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An Exploration into the Phenomena Behind Post-Secondary Higher Education and Its Implications on Employability, and Constructive Lifestyle Changes Among Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

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An Exploration into the Phenomena Behind Post-Secondary Higher Education and Its Implications on Employability, and Constructive Lifestyle Changes Among Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

Abstract

Mass incarceration and repeated offenses are major issues in New York State. The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2011) reported that nearly 7 in 10 formerly incarcerated individuals committed new crimes, and half ended up back in prison within three years. One reason for this high rate of recidivism was the low level of education among this group and the lack of opportunities for them to enhance their level of education (Pew Center on the States, 2011). The Pew research showed evidence that post-secondary higher education attainment was a key factor in increasing chances of employability and helping formerly incarcerated individuals adapt constructive lifestyle changes that helped them become contributing members of families, communities, and the society at-large. The purpose of this qualitative study which implemented an advocacy/ participatory worldview, was to highlight the stories of 10 formerly incarcerated male students from New York State in order to identify the implications that post-secondary higher education had on life experiences related to their employability upon release, and constructive lifestyle changes that helped keep them out of prison. Using an online survey tool, helped explore how post-secondary higher education (PSHE) positively impacted their lives.

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An Exploration into the Phenomena Behind Post-Secondary Higher Education and Its
Implications on Employability, and Constructive Lifestyle Changes Among Formerly
Incarcerated Individuals

By

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

Supervised by

Dr. Janice Kelly

Committee Member

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St. John Fisher College

May 2015

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May 2015

Dedication

“A little learning, indeed, may be a dangerous thing, but the want of learning is a calamity to any people. Education is the key to freedom.”

Frederick Douglass

First and foremost, this project is dedicated to my mother and father who laboriously worked to instill in me the value of acquiring higher education, and for imparting me with the tools necessary to succeed in whatever I set out to accomplish in life.

Secondly, I dedicate this achievement to all of my loved ones who believed in me at one of the lowest points of my life—my incarceration—when I did not even believe in myself.

Also, I dedicate this accomplishment to those individuals that I met behind “stone and steel” enclosures, whom through their lived examples demonstrated the transformative power of education. And to those individuals that played a significant role in guiding me towards the educational journey that helped set me free mentally, spiritually, and physically. Furthermore, I dedicate this accomplishment to all the staff from the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison.

Last but not least, I thank God for keeping me in His grace. His divine intervention throughout the course of my life has demonstrated his faithfulness to hold true to His promise “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5).

Biographical Sketch

Samuel Arroyo is a social worker who has dedicated his life to the provision of quality to services to individuals and families affected by diseases and other forms of societal ills. Mr. Arroyo achieved a Certificate in Ministry and Human Services from New York Theological Seminary in 2000. He also holds a Bachelor in Behavioral Sciences from Mercy College. Throughout his undergraduate studies at Mercy College, Mr. Arroyo was on the Dean's list various semesters, received Department Honors in Behavioral Science, and graduated Magna Cum Laude in May of 2005. Mr. Arroyo commenced his graduate studies at Herbert H. Lehman College in 2007 where he graduated and received his Master of Social Work degree in 2010. In 2012, Mr. Arroyo commenced his doctoral studies at St. John Fisher College where he engaged in the course work towards his Ed.D. in Executive Leadership. Mr. Arroyo engaged in qualitative research to explore the implications of post-secondary higher education on formerly incarcerated individuals' employability and lifestyle changes that led to their desistance from crime. He conducted his research under the direction of Dr. Janice Kelly, dissertation committee Chair, Dr. Gilbert Louis a committee member, Dr. Carl Mazza, his executive mentor, and Dr. Damary Marcelina Bonilla-Rodriguez, his trailblazer. Mr. Arroyo completed his dissertation titled "An Exploration into the Phenomena Behind Post-secondary Higher Education and Its Implications on Employability, and Constructive Lifestyle Changes Among Formerly Incarcerated Individuals," and earned his Ed.D. in Executive Leadership in May of 2015.

