretted not having a family that emphasized education and not using drugs. He shared that he presently felt that his prison experience only accounted for 20% of the stigma he feels now and that being an African-American accounted for 80% (RP4, p. 13). He recognized that through helping young men in the community, he does not feel that the stigma hinders him in any way.

I hope and pray for a better day and I'm hoping that as I often talk to young guys that come in here (into his restaurant)... I'm hoping that I can somehow plant

some seeds in their mind that might grow so they don't have to waste the years that I wasted to get where I am now mentally, you know (RP4, p. 14)?

He shared that even if he still lived in a socially disorganized community, what mattered most was his decision to stop using drugs- which led to not being involved in criminal activity. He shared that it took him many years and many different incarcerations, but he "finally" made the decision to do something different than what his environment- his community and family breded- "inner-chaos." "The area no longer mattered to me no more. I don't care where I live right now, I still choose not to use (drugs) (RP5, p. 6)!

RP6 shared that his "successes" came relatively easy to him and when he attempted to do something, he was shocked at the positive outcome. He recognized that after he had some achievements, he reflected that he had hindered himself because of negative thoughts and inactivity.

Here's the thing, I didn't even think that I was in a position to own my own home and when I applied for the bank it was like a piece of cake, you know? I was kind of like on a high for a while. I mean I was really on a high for a while! When I reflected on my peer group who were still doing negative things in the community,- even though I saw myself as one of them, I knew I had to and wanted to.... deep down... disassociate myself from my own "friends," you know what I'm saying (RP6, p. 20)?

RP7, when asked if he felt stigmatized by his previous incarceration and chemical addiction, shared emphatically:



No! I don't feel stigmatized at all because I know that was just one moment in time. One moment in my life. I am out (of prison) and living a law-abiding lifestyle. I am good. I have the love of a good woman, my religion, a business, and my family (RP7, p. 20)!

RP8, similar to RP7, shared that he reentered the community and dedicated his life to his religion, family, and got a job. He recognized those things as what kept him grounded. "I am doing the right thing" (RP8, p. 1).

RP9 like RP6 described his reentry process as being "easy." He was able to reenter the community and approach his former employer, and obtain his former job shortly after being released from prison.

When I got out of prison I called my former supervisor I worked with and within two weeks after I got out –although I was in a different plant (at the Box Company), I was right back to work! I met my first wife, I had a set of twins from her that just turned 27. She was a good factor, by having that family unit kind of helped my reentry, you know. Those were my most productive years in life. I had that family unit, a sense of responsibility, and I guess having that sense of responsibility eased the reentry (RP9, p. 5).

RP10 shared that he did not feel stigmatized and that he felt a greater sense of self-esteem because he had helped others in the community and was a recognized reentry advocate in the community. He related a story about running for political office against a powerful incumbent in the community about 10 years ago.

I ran because people needed to know it wasn't about winning the election it was about showing people that people do change. You know I came out of prison, did

something completely different with my life, I'd been out of prison a few years at that time and I wanted to show that other people could do the same thing given the opportunity. I got 18,000 votes you know so that was, yeah, 18,000 people believed in change, you know, and hopefully those 18,000 are still working for change. (Looking away reflectively, shrugging his shoulders, and smiling) (RP10, p. 10).

### **Conclusion**

The results presented in this chapter reflect the thoughts of African-American chemically dependent ex-offenders who have reentered a mid-sized city in the Northeast after their release from the State Department of Corrections. All of the research participants came from and returned to socially disorganized communities but were able to navigate their communities and succeed in their reentry processes. The research participants have been out of the criminal justice system for three or more years and no longer use drugs. Excerpts from the qualitative semi-structured interviews were provided to illustrate the themes that were generated from the 10 interviews that were conducted with the research participants. A more detailed summary and discussion of the results are provided in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Summary and Implications**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to understand the reentry processes of chemically dependent African-American men who have reentered the city under examination after their release from the State Department of Corrections. Understanding the reentry processes can help identify the components of a successful reentry process and inform executive leaders, criminal justice practitioners and reentering former prisoners of the components of a successful reentry process and lead toward a deeper understanding of the complexities that surround prison reentry.

This qualitative inquiry shed light into the internal and external forces that when combined helped to make each of the research participants successful in their reentry processes. This chapter summarizes the research process and presents the implications for executive leaders, the fields of criminal justice, cultural resilience researchers, as well as criminal justice practitioners.

### **Summary of the Research Process**

This directed content analysis project incorporated the responses of purposely-selected group of African-American men who reentered a mid-sized city in the Northeast after their release from the State Department of Corrections. The participants were selected because they were African-American men, they had chemical dependency concerns, they reentered the city and settled in socially disorganized communities (high crime rates, high minority populations, low educational attainment, and high poverty

rates), and they had remained out of the criminal justice system (with no police contact) for three years or more.

The participants were selected for the project because of their ability to share their insight with regard to their ability to negotiate their socially disorganized communities post-release. Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by participant themselves (Creswell, 2003). Evolving and emerging phenomena are best explored through a qualitative lens (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded for themes. This study employed the use of a directed content analysis, which incorporated the Cultural Resilience Model (2007) and Social Disorganization Theory (1942) as the theoretical frameworks to identify themes, codes, and categories for the emergent themes.

### **Discussion of the Research Findings**

Prison reentry has been defined as being all of the activities and programming conducted to prepare ex-offenders to reenter communities safely and live as law-abiding citizens (Petersilia, 2003). Reentry needs are considered to be anything that is included with the identification of one's needs while incarcerated/planned for while incarcerated-up to and including the services obtained when the offender has reentered the community. The processes that serve to assist an ex-offenders' reentry into society generally pertain to conventional involvement in social institutions, such as family, school, work, and various social service and civic organizations (Delisi, Hochstetler, & Pratt, 2010). Garland et al. (2011), maintained that substantial attention should be given to the influence of psychosocial strains along with other reentry-related obstacles and that

assessing their overall impact on social adjustment which could considerably advance the academic understanding of prison reentry.

The significance of this study arises from the lack of extant qualitative research on reentering ex-offenders. Quantitative research in the field of prison reentry has shown that nationally, 4 out of 10 prisoners return to prison within three years of release (Pew Center on the States, April 2011). In a 2003 report drafted by the New York State Department of Corrections, an estimated 923 men were paroled to the city under examination and approximately 80% were Black. Though no official data has been published that indicated the amount of post-incarceration parolees who have reentered the city since 2003; estimates have shown that the rates have steadily increased and the amount of people reentering the city in 2010-2011 was approximately 1,100 inmates according to Elizabeth Wilks, the New York State Deputy Director of Reentry (personal communication, February 2, 2012).

The New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services (NYSDCJS) (2009) identified that 24, 520 offenders were released from the New York State Department of Correctional Services (NYSDOC) in 2006. Of the released prisoners, 2.9% returned to prison for a new felony within one year following release, within two years, 7.6% of parolees returned to prison, and 10.7% were returned by year three of their release from prison. The NYSDCJS (2009) further identified that the rates of re-incarceration after release from prison was substantially higher for post- release supervision rules violations. In 2006, 18.4% were returned to prison for a rules violation within one year of release, 27.5% were returned to prison within two years of release, and 30.5% were returned to prison for a rules violations within three years. Of the released inmates on post-release

supervision (parole), 51% were identified, as Black, 24% White, and 23% were identified as Hispanic according to a 2010 report from the New York State Division of Parole (NYSDP) (2010).

Approximately 80% of parolees in the Western New York area returned to the NYSDOC within three years of release due to committing a new crime or violating the conditions of their parole. Given the daunting statistics on recidivism and the return to the correctional system, a segment (20%) of the reentry population has maintained the ability to remain free of criminal justice system involvement and warrant further scrutiny (Klofas & Porter, 2010).