Abstract

Mass incarceration and repeated offenses are major issues in New York State. The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2011) reported that nearly 7 in 10 formerly incarcerated individuals committed new crimes, and half ended up back in prison within three years. One reason for this high rate of recidivism was the low level of education among this group and the lack of opportunities for them to enhance their level of education (Pew Center on the States, 2011). The Pew research showed evidence that post-secondary higher education attainment was a key factor in increasing chances of employability and helping formerly incarcerated individuals adapt constructive lifestyle changes that helped them become contributing members of families, communities, and the society at-large.

The purpose of this qualitative study which implemented an advocacy/participatory worldview, was to highlight the stories of 10 formerly incarcerated male students from New York State in order to identify the implications that post-secondary higher education had on life experiences related to their employability upon release, and constructive lifestyle changes that helped keep them out of prison. Using an online survey tool, helped explore how post-secondary higher education (PSHE) positively impacted their lives.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2011) reported that nearly 7 in 10 formerly incarcerated individuals committed new crimes, and half ended up back in prison within three years. The need to provide incarcerated students with resources to help them make positive transitions and lifestyle changes was identified. One reason for the high rate of recidivism was the low level of education among this group and the lack of opportunities for them to enhance their level of education (Pew Center on the States, 2011). Unfortunately, the elimination of Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals in New York State continued to be a barrier to implementing effective interventions that helped curtail crime and recidivism by providing incarcerated individuals with opportunities to complete college-level courses and degrees while in prison.

Furthermore, the Division of Criminal Justice Statistics (2011) proclaimed that 600,000 prisoners were released each year. Those startling statistics were compounded by the reality of increased crime rates in New York State (Department of Criminal Justice Statistics, 2011). It was imperative to explore the dire need to promote effective interventions that helped reduce crime and recidivism. Some advocated for policy change that supported reinstatement of funding for such interventions. Research suggested that post-secondary higher education (PSHE) helped decrease crime and recidivism (Chappell, 2004; Esperian, 2010; Jancic, 1998; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998); this appeared to be one cost-effective way to address the problems. It was

counterproductive not to pursue the investment in college education for incarcerated individuals.

In New York State in 2012, the cost for warehousing each prisoner was \$54,000 per year (Hudson Link, 2012) – up from \$34,000 per year in 1997 (Stevens & Ward, 1997). In a February 2014 announcement, Governor Cuomo stated that the cost for maintaining an individual in prison per year went up to \$60,067 (Mann, 2014). Moreover, older adults in prison were the fastest growing population in U.S. prisons (Mikle, 2013). Mikle (2013) suggested that maintaining older adults in prison was more costly because most health expenditures were covered by state taxpayer dollars. This startling reality drew the attention of many. If one leaned towards the notion of rehabilitation and costs-savings versus punishment, one logical extension of that position was that it was in the best interest of taxpayers to reinstate funding of PSHE for prisoners.

Ubah (2004) reached the conclusion that the elimination of Pell Grant was part of a conservative agenda that carried on from 1982 thru 1994. He proposed that the debate over the elimination of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals' PSHE was captured in two opposing perspectives that were integrated into United States' historical and political context (Ubah, 2004). The perspectives were: the idealistic liberal agenda which supported PSHE for incarcerated individuals and the conservative pessimistic view which led to the abolition of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals.