Of those paroled to the city under examination, 89% reenter socially disorganized communities. Socially disorganized communities are plagued with high crime rates, and heavy concentrations of parolees and probationers (Klofas & Porter, 2010) . The communities in the city that have high concentrations of minority residents, heavy population mobility, and high poverty rates dominate what has been called the “Circle.” All of the research participants lived in the “Circle” after their release and described their communities as crime and drug-ridden both pre and post incarceration.

At the heart of the research project was the desire to understand the components of a successful reentry process for the African-American men in the participant pool. The research yielded results that were in keeping with both the Cultural Resilience Model (2007) and Social Disorganization Theory (1942). The participants identified that there were internal and external sources that contributed to their reentry processes.

Social Disorganization Theory (1942) attributed crime and delinquency to absence or breakdown of communal institutions (e.g. family, school, church and local

government) and communal relationships that traditionally encouraged cooperative relationships among people (Jensen, 2003). All of the research participants described growing up in dangerous, crime –ridden and drug- infested communities. The participants described communities in which the people they idolized were pimps, drug dealers, and “hustlers.” They described growing up in an age when there were few African-American role models that were accessible and they felt as if they had been given role models in the media that were considered to be tough, street-wise gangsters. The research participants described situations in which they would emulate Shaft<sup>8</sup> or Dolemite<sup>9</sup> and that there was very little communal or societal pressure to do anything differently. All of the research participants felt that their communities and societal interactions during their formative years superseded whatever they may or may not have been taught in their homes.

Money, hustling, the “fast life,” you know, that type of thing - was all that I knew. I could make more money on the street than I could at a 9 to 5 (job), but it doesn’t last. That distracted me. Relationships you know, intimate relationships with females that was also a distraction you know? Street life was basically everywhere. Everywhere you went there it was right there in front of you. My family life wasn’t a happy life because my mom and dad was in the verge of separating at that time and when they finally did split I took to the streets and there was no one around to stop me! Hustling, the women, the drugs, you know, the glamour stuff- that’s what was important to me growing up. My dad was a pothead and an alcoholic so he was an absentee father for most of my life. The

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<sup>8</sup> A fictional Blaxploitation character that was featured in movies as hero detective who fought crime with a violent fury in Harlem, NY.

<sup>9</sup> A fictional Blaxploitation character that was featured in movies and was a known pimp in the community.

thing in between him and my mom had caused him to leave so I had no male role model so I had to take to the streets (RP8, p. 3)!

The lack of familial control also figured prominently for some of the research participants. RP2 described a daunting childhood in which he was institutionalized early in life and continued to be institutionalized for the next 30 years.

I'd been pretty much alone my whole life, even though I have family, I don't have family. The streets raised me. I take that back, I wasn't raised really, when my mother passed away, I was 22, I barely knew her and my father passed away 10 or 15 years ago. If I had seen him again I would have killed him, so I was raised by the streets, jails, institutions and the streets. Way back then, my father- he wasn't around. There was six of us from my mother and father and four more kids from my mother and another man. My mother had to take care of all of the kids by herself and she couldn't do it so three of us were put in foster care at 1, 2, and 3 years old. So, until I was 7 years old I thought the foster people that I was living with were my parents, I didn't know until one day my mother came to the foster home and came to take us back that's how I found out this woman was my real mother. It was a mess. I would run away a lot to go back to the foster home.

Sometimes I would make it (to the foster home) and sometimes I wouldn't. I slept on the streets. Going with my mother was bad. That's when the physical abuse started and I took to the streets. I had to get out of there. When I was on the street they would catch me and put me in shelters and psychiatric hospitals and stuff (shaking his head) (RP2, p. 8).



Many of the research participants recounted criminal, gang, and/or drug activity and they did so with a sense of nostalgia and often humor, but it was then quickly replaced with a sense of disbelief that they engaged in those activities. The recollections were often framed similar to one who looks at a decades old picture and sees how their hairstyle or clothing was in the picture. Even though there would be acknowledgement that one was in the picture there was a disbelief that one would have a certain hairstyle or have made a certain clothing choice; one that they would acknowledge that they would not have made today.

One day I don't know I think it was something wrong with me when I was younger. The people next door and I'm laughing cause the people next door, I broke into their house and I was a little clepto or something when I was young. I had no idea why but, I just broke into their house one day. I don't know what I was looking for. I remember their names, the Silks. Mrs. Silk (shaking his head and laughing to the point of tears). I broke into their house but somebody that lived behind them must have seen me and they called the police. The police knew I was in there and they had the house surrounded. All the neighbors came out and watched it go down. I come running out and I tried to run across the lawn and hop the fence and they grabbed me and took me in the car. They put me in Queens Crown State Hospital and the only reason I'm laughing is because the person's house that I broke into Ms. Silk, was one of the resident nurses or something like that at the hospital. I was drugged up all the time (laughing). They made sure I was medicated well (laughing) (RP2, p. 11)

Familial discord featured prominently for a majority of the research participants. RP3 described a mother who tried to protect him and his siblings from the streets but there was familial discord that negatively affected his childhood. He also described a time in which his mother's protection did not shield him from the negativity.

We moved a lot! We moved a lot and I think we moved a lot because of my mom and my dad at some point separated and so you know my dad was, he was you know, he drank a lot and stuff like that. My dad was a laborer for a number of years until we moved to the Northeast side. I never knew my dad was a drinker- a heavy drinker until we moved to New York State. My mom would argue with him about the paycheck on Fridays. He'd come home and he'd be messed up you know, and he'd blown the money and so there was a lot of difficult times, you know- domestic violence. He was fighting my mom and stuff like that. My dad wasn't the disciplinarian in our household my mom was but, after a while, it didn't do any good with me. She would try and discipline me too but I was like "nah, I'm not hearing it" you know. So, I think when I was about 14 I left. I actually moved in with a woman. I had this woman that I was seeing. She was probably twice my age you know? She might have been like 28 or something, and I was like 14. So, that started the beginning of me being involved with women because I didn't get involved with girls I got involved with women because women kind of took care of me and stuff like that, they had a place, you know (laughing) (RP3, p. 11)?

There was a realization and sense of resolve that all of the research participants had when they described growing up in economically impoverished communities. There

was an acknowledgement of very few social controls that would have been able to counteract their criminal activity and drug use because their desire to engage in those activities was stronger than any other social control at that time. The desire to hang out with their friends, use drugs, engage in criminal activity, obtain material possessions, and to attract women was their world and their futures revolved around gaining more drugs, material possessions, and women; thereby, enhancing their social capital in the communities in which they lived.

We were poor and living in the projects. We ate and stuff (laughed) but there was nothing extra because there were a lot of mouths to feed. After awhile, I left. I left the house early. I was probably like 11 or 12 years old. I stayed with friends and various women I would meet. The neighborhood was rough! There was crime, drugs, rape, and all sorts of stuff. I guess I was just drawn to that. I guess, looking back on it, I was just curious. Curious about the negativity. I was just drawn to it, maybe it was a personality trait back then, but I knew I wanted to be a part of that. There was this pimp/drug dealer in the community who kind of took me under his wing. He just seemed to like me for some reason. He would see me and let me ride in his Cadillac and I would make sure everyone would see me with him because I felt like I was the “man” back then (laughing) (RP7, p. 5)

**Cultural resilience.** As previously stated, predominant theories with regard to coping and resilience are rooted in an ethnocentric European worldview; however, researchers have called for additional research on coping and resilience studies focused on ethnic minority populations. Understanding the factors that predict risk and resilience in African-American requires an appreciation of the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and

practices unique to the African-American community (Utsey et al., 2007). Internal and external coping resources for African-Americans have been derived from strategies borne out of centuries or negotiating racism and oppression, maintaining a strong religious and/or spiritual orientation, and include supportive social networks (Utsey et al., 2007). A significant amount of research has been conducted with regard to the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and practices of African-Americans, and the effective coping strategies of African-Americans that result in positive adaptive outcomes in situations of risk and adversity (Utsey et al., 2007; Utsey et al., 2000).