Ubah (2004) examined the history and abolition of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals' PSHE in the United States. In 1965, under the Presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, Congress signed the Higher Education Act into law as part of the Great

Society's domestic plan (Ubah, 2004). Pell was part of the 1965 plan - specifically, Title IV in the 1965 Higher Education Act (Ubah, 2004). Pell was a Federal grant established to subsidize college education costs for students from poor families. Ubah (2004) claimed that Pell became the primary source of funding for incarcerated individuals' PSHE because most of them came from poor families. He proposed that proponents of PSHE for incarcerated individuals believed that acquiring a college-level education helped enhance skills that made them more marketable for employment opportunities upon release, helped them develop social bonds, and deterred criminal behavior (Ubah, 2004). These notable effects of PSHE on incarcerated individuals should have been enough to convince legislators to reinstate Pell funding; however, that was ideal and not reality. The decision was dependent on whose agenda seemed more persuasive and on the legislation signed into law. In spite of opposing views, there were those factions who believed in the benefits of educating incarcerated individuals versus warehousing them (Hudson Link, 2012); Ubah's (2004) study supported that claim.

More importantly, some factions in society continued to believe in the transformative power of education. PSHE was identified as the catalyst for constructive lifestyle changes. Prior research supported the effects of PSHE on recidivism (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Chappell, 2004; Esperian, 2010; Fuentes, Rael & Duncan, 2010; Jancic, 1998; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998; Wheeldon, 2010), its effect on the administration of prisons (Lahm, 2009; Tewskbury, Erickson & Taylor, 2000) and the overall support for reinstatement of Pell funding (Esperian, 2010; Gehring, 1997; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Taylor, 2005; Ubah, 2004; Werner, 1997) due to PSHE's

transformative power. Evidently there were many in agreement about the need for reinstatement of Pell Grants to fund PSHE for incarcerated individuals. However, there were obviously those in opposition to it. Both Gehring (1997) and more recently Ubah (2004) proclaimed that a major reason for the demise of PSHE for prisoners was part of a conservative, anti-correctional education trend in the U.S. Congress. This became quite costly. Nonetheless, until Pell funding can be reinstated, something has to be done to help incarcerated individuals make constructive lifestyle changes or else face potentially harmful consequences upon their release.

Post-secondary higher education for incarcerated individuals continued to be a promising approach towards rehabilitation. It appeared to be a more cost-effective intervention than tough-on-crime approaches. There were those who strongly believed in rehabilitation versus retribution. In a speech, Governor Cuomo announced the plan to launch a statewide initiative to fund college courses in ten New York prisons to give prisoners an opportunity to earn a college degree (March 11, 2014, NPR). He stated “the program is an investment in people before problems develop, rather than just paying for the damage after it occurs” (Winsor, 2014). Moreover, he proposed that currently it would cost taxpayers \$60,000 per year for each incarcerated individual, totaling 3.6 billion for prisons and a 40% chance of recidivism for each prisoner released (March 11, 2014, NPR). These numbers were alarming compared to the low cost of funding an education for prisoners. It takes only \$5,000 per year for a college-ready individual to obtain a college level education while in prison (Hudson Link, 2012). Constructive lifestyle changes encompassed a process and education was the catalyst for those changes.

Those supporting the costs-benefits of rehabilitation versus retribution can appreciate the need for PSHE as a cost-effective intervention that increases chances of employability and constructive lifestyle changes. Researchers claiming that PSHE was cost-effective went as far as proposing alternative funding options (Chappell, 2004; Taylor, 2005). Chappell (2004) suggested PSHE distance learning was a more cost-effective design to traditional PSHE for incarcerated individuals. While Taylor (2005) provided alternative PSHE funding methods and program designs as a way to help bridge the gap between rehabilitation and successful reentry. Taylor (2005) presented the phone-commission rebate funding, the on-site college-credit operations which was similar to what Chappell (2004) proposed, and the for-profit university tax-credit donation programs as potential funding options. The belief that PSHE was an effective intervention existed within the scope of considering alternative funding options for prisoners' post-secondary education.

Problem Statement

PL 103-322, the Violent Crimes Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 was signed into law by President Clinton on September 13, 1994 (Clinton, 1995). Provisions of this law eliminated Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals. Since then, recidivism rates increased significantly in NYS (Clinton, 1995). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2002) published findings that out of 272,111 parolees released in 15 states in 1994, 67.5% were rearrested within 3 years. Studies generally supported the effectiveness of post-secondary higher education to help formerly incarcerated individuals adapt constructive lifestyle changes that increased chances of employability upon release (Esperian, 2010; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998), helped

decreased recidivism rates, and increased chances of desistance from crime (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Chappell, 2004; Esperian, 2010; Fuentes, Rael & Duncan, 2010; Jancic, 1998; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Travis, 2011; Warr, 1998; Wheeldon, 2010).

Historical Rationale for the Study

Ubah (2004) elaborated on the historical perspective behind the abolition of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals in the United States; he proposed that attempts to demolish Title IV of Higher Education Act of 1965 date back as far as its inception (Ubah, 2004). There were always factions in opposition to President Johnson's Great Society (Ubah, 2004). Title IV was part of that domestic plan which provided subsidized college education (Ubah, 2004). Shrum (2004) and Ubah (2004) claimed that Pell became the primary source of funding for prisoners' PSHE, because most prisoners came from poor families. Ubah (2004) proposed that proponents of PSHE for incarcerated individuals believed in the positive effects of education on employability and constructive lifestyle changes that led to desistance from crime.

Page (2004) affirmed that on November 10, 1993 Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, a Republican from Texas, reintroduced Senate Amendment 1158 in a concerted effort to eliminate Pell funding for all incarcerated individuals; that perspective was leveraged in the historical context of power politics in the U.S. (Ubah, 2004). After several decades and successful increments to abolish Pell funding for incarcerated individuals, the Violent Crimes Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 was signed into law (Clinton, 1995; Page, 2004). This study explored the political, historical, and unethical inclinations

behind the elimination of Pell for incarcerated individuals, the unintended consequences that ensued, and explored potential solutions to the aforementioned societal problems.

Historical trend: Proposed bills and amendments to eliminate Pell funding for prison-based education. The elimination of Pell funding for all incarcerated individuals trailed from the enactment of the Violent Crimes Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Ubah, 2004) but attempts to dismantle it dated back as early as the formation of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" (Shrum, 2004). Shrum (2004) proposed that the debate between political parties concerning funding educational programs for incarcerated individuals soared during the 1970s. Unfortunately, scholars and policy makers throughout the U.S. embraced Robert Martison's ideology of "nothing works" related rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals (Shrum, 2004). The effectiveness of PSHE as an intervention to reduce crime and recidivism became questionable to conservatives who shared similar sentiments as Martison (Shrum, 2004). Shrum (2004) stated that "programs based around punishment and surveillance grew" (p. 1). Martison's ideology was used throughout the years by conservative lawmakers to introduce bills that called for tougher punishment and excluded incarcerated individuals from Pell eligibility, thus, prevented them from obtaining a college level education.

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 had already put an end to Pell Grant funding for incarcerated individuals convicted of drug-related offenses (Page, 2004). This unyielding attempt by political figures to build utilitarian coalitions and implement policies that were detrimental to those less fortunate in our society had its roots in U.S. history's political monopoly by Republican conservative factions (Ubah, 2004). Political attempts to dismantle the Pell Grant system was viewed as an attack on marginalized

populations, including incarcerated individuals, since the inception of this federal grant (Shrum, 2004; Ubah, 2004). Republican conservatives have always made attempts to dismantle Pell funding for incarcerated individuals (Gehring, 1997; Ubah, 2004). Ubah (2004) concluded that the opposition to the provisions of Title IV was part of the conservative trend in the U.S. Congress. Page (2004) referred to this trend as a “legislative penal drama” where conservative lawmakers acting in concert with popular media played on the sentiments of White working middle class voters to effect discriminatory policy changes. In the case behind eliminating Pell funding for incarcerated individuals, they played into the fear of crime, prejudices towards Blacks and Latinos, and mistrust of penal practitioners promoting PSHE as a crime deterrent (Page, 2004).