The research participants eluded to several components as outlined in the Cultural Resilience Model (2007). Each of the research participants discussed their quality of life both pre and post-incarceration. Each of the research participants described being raised in and reentering socially disorganized environments and yet they also recognized the need to not fall victim to their neighborhoods after their release from prison. There were cognitive shifts that each of the participants acknowledged that were needed after release and they all had internal and external sources that helped aide their cognitive shifts. The cognitive shifts are often called “self- agency” (Maruna S. , 2001); however for the purposes of this research project, self- agency was defined as self-control and self-reliance. Self- control became a theme because there was a certain point for each of the research participants noted that they had thought about their lives being “out of control” and there was a point in time, for most it occurred during their incarceration and for the remaining few participants it occurred after their release from prison in which they gained “control” over their lives and developed a “plan of attack.” Self- agency in reentry literature, according to Maruna (2001), has been definied as noticeable turning points in

an ex-offenders ability to navigate the world. The self -agency often manifests itself in the form of a sense of self-control, empowerment, and having a sense of responsibility. Each of the research participants described instances of all of the self-agency themes. What was striking during the interviews was the degree to which a majority of the research participants wanted to highlight the area of self-control and minimize the other areas that contributed to their post-release success. There was a heavy emphasis on the cognitive shifts that it took to change one's mindset and world- view and several probing questions were needed to help illicit answers with regard to external sources of support in many instances during the interview process.

Research participants seemed compelled to detail their processes in the development of their "new selves" and how they went about transforming from chemical addiction and criminal activity to "success." There were "epiphanies" while they were incarcerated and the participants described becoming more reflective and in that reflective-mode, they made conscious decisions to do things differently upon their release from prison. One participant described his incarceration as his "wilderness experience." He used the time he was imprisoned to develop a "plan of attack" which included changing his friendbase, his hobbies, and the things he felt led to his drug use and criminality. He stopped going to bars, he stopped dating "loose women", and spent his time at home and in the church. Other research participants discussed their reformation in terms of getting a hold of their chemical addictions, getting into self-help groups and chemical dependency treatment.

Quality of life both pre and post incarceration was also an area the research participants wished to discuss the most during the research project. The participants used

more descriptive language to discuss their post-incarceration quality of life. Some of the research participants shared that they had not thought about or did not recall aspects of their quality of life before they were incarcerated until the researcher had asked questions and forced them to recall their communities and their home lives before they were incarcerated. RP7 shared that he thought the interview process was forcing him to “recall things I had not thought about in awhile. This is therapeutic” (RP7, p.15)! Some of the words participants used to describe their pre-incarceration quality of life were “poverty-stricken”, “impoverished”, “majority African-American” and there was a certain level of a desire on the part of the participants to leave it to interpretation what those words meant. It was assumed that perhaps the research participants felt comfortable not being as descriptive about their pre-incarceration communities because there was a shared knowledge of those communities on the part of the researcher. The words used to describe their post- incarceration quality of life were “completely different”, “a total 180”, “satisfying”, and “ a life.” The participants were more willing to describe their post incarceration experiences because they felt a sense of redemption and satisfaction with the successes they had been able to achieve thusfar. They described their psychological states as being “light years away” from what they had experienced before they were incarcerated. There was a recognition that they were now engaged in their life processes and not mere bystanders allowing life to happen to them. There was an acknowledgement of having a certain level of control over their fate and that they were actively participating in the living of their lives. Where one participant had described his incarceration as a “living state of death”, there was an acknowledgement that like the Cultural Resilience Model (2007) suggested, quality of life incorporated environmental factors, social

factors, psychological factors, and physical factors- all of which he felt he had no control over while incarcerated. The research participants validated this section of the Cultural Resilience Model (2007) by the language they used to discuss the significance their communities played in their negative and positive self- development.

Where the research participants did not validate the Cultural Resilience Model (2007) was in the area of the risk factors. None of the research participants described racism or things related to difficulty with interacting with other races of people. What some of the participants did want to discuss was the issue of control that was exerted by people in positions of authority as it related to them and their daily activities but they did not frame their dissatisfaction or complaints in terms of race. Their concerns were discussed in terms of positionality and though there were complaints about the State Office of Parole, the State Department of Corrections, and how they may have experienced ill-treatment, the lack of treatment (related to medical conditions or chemical addictions), or other forms of assistance while incarcerated and after release there was no discussion about micro or macro-aggressions as they relate to institutional or societal interactions based upon race. It could be assumed that the reason the research participants did not validate the racism segment of the Cultural Resilience Model because racial issues and racism are ever-present and a function of their daily lives to a point where it could not be identified.

Much like the African-Americans that lived generations ago in America, the research participants in this study described institutionalized discrimination. The research participants described missed opportunities, discrimination for employment, housing, the inability to sit on a jury, the inability to obtain loans for their education, and societal

discrimination based upon their status as a felon. Despite the perceived and legal institutionalized injustices, the research participants were resilient and achieved successes in their lives. Once a person is labeled a felon, he is ushered into a parallel universe in which discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are perfectly legal, and privileges of citizenship such as voting rights (in some jurisdictions) and jury service are off limits. Second class citizenship begins the moment one is branded a felon. (Alexander, 2010). Prison reentry has been categorized as a “closed- circuit of perpetual marginality.” There exists a cyclical nature of entering prison and being released to the community only to violate the terms of one’s parole or obtain a new charge can be attributed to ex-offenders reentering the same communities one came from before their incarceration and/or reengaging in the same behaviors after they have reentered the community.

The Cultural Resilience Model (2007) also discussed traditional factors as being family adaptation, family cohesion, cognitive ability, and social support. Family featured prominently in the research interviews and a majority of the research participants described getting material and emotional support from their families. There was a heightened awareness on behalf of the majority of the research participants that their families “sacrificed” to help them after their release from prison. The only time that some of the research participants became emotional during the interview process was when they recounted their familial support and their love for their families. Some of the research participants discussed still having familial problems that need to be addressed and how they were struggling with lingering resentments, familial discord, and tense familial relationships, yet there was still a recognition of the role family played in their reentry processes. Where some of the research participants described not being close to



their families, they have managed to create families among their friend bases and through their connections to self- help organizations in the community. They too, recognized having a strong support system was important and they have managed to carve out a family from non-blood related people whom they treat as “family.” The positive familial support that many of the research participants discussed differed from some existing criminology research that found that families often represented a barrier to successful reentry processes because the ex-offender did not receive the level of support post-release that they had planned on while they were incarcerated and it in turn increased their resentment and anxiety levels post-incarceration. In addition to the lack of realized familial support; some researchers have suggested that because families of incarcerated people have their own biopsychosocial stressors- adding the responsibility of helping a newly released family member could strain already stressed familial units and alienate, demotivate, frustrate reentering ex-offenders (Naser & LaVigne, 2006). None of the participants in this study shared that their reentry processes strained their families. There were repeated acknowledgements of how families rose to the occasion after incarceration to support the research participants by providing encouragement, housing, financial support, and material support after incarceration.

The Cultural Resilience Model (2007) combined ritual, spiritual, collective, and cognitive emotional supports in a category termed Cultural Factors. The reliance on spiritual sources of support was in keeping with research on African-Americans and coping strategies. Daly et al. (1995) found that African Americans preferred coping strategies that were group centered (e.g., family, community, kinship networks) and/or relied on religious or spiritual (e.g., prayer, meditation, etc.) approaches to dealing with

adversity. Religious or spiritual coping enhances resilience by providing a basis for optimism as well as a cognitive framework for understanding stressful situations (Barbarin, 1993).

Spirituality and rituals featured prominently for a couple of the research participants in that there was an acknowledgement of a higher power and a reliance on that higher power for guidance and assistance with their reentry processes and their chemical addictions. Christianity and Islam were mentioned frequently throughout the interviews as an external source of support that aided people with their cognitive shifts and successful reentry. There were occasions of a deepening of one's religious convictions and conversions to religions that occurred while incarcerated. The ritualistic factors featured prominently for half of the research participants as they recognized that they were either religious or spiritual. The religious participants were part of organized religions and the others claimed that they were spiritual and more so Agnostic. The Agnostic participants discussed their belief in a higher power using the language from self-help groups. They shared that they have a "belief in a power greater than me" or they had a belief "in the God of my understanding", both phrases used in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous textbooks.

Collective coping featured prominently throughout this research project due to the heavy emphasis on the effectiveness of 12 Step/self help groups in the community. Conceptually, collective coping is derived from an African-based cultural/value system that places the group's interest above that of the individual. In this system, African-Americans rely on group-centered activities (e.g., "got a group of family or friends

together”) for coping with adversity (Utsey et al., 2007). RP3 shared that he thought self-help meetings were a place where he could be accepted and embraced.

Well, I was actually involved in self-help and I found self-help to be very helpful in the sense that it gave me a group of people that accepted me for who I was and embraced me and also gave me an opportunity to network within different groups just talking to people (RP3, p. 3).

#### **Discussion of the four essential components of a successful reentry process.**

This research project yielded for essential components of a successful reentry process:

1. Self Reliance/Self Control
2. Help From Others
3. Altruism
4. Disavowal of Stigma

The theme of self-reliance and self- control was in keeping with extant research on reentering ex-offenders. Noted researcher Shadd Maruna (2001) termed self-control and self-reliance as “self-mastery.” Self- mastery is where an ex-offender strives successfully to master, control, enlarge, or perfect the self. Additionally, self –mastery occurs when an ex-offender attains dramatic insight into the meaning of his life and experiences a sense of control over his destiny in the wake of his incarceration or an important life event (Maruna S. , 2001).

Many of the participants described their reentry processes in terms of having done something on their behalf “intentionally” and “deliberately” in an effort to alter their perceived barriers to reentry. Participants frequently discussed themselves in an egocentric manner and disavowed receiving help from other entities. At times the reentry

process was boiled down to “having made a choice” or a “decision to live differently.” There were frequent decisions to change their habits, their friend bases, and their world-view. RP3 shared that he had a desire for something different for his life after he reentered the community.

I wanted to do the right thing. The last time I came out I wanted to do the right thing and for me that was a driving force that I wanted. I was tired of the pain... of in and out, you know, of just that whole scene. I was just tired of that, you know, it was like no, I just can't keep doing this (RP3, p. 4).

RP5 shared “see once you get tired of something, you'll try something different (RP5, p. 3).

The finding of “getting tired” is in keeping with the “age-out” process and the theories that suggested developmental cognitive shifts occurred for desisting ex-offenders. Some phenomenological criminologists have attempted to understand criminal decision-making through an examination of the ex-offender's self projections- the self image they are hoping to uphold (Toch, 1969) the ends they aim to achieve (Shover, 1996), and their strategies for creating meaning in their lives (Irwin, 1970; Shoham & Seis, 1993).

Leibrich (1993) attributed desistance not to the social bonds one has formed or to aging out of crime, but to major cognitive shifts. The cognitive shifts refer to the way one thinks about and interprets their lives. A person has to change from within and once they make the necessary move to change the way they perceive their past, present, and future - they will desist from their criminal activity (Maruna S. , 2001). RP6 discussed his transformation and desire to alter how he perceived himself.

When I came home on the streets it was like the same ones (people) that was in prison are the same (people) that came back to the streets. They came back to the same streets. They're doing the same thing! So, part of my being tired was realizing that I had to change my people, places, and things. I knew I had to get away from doing what everybody else was doing because if I kept doing what everybody else was doing, I was going to get the same results as they were getting- prison (RP6, p. 3)!

In many instances, during this research project, when recounting the internal sources that contributed to the reentry process, the participants seemed to place a heavy emphasis on the redemptive aspects of their reentry processes. At times, though there was an acknowledgement that they had external sources of support in their reentry processes, there was a sense that without the internal source of their self-mastery, they would not have been able to have been successful in their reentry processes. At times, there were statements that participants made about not receiving help from external sources, but in the same sentence, they would acknowledge external supports. It became apparent that they had internalized their success and wanted to couch their reentry in terms of their ability to adapt and control their chemical addictions and propensities toward criminal activities. This internalization of their reentry processes was in keeping with extant research on successful reentry processes. It also became clear that the research participants attributed their criminality and chemical addictions to external sources (their communities, lack of parenting, and their friend-bases) and their success to internal sources of change and a desire to not return to their "former selves" (prone to criminal activity and drug use).

This research project yielded results that were similar and dissimilar to the seminal reentry research project- the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS)(2001). Unlike the participants in the LDS (2001), the research participants all acknowledged having committed the crimes they were incarcerated for and the research participants did not frame their criminality in terms of “that was not the real me” or “that was the bad me who committed the crime but the “good” me was able to change.” The research participants were able to acknowledge they committed the crime but they did not categorize themselves or describe their previous chemical addictions or criminality as a negative character trait/character defect. For all of the research participants their chemical addictions, subsequent criminality, and incarcerations were moments of time in their lives. One research participant described his incarceration as a “living state of death” and implied that though he was alive, he was dead. The language he used represented a time (his incarceration) during which he felt that though he was alive, he did not have the control necessary to control his environment or to determine what happened to him. It was only through his subsequent reentry experience that he was able to resume “living” and achieve having a life- a say in his day to day activities and all that it means to be a human being. The lack of humanity is something that another research participant shared when he reflected on his incarceration and his refusal to be treated as an animal. Again, he too, was able to mentally resist the adverse conditioning of the correctional system and develop an inner sense that he needed to change his life completely in order to be successful upon his release from the correctional facility and to never return to the correctional system. The research results were similar to the LDS (2001) in that there was a purposeful and intentional internal and external resistance to the labeling of felon and to

the subsequent institutional discriminatory practices that the ex-offenders experienced. There were acknowledgements that the “system” was designed for them to fail at their reentry processes and there were covert and overt actions that took place from within and with the help of others that were taken in order to mitigate the negativity they encountered post- incarceration.

Member checking was employed to review the research findings with half of the research participants. They all agreed the findings were reflective of their thoughts about their reentry processes. At no time did any of the research participants in the member checkingshare that the results were not in keeping withtheir experiences during their reentry processes. All of the research participants wanted to highlight the research finding that specified that an essential component of successful prison reentry was the finding that help from others was key to their success.

*External sources that supported the reentry process.* It is through the exploration of the external forms of support for the ex-offenders that one can see how some of the ex-offenders in this study were positioned more advantageously than others. The external forms of support were more pronounced and identifiable for some of the research participants. In particular, the research participants who shared that they were HIV positive recounted far more post-release services were available to them than the other research participants who were not HIV positive. Both HIV positive research participants described receiving healthcare services, housing assistance, and vocational assistance (traditional barriers to successful reentry) that were over and above the post-release external sources of support for the non-HIV positive research participants. Both HIV positive research participants recognized and identified that they felt the fact that they

received comprehensive external supports because of their health status positioned them for a greater level of success or a reduced level of stress after they were discharged. RP2 identified that he owed his present success to his HIV status and his post-release community service providers.