The “unintended” consequences of the Violent Crimes Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. Recidivism rates increased in NYS and abroad since the elimination of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals (Clinton, 1995). Research supported the notion that most incarcerated individuals would at some point be released into our communities and that many would return back within three years post-release, for committing new crimes (BJS, 2007). The cost for warehousing each incarcerated individual in NYS increased from \$34,000 per year in 1997 (Stevens & Ward, 1997) to \$54,000 per year in 2012 (Hudson Link, 2012) to \$60,067 in 2014 (Mann, 2014) and would continue to increase as incarceration rates upsurge (Vera Institute of Justice, 2012). The astronomical cost of mass incarceration has been a topic of discussion by many. The cost for supporting all NY state prisons’ expenditures was \$3.6 billion in 2012, and the Department of Corrections and Community Supervisions budget was \$2.7

billion (Vera Institute of Justice, 2012). Tough-on-crime laws did not remedy the problems associated with increased crime and recidivism rates; instead, they added to the severity of the problem. The elimination of Pell funding for PSHE left incarcerated individuals without hope; for many of them all that remained was a shattered dream. This scenario wreaked havoc within penal institutions and communities where incarcerated individuals returned upon release.

Unethical inclinations that helped gain support for the elimination of Pell. Despite evidence that suggested that PSHE helped reduce crime and recidivism (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Chappell, 2004; Esperian, 2010; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998; Wheeldon, 2010) and helped maintain institutional safety, conservative lawmakers used fear of crime and utilitarian values of particular audiences to gain collective support for punitive policies (Page, 2004). Others in opposition to that fallacy believed in the transformative power of PSHE as a means to combat crime and recidivism (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Chappell, 2004; Esperian, 2010; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998; Wheeldon, 2010).

In spite of attempts by individuals of more liberal perspectives, proponents of PSHE and prestigious organizations, their counter-amendments were rejected by the majority (Page, 2004). However, the majority vote was questionable. Utilitarianism was based on the premise of the “greatest good for the greatest number of people” (Sandel, 2009). Conservatives capitalized on the people’s sentiments; they claimed that the elimination of Pell for incarcerated individuals helped secure a college level education for young adults of lower and middle class factions - a strategy that helped focus the

sentiments of the people on retribution for crime versus rehabilitation (Page, 2004). The punitive policies and tough-on-crime approach had an over-all adverse effect and became more costly than funding a college level education for incarcerated individuals (Page, 2004; Hudson Link, 2012; Stevens & Ward, 1997). Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison (2013) and Winsor (2014) produced statistics that helped support that claim. The U.S. incarcerated more people per capita than any other developed country in the world (www.prisonpolicy.org, 2012). Historical accounts revealed that mass incarceration in the U.S. was closely related to ideological policies versus actual crime rates (www.prisonpolicy.org, 2012).

Sandel (2009) reported that one of the problems with utilitarianism was that it did not take account of how short-term measures gain the greatest good for the greatest number of people produced long-term damages that negatively impacted everyone. Case in point, NYS taxpayers and many others were negatively impacted on multiple levels by the elimination of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals. Another problem with the utilitarian perspective was that it made justice and rights a matter of calculation versus principle (Sandel, 2009). The elimination of Pell Grant funding for incarcerated individuals predisposed us, including incarcerated individuals, to social, economic, and human impoverishment; this became more costly than anticipated.

Proposed advocacy. For the factions that leaned towards the notion of rehabilitation versus punishment, one logical extension of that position was that it was in the best interest of society to reinstate funding of PSHE for incarcerated individuals. Studies generally supported the effectiveness of PSHE to increase chances of employability upon release (Esperian, 2010; Page, 2004; Steurer & Smith, 2001), reduce

crime, recidivism, and increase chances of desistance from crime (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Chappell, 2004; Esperian, 2010; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998; Wheeldon, 2010).