Actually, it might sound a little strange, but the fact that I'm HIV positive is one of the reasons why I'm sitting here today. I got hooked up with agencies that help people that's living with the virus and anytime I was going through anything, I had those agencies to fall back on, so if it wasn't for the virus I don't know what I'd be doing today (RP2, p. 6).

Similar to RP2, RP8 acknowledged how his post-release assistance from agencies that work with HIV positive people positioned him for success that he felt was over and above what non-HIV people in his position (reentering the community) would have received.

I got a lot of help because of my positive status. Help that an ordinary person wouldn't have gotten, you know, so I did have that advantage and I took advantage of it. I used it, you know? I hooked up immediately with people that were, organizations that would help HIV positive people. So, in that aspect yeah it (reentry) was easy for me (RP8, p. 4).

Caseworkers and mentors were also a noted form of support and in one instance; the research participant was appreciative of the help he received from his parole officer. Each of the research participants described instances in which an external source of support (case worker/mentors) helped instill a source of hope for a better future. The research participants described instances that they encountered failure or what one would



describe as a traditional barrier to successful reentry (the inability to obtain housing, education, employment, and access to healthcare/chemical dependency treatment or mental health services) and how someone in the community was able to help them negotiate the community despite their perceived failure. The one instance in which the research respondent identified his parole officer as someone who helped him in his reentry processes proved to be an outlier because when a majority of research respondents spoke about the parole system, they had negative comments and at times, the mention of parole evoked feelings that ranged from anger to ambivalence. RP1 felt that parole was a “control organization bent on controlling and not helping people” (RP1, p. 23)! RP5 felt that his parole officer helped him. He described an instance in which he was supposed to visit his parole officer but he was on the other side of town high from his drugs of choice. He called his parole officer and told him what was going on and his parole officer picked him up, took him to a drug detoxification facility, and helped him get into a long-term inpatient program in the community. He said that his parole officer “saved my life that day” (RP5, p. 5)!

Altruism featured prominently as a theme throughout the research project. A majority of the research participants discussed having failed at other professions but found their “calling” when they got into the field of chemical dependency, working with other ex-offenders, and counseling people who are currently incarcerated. It has been noted that although they (ex-offenders) may be likely to fail in many legitimate careers, ex-offenders often discover that they are quite good at counseling other ex-offenders (Maruna S. , 2001). Ex-offenders often find that through working with other ex-offenders and drug addicts that they may achieve or even excel. Often ex-offenders are considered

as “wounded-healers” (Maruna S. , 2001). RP2 shared “I believe who better to work with a certain population than somebody that went through with that population and been through” (RP2, p. 16). RP3 shared that he founded his halfway house organization because he had difficulty finding housing after his release from prison and that he recognized a housing gap in the community for ex-offenders and chemically dependent people in the community. He thought he was the person to help close the gap. He wanted to be there person who helped ease the housing problems for people with whom he identified because of their shared experience. RP6 currently works in the field of chemical addictions and is a counselor at a local drug rehabilitation facility in the city under examination. He recognizes that he entered the field because he identified with the young people he counsels and wants to help them and save them from themselves and the misery that accompanies criminality and drug addiction.

All of the research participants acknowledged trying to help others by sharing their stories and trying to help people who they perceive as travelling down the “wrong path.” Even the research participants who did not go into helping professions felt the need to “plant seeds” and give others things to think about so that they would not fall victim to addiction and crime. RP4 shared that he hoped the young men that came into his restaurant would want to “emulate” him and do what he has been doing to “stay out of that cycle (of drugs and crime) because your freedom is worth everything.” RP4 described his incarceration as “living while you are dead” (RP4, p. 10). He acknowledged being aware of his surroundings in prison but not being able to enjoy the simple pleasures that freedom provides made him feel like he was dead. In addition to all of the other motivating factors he identified, he identified desiring to help other people prevent that

sort of feeling was something that he found motivated him to want to continue, “doing the right thing.”

The research participants in this research project were a small selected group of men who live in a mid-sized city in the Northeast. They have served time in the State Department of Corrections for violating the law. At this time, they are law abiding citizens of the community. They represent a larger segment of ex-offenders who have reentered the community after serving time in the State Department of Corrections. This group of men were not difficult to locate and all of them shared that the reason they participated in the project was not to be a part of a criminal justice research project or to contribute to a greater body of knowledge with regard to cultural resilience, but to help the researcher who is an African-American woman, obtain her doctorate. This shared history united the men and the researcher and contributed to their desire to answer personal questions about their lives and expose themselves despite of guarantees of anonymity. Contributing to the research project was yet another manifestation of their commitment to altruism. Additionally, when asked questions with regard to their role in society as African-American men, the participants who went into helping professions shared that it was important to them to help other people- not just African-Americans- reenter society after incarceration, heal from their criminal pasts, and heal from chemical additions. One participant shared that “the disease of addiction doesn’t just affect African Americans. If my story and advice can help anyone, then that’s what I want to do. Help anyone. This disease (of addiction) doesn’t discriminate, so why should I (RP4, p. 7)?

The African-American men in this research project are just a small percentage of the African-American men who exit the prison system in the United States on a daily

basis; however, stereotypically, in criminal justice research, the focus is on the recidivism rates or the amount of ethnic minorities in the prison system in the United States. This research project focused on African-American men who have come from socially disorganized communities, had chemical addiction concerns, and reentered the community with limited resources and limited social capital but have been successful at reentering the community despite the barriers to their reentry processes. The research participants have been resilient and determined to not “be a statistic” and do something different. The research participants acknowledged that they were a part of a growing number of African-American men in the correctional system and that the number was increasing at an alarming rate. It stands to reason that the criminal justice research community should recognize that although a small population, there are African-American men in the community who have reentered the community after being discharged from prison who have been successful after reentry and they too warrant the attention of the research community and community at large.

### **Implications of the Research Findings for Executive Leaders**

Approximately 1,100 people reenter the city under examination after discharge from the State Department of Corrections (Klofas & Porter, 2010). Roughly 89% of them reenter socially disorganized segments of the community and a majority of those ex-offenders are ethnic minorities. This research project has focused on African-American ex-offenders and sought to understand from a qualitative perspective, the keys to their ability to remain out of the criminal justice system for three years or more.

Designing reentry services to be comprehensive and person-specific would enable community service providers to meet the needs of reentering prisoners. At this

time, the city under examination only has two organizations that specifically cater to the needs of prisoners and they rely largely on volunteers from the community who are well-meaning but not well-versed in meeting the needs of the ex-offenders that they serve. Neither of them provide the wide-ranging hands-on services that are needed for reentering ex-offenders. Two of the research participants who identified being HIV positive described having comprehensive services that went far and above the care they would have received were it not for their HIV positive status. They received case management assistance, housing assistance, healthcare assistance, vocational/educational assistance, and economic assistance to aid their reentry processes. The non- HIV positive research participants described struggling to attain the aforementioned types of services in the community and it hindered their reentry processes and their needs were not met or not met as quickly as the HIV positive research participants. It stands to reason, that providing services that help reentering prisoners could have an impact on the recidivism rate and the rates of criminal victimization in the community. Using the behavioral healthcare model of a local HIV/AIDS service provider in the community, could help improve the chances for reentering ex-offenders in the city. Responsible AIDS Care (RAC) offers their clients Care Managers who can provide assistance with a range of services. Care managers provide linkages to other services in the community, aid with obtaining medical insurance, housing, aid in the development of proper support networks in the community and provide referrals for chemical addictions therapy, mental health services, debt management, and domestic violence counseling services, as well as coordinate transportation services, and advocate for their clients in the community. The comprehensive services provided for RAC clients could serve as a model for prison

reentry services and reduce the opportunities for mitigating circumstances to be a detriment to the reentry processes of ex-offenders in the community.

Executive leaders should also be mindful of the people they hire as Care Managers for reentry programs in the community. A knowledge of the needs of reentering ex-offenders and cultural sensitivity are crucial factors when considering the type of people that would be Care Managers for reentering ex-offenders. Knowledge of the biopsychosocial stressors would be an essential characteristic for potential prison reentry Care Managers. Knowledge of the community would also be another vital characteristic for people working with ex-offenders so that they could help place ex-offenders in suitable areas of the community that would increase their chances of being successful once they reenter the community. Culturally sensitive and community savvy Care Managers could also provide counseling to ex-offenders to help the reentering ex-offender believe and have hope that there is a discernable path out of the chemical addiction and criminal lifestyles that the ex-offenders experienced before they were incarcerated.

In addition to service provision in the community, the research participants' responses to questions with regard to the State Office of Parole yielded an additional area that had implications for executive leaders. The role of parole officers needs to be more clearly defined and though ex-offenders are reportedly counseled before their release from the State Department of Corrections with regard to the function (s) of parole officers, additional counseling post-release is warranted so as to clear up any remaining misconceptions about the level of supervision they could expect once the ex-offender returns to the community. The role of parole officers seemed to be a gray area for many

of the research participants and the emotions the mere mention of parole evoked was not uniform across the interviews. The emotions ranged from ambivalence to anger and the participants seemed to have differing accounts about whether or not they felt parole was of help or a hinderance to their ability to successfully negotiate their neighborhoods post-release.

Another implication for executive leaders is the issue of funding and tax allocation for prison reentry services in the community. Executive leaders should be cognizant that tax funds are allocated toward programs that employ the use of best-practices and provide comprehensive/needed services that could have an impact on the ex-offenders and society at large by reducing criminal activity, criminal victimization, chemical addictions, and recidivism.

The research findings also presented additional factors that executive leaders should be aware of when developing reentry programs in their communities. The finding that help from others was an essential component of the research participants' reentry processes also lends to the idea of developing comprehensive services for the ex-offender and their families which could further increase the chances that an ex-offender could become successful after release from prison.

In New York City, New York an agency sought to provide chemical dependency services to ex-offenders and provide assistance to their families by way of referring them to services they may need in the community. La Bodega de la Familia, provided family case management services in an effort to reduce the damage done to family units as a result of having a chemically dependent ex-offender reenter the family unit. By providing the support needed to families who may be in crisis or struggling with the issues that

accompany prison reentry and chemical dependency, family structures were provided with the necessary supports to overcome and deal with the stressors placed upon them by reentering family members.

**Implications for further research.** Qualitative research using this population is essential for practitioners and policy makers and can have a positive impact on future decision-making. Given that the traditional method in the field of criminology to examine ex-offender populations tends to focus primarily on quantitative research, first-hand accounts are vastly important and informative. Qualitative research of this nature using a larger sample size would be valuable in that a deeper exploration of the sources of internal and external resilience could help with designing reentry programs that could meet the needs of reentering prisoners.

Additional qualitative research with regard to the role of parole officers and the people on their caseloads is warranted as there was evidence of a lack of clarity with regard to the role parole officers play in the reentry process and there appeared to be ambivalence and confusion with regard to parole supervision and its true meaning/application. Some of the research participants had a different understanding of what their parole officers would do post-incarceration and it caused for both negative feelings and a disregard for the impact/role post-incarceration supervision could play in the reentry process.

The research finding that there were two distinct paths for prison reentry for the HIV positive research participants and the non HIV positive research participants provides an indication the further research is warranted comparing and contrasting the reentry processes for both groups. Additional attention should be paid to the fact that for



the participants in this project who were diagnosed as HIV positive were thankful for their health status because they feared that without their diagnoses, they would have received less help than they received and it positioned them to be successful. Clearly, additional research should be conducted to examine the HIV positive ex-offenders and their reentry processes.

A broader exploration with regard to cultural resilience is also warranted at this time. The research participants touched upon several of the areas of the cultural resilience model but, again, a larger sample size of African-American ex-offenders could illicit additional information with regard to the validity of the Cultural Resilience Model (2007). By teasing out the cultural components or cultural impact on resilience, the field of resilience research could be guided to understand the impact that culture and spirituality have on the ability that African-Americans have to buffer the impact of life-stressors and potentially incorporate them into policies and procedures catering toward that population.

**Implications for education.** The issue of reentry resonates with the criminal justice community in that at its core are the meanings of what is the end result of incarceration and whether or not we are a society of laws and adherence to those laws and what is to be done with people who go afoul of the rule of law. Once people are incarcerated it is the job of correction officials to not only house and take care of those who are incarcerated but attention needs to be paid to the mentality and suitability of people to reenter society. Whether one is of the belief that the correctional system is to be punitive or rehabilitative the issue still remains how people can enter the correctional system and be positioned to reenter the community in such a way as they do not return to

the correctional system or remain wards/dependent on the State. The correctional system is faced with a tremendous responsibility to ensure that those who reenter society are given the tools they need to resume life in the community and to become law-abiding citizens. Reentry has been defined as being all of the programming and educational tools that lead toward resuming life in the community. This research project provided and understanding into the components of a successful reentry and reentering prisoners and the findings of this research project could be used to help develop reentry programming to help foster an understanding of the complexities of reentry and instill a sense of hope and motivation for reentering ex-offenders.

**Implications for practice.** The fact that many more reentering exoffenders fail at reentry than succeed is evidence that reentry is a daunting task and that additional planning must take place before the offenders reenter the community. Criminal justice practitioners must take an aggressive and participatory role in the planning for reentering exoffenders. This research project illustrated the inability/lack of assistance from many of the community-based supervision providers. The majority of the research respondents reserved their harshest criticism for parole officers. With the exception of only one research participant, there were harsh feelings toward the role the parole officers the participants had during their initial reentry to the community. There were statements of aggressive restrictions and apathetic parole officers who by the participants' descriptions, limited their involvement in their reentry processes to the enforcement of parole restrictions and that the parole officers assumed a disciplinarian approach to reentry. This research project illustrated that some ex-offenders were able to comply with their parole restrictions and not internalize what they perceived to be micro or macro level

aggressions. This finding is an illustration of why it would be incumbent upon parole officers in particular to understand the the psychological states of the reentering ex-offenders and adjust their interpersonal communication skills accordingly.

Correctional counselors and social workers maintain the unique position of being the firstline of prison reentry planners. The incorporation of realistic reentry planning is warranted as evidenced by the responses of the research participants in this project. Like with chemical dependency counselling a realistic relapse prevention plan is something that must be incorporated into the plan for reentering ex-offenders. Preparing people for both failure and success and what to do in the event of both is something that is needed when considering reentry planning. Like in chemical dependency treatment there must be an understanding of the internal and external triggers for the engagement of self-destructive behavior and the same holds true for criminal justice practitioners. Reentering prisoners must be aware of the internal and external motivations for their criminal activity and be prepared to make the necessary life adjustments to prevent them from contributing to negative behaviors that could lead to incarceration or death.

**Ability of the theoretical framework to describe and explain this experience.**

The use of Social Disorganization Theory (1942) and Cultural Resilience Model (2007) explained the experience of the research participants in that it explored the relevance of coming from socially disorganized communities, reentering socially disorganized communities after they served their prison sentences and illuminated how they were able to remain resilient despite the social impediments to their reentry processes. The fact that the cultural resilience factors were validated except in the area of racism illustrated that successful reentry is not a culturally based phenomenon but one of human conditioning

and positioning. The absence of social controls and community-based support mechanisms only highlights the daunting task of successful reentry processes and represents an illustration of the fact that the research participants were able to remain steadfast and resilient even though they confronted issues that have deterred others in their reentry processes- a majority of ex-offenders are unsuccessful in their reentry processes and that too highlights that for some people they are to withstand the pressures they are confronted with when they reenter disorganized communities.