Karpowitz and Kenner (1995) claimed that PSHE was the most successful and cost-effective preventive method to deter crime. While research provided invaluable evidence that supported PSHE as a prominent intervention, there had to be a consensus amongst the masses for major policy change. Without an education, it was nearly impossible for incarcerated individuals to make significant lifestyle changes and obtain suitable employment upon release (Esperian, 2010; Page, 2004; Steurer & Smith, 2001).

Support and advocacy for reinstatement of Pell grants for incarcerated individuals called for a collective movement by those negatively impacted by laws that denied the neediest in the U.S. of the right to an education. However, that could only be made possible on common ground. There existed a dire need to form a coalition to address the needs for education of this marginalized and oppressed group which called for a challenge of conventions that regulate the application of principles in policy. Such coalition could question the legitimacy of the customary practices (Balkin & Siegel, 2006).

Advocacy Coalition Framework called for a collective alignment to policy core belief systems of the coalition players (Stachowiak, 2009). Coalition players had the authority to positively impact enhancement of policy understanding, policy formation, coalition building, and prediction of future policy changes (The Regents of the University of Colorado, 2012). Stachowiak (2009) suggested that Advocacy Coalition Theory was best applicable whenever there existed a sympathetic administration in office. President

Obama shared the belief that it was the government's financial and moral obligation to ensure that all Americans had access to higher education opportunities. Cuomo also proved to be a staunch supporter of funding college education for prisoners with taxpayer dollars. This appeared to be the perfect time to do the "greatest good for those with the greatest need - incarcerated individuals."

Kübler (2001) wheedled that problems needed to be overcome through collective action for coalition cohesiveness and mobilization to occur. Kübler (2001) stated that "individuals are embedded within social networks, group settings, and more or less formal social organizations, all of which are likely to influence decisions to engage in a social movement" (p. 267). It would have been in the best interest of society at-large that a coalition was formed that advocated for reinstatement of Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals.

Theoretical Frameworks of Study

Since there was no single theory found in the literature review that could comprehensively explain why lifestyle changes, recidivism, and desistance occurred, this study provided an overview of the various theories used in previous studies to explain the phenomena. This study embraced a multi-theoretical perspective that helped explain factors involved in lifestyle changes that impacted the participants' employability, recidivism, and their ability to desist from crime.

Maturational theory overview. Maturational Theory was founded by Dr. Arnold Gesell dating back to the 20th century. The main premise of Maturational Theory established that all children went through a sequence of stages that were similar and predictable; however, every child experienced those sequences at his/her own pace.

Therefore, every child's stage of development was different from his chronological age. Some researchers believed that individuals' changes in criminal behavior or their engagement in the desistance process happened by default as individuals matured. They suggested that individuals matured out of criminal involvement, therefore, they desisted from crime (Collins, 2004; Glueck & Glueck, 1974; Maruna, 1997; Matza, 1964).

Structural-functional theory overview. The basic tenant of this theory suggested that society was a complex but interconnected system where each part was supposed to work as a functional whole. The human body was used as a metaphor to help explain it and provided this researcher with a visual representation of the theory. The theory posited that institutions including governments, schools, families, and individuals were interconnected systems that had to work together to function as a society (Laub, Samson & Nagin, 1998; Samson & Laub, 1993; Visher & Travis, 2003; Warr, 1998; Weaver, 2013). Since all systems were interconnected, the structures influenced individual behavior and vice versa. Some of the research discussed in Chapter 2 of this study stood on those premises as a basis to help explain the phenomena.

Cognitive development theory overview. Jean Piaget was identified as the founder of cognitive development theory during the 20th century (www.piaget.org, 2015). Piaget's main focus was children; he believed that their development and behaviors were a byproduct of consistent and reliable patterns of interactions between individuals and their environments through the use of mental schemas. He believed that schemas were goal-oriented tactics that individuals used to explore and gain insights about their environments. A child's cognitive development was categorized into four stages: from birth to 2 years old, the sensorimotor stage; from 2 to 7 years old, the pre-operational

stage; from ages 7 to 11, the concrete operational stage; and from ages