### **Research Limitations**

The limitation for this research project pertained to the research participant sample. The research sample was a purposefully selected subset of African-American men who reentered a mid-sized city in the Northeastern United States. The results of the research project were not generalizable to African-American men who have reentered other communities. The participants of the study, however, were experts in their reentry processes because they discussed their lived experiences.

An additional limitation of the study presented itself during the interviews and was reflected in the lack of descriptive analysis on the part of the research participants when describing their socially disorganized environments. It is believed that because the researcher was familiar with the communities the participants described, the participants felt a certain level of having a shared experience between themselves and the researcher so that they perceived less of a need to be specifically descriptive to the researcher with regard to their (perceived) common communities.

## **Conclusion**

While we as a society have developed laws and regulations for how we are to interact with one another and behave in society, there is a segment of our population who for whatever reason, decide not to adhere to the rules that govern our land. They have been deemed to have run afoul of the law and deserve to be punished for their violation (s). Once some have served their time in prison, they reenter their communities with very little possessions, opportunities, and/or social capital. Some of those who have reentered the community have been able to negotiate their communities and remain crime and drug free. Others, have not, and return to their lives of drugs and criminality and suffer their fate. The research participants in this research project have shown that they have been able to withstand the pressures of their reentry processes. As a society, we are bombarded with negative images of African-American men and when discussing African-American men in the criminal justice system they are often marginalized, underestimated, and undervalued and that remains something that must be corrected. The men interviewed for this research project, are sons, fathers, taxpayers, and valuable members of the community and this research project is a testament to the resilience and ability to have lives after prison. Successful reentry is possible and society can either aid in the successful reentry of the ex-offenders who reenter the community or contribute to the “closed circuit of perpetual marginality” by continuing to ignore and relegate people to second class citizenship based upon their behavior and changeable characteristics.

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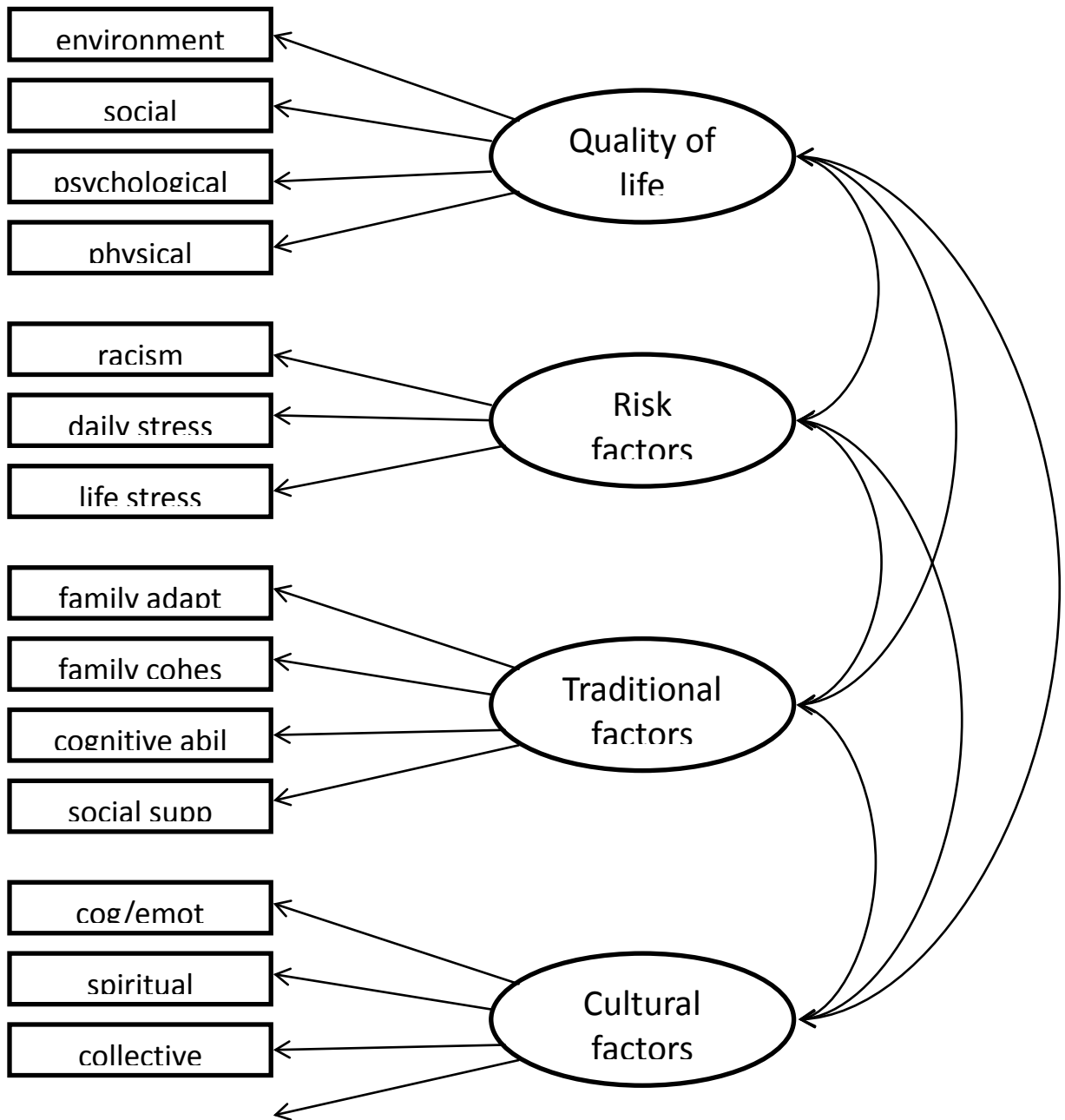
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## Appendix A

Cultural Resilience Measurement Model (2007)





## Appendix B

### Interview Guide: Demographic Questions

Name of Interview Participant:

Current age:

Birthplace:

Current residence:

Current living arrangements (With whom do you live?)

Employment Status:

Educational Attainment:

Military History:

Marital status before and after incarceration:

Religious: (pre and post release identification)

#### **Chemical Addiction History:**

Drug (s) of choice:

Drug use history:

Age:

Method of use:

#### **Drug treatment history**

Were you mandated to attend/enroll in a drug treatment program?

Treatment experience and outcome:

**Criminal Justice Information**

Criminal Justice History:

How many years were you incarcerated?:

Post release supervision? Yes or No:

Post release supervision violations?: How many?  
time:

If Yes, Length:

Additional jail or prison

In which institution (s) did you serve your sentence?

How many years have you been out of the criminal justice system?

## **Appendix C**

### Dissertation Interview Questions

#### **Prison Reentry Reflections**

1. Tell me what your prison reentry process was like.
2. How would say your prison reentry process was impacted by being an African-American man?

#### **Social Disorganization**

1. Describe your community pre/post incarceration.
2. Were the problems in your community pre-incarceration similar to the problems in your community post incarceration?

## **Appendix D**

Informed Consent Form

**St. John Fisher College**

Institutional Review Board

**Informed Consent Form**

**Project:** *How African-American Ex-offenders Successfully Negotiate Their Socially Disorganized Environments into Which They are Returned After Incarceration: As Reflected in Their Own Words*

**Name of Researcher:** Tisha M. Smith

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dianne Cooney Miner, PhD, RN, CNS

**Title:** Dean, Wegmans School of Nursing

**Phone:** (585) 385-8472

**Email:** [dCooneyMiner@sjfc.edu](mailto:dCooneyMiner@sjfc.edu)

Dissertation Committee:

**Dr. Cynthia McCloskey**  
Associate Professor of Nursing

Graduate Program Director Wegmans School of Nursing St. John Fisher College

**Phone:** (585) 358-8471

Email: cmccloskey@sjfc.edu

Approval of study has been obtained by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board to complete this research project.

**Place of study:** A mutually agreed upon location

### **Interview Process**

You will be asked to participate in an interview process lasting approximately 1-2 hours and the interview will be audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher and/or a fee-based transcription service. You may be contacted to ask additional questions during the research project. The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon location at time that is convenient to you as the research participant.

You will be provided a copy of the research abstract should you request one after the research project has been completed.

You will be offered a \$10 gift card for your participation in the project whether you complete the interview process or not.

**Risks and Benefits:** During the course of the interview process, you may encounter some emotional discomfort, as you will be asked to recall periods of time in which you suffered emotional stress/trauma. As a participant in this study, you will be afforded the opportunity to stop the interview process and to withdraw your consent for the participation in this research study. Should you feel that you have lasting emotional concerns; the researcher will be in a position to refer you to a local community service provider to aid you with your emotional concerns.

The benefits for participating in this study will be that your interview responses will contribute to the body of knowledge in the criminal justice field and add to existing research in the field of cultural resilience. Your participation in this project will shed light on the prison reentry processes of African-American ex-offenders returning to the city under examination.

The researcher is a licensed drug and alcohol counselor in the State of New York and is considered to be a “mandated reporter” in New York State and you cannot disclose any information with regard to current participation in illegal activity including crimes against persons or illicit drug use, sales, or promotion.

The information and research findings for this proposed research project will be shared at conferences, presentations, and will be submitted for publishing after the completion of the project.

### **Confidentiality**

You will not be mentioned by name in the research project and any and all identifying information will be removed. Your name and professional/ institutional identifiers, will be removed to protect your confidentiality.

The transcripts from the interviews will be maintained by the researcher for the duration of the project and a period of three years after the completion of the project. All materials related to the research interviews will be kept in a locked box for a period of three years after the completion of the project and then destroyed.

**Your rights:**

As the research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
5. Be provided a \$10 gift card at the beginning of the interview

I have read, received a copy of the above, and hereby give my consent to participate in the above named study.

Signature of Research Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to be audio-taped for the purposes of this research project :

Research Participant Initials \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Initials \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you or your child experiences emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, contact the Office of Academic Affairs at (585) 385-8034 or the Wellness Center at (585) 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

## **Appendix E**

Debriefing Form

**St. John Fisher College**

Institutional Review Board

Debriefing Form

**Title of study:** How African-American Ex-offenders Successfully Negotiate Their Socially Disorganized Environments into Which They are Returned After Incarceration: As Reflected in Their Own Words

**Name(s) of researcher(s):** Tisha M. Smith

**Faculty Supervisor/Phone:**

**Dissertation Chairperson:** Dianne Cooney Miner, PhD, RN, CNS

**Title:** Dean, Wegmans School of Nursing

**Phone:** (585) 385-8472

**Email:** [dCooneyMiner@sjfc.edu](mailto:dCooneyMiner@sjfc.edu)

**Dissertation Committee:**

Dr. Cynthia McCloskey  
Associate Professor of Nursing

Graduate Program Director Wegmans School of Nursing St. John Fisher College

**Phone:** (585) 358-8471

**Email:** cmccloskey@sjfc.edu

**The hypotheses of the study:**

**H1:** There are cultural resilience factors that play a role in the successful prison reentry processes of African-American ex-offenders returning to the city under examination after incarceration

**H2:** African-American ex-offenders are capable of sharing their reflections on their life-course experiences (pre and post incarceration) as they relate to their ability to negotiate their socially disorganized environments.

**Methods used:** Qualitative interviews (semi-structured)

**Expected results:** African-American ex-offenders will be afforded the opportunity to discuss their unique life-course events that contributed to their ability to successfully reenter the city under examination after incarceration.

If you would like results of the study, please provide the following information:

**Name:**

**Address:**

**Phone:**

Thank you very much for your participation. Feel free to contact the researcher or the faculty supervisor listed above if you have any questions.



## **Appendix F**

### Letter of Introduction

My name is Tisha M. Smith and I am a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, NY. I am currently conducting research about the post incarceration experiences of African-American men in the city under examination. The title of the research project is:

**How African-American Ex-offenders Successfully Negotiate Their Socially Disorganized Environments into Which They are Returned After Incarceration:**

**As Reflected in Their Own Words**

I am particularly interested in examining how African- American ex-offenders have been able to be successful in their reentry processes and stay out of the criminal justice system for three or more years. Previous research has indicated that a majority of ex-offenders returning to the community return to prison on new charges or violations of their post-release supervision during their third year of freedom. I seek to interview people who are ex-offenders in an effort to explore the unique factors to which they attribute their success. The research will be conducted in an effort to understand what, if any, cultural resilience factors played a role in their ability to remain out of the criminal justice system after serving time in the state department of corrections.

The St. John Fisher Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed this project and the project has been approved by the university at this time. I look forward to your

participation in this project and hope to conclude the research by having a dissertation that adds to the extant qualitative research with regard to the prison reentry process.

Sincerely,

Tisha M. Smith

## Appendix G

### Summary of Themes Developed from Interviewing Ex-offenders

| <b>Themes</b>                  |   | <b>Theory</b>                                  |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Self control and self-reliance | The research participant reported ego-centric behavior/innate characteristics or a sense of being unable to change their circumstances or lives   | Cultural Resilience                            |
| Altruism                       | The participant shared that he experienced a heightened sense of caring for others or a need to focus on others to the exclusion of self  | Cultural Resilience                            |
| Disavowal of stigma            | The research participant described the ability to negotiate the world despite their perceived stigma through increasing their self-esteem, achieving esteem-able acts, and engaging in “normal” activities: purposeful activities | Social Disorganization/<br>Cultural Resilience |
| Help from others               | The participant acknowledges receiving help from others (family members, self-help groups, mentors, case managers, case workers, parole officers, or religion (clergy))   | Cultural Resilience                            |

## Appendix H

### Research Participant Demographics

| RP# | Area Reentered | Drug Use (Age) | Current Age | Mandated to Tx. | # of Arrests | Last Charge                    | Years Served (Total Lifetime) | Years Out |
|-----|----------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| 1   | 19th Ward      | 14             | 54          | Yes             | 3            | Burglary 3 <sup>rd</sup>       | 9.5                           | 11        |
| 2   | East Side      | 12             | 55          | Yes             | 10+          | Robbery 1 <sup>st</sup>        | 19                            | 15        |
| 3   | Northeast      | 12             | 48          | Yes             | 10           | Burglary 2 <sup>nd</sup>       | 4                             | 22        |
| 4   | 19th Ward      | Refused        | 59          | No              | 1            | Criminal Sales 1 <sup>st</sup> | 16.5                          | 9         |
| 5   | Northeast      | 12             | 49          | Yes             | 28-29        | Robbery 1 <sup>st</sup>        | 10                            | 12        |
| 6   | 19th Ward      | 12             | 48          | No              | 7            | Poss. Stolen Prop.             | 5                             | 21        |
| 7   | 19th Ward      | 12             | 49          | No              | 3            | Robbery 1 <sup>st</sup>        | 4.5                           | 29        |
| 8   | Northeast      | 11             | 61          | Yes             | 27           | Criminal Poss. 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 7                             | 8         |
| 9   | Northeast      | 13             | 58          | No              | 1            | Homicide                       | 6                             | 23        |
| 10  | 19th Ward      | 9              | 67          | No              | 40-50        | Criminal Sales                 | 22                            | 16        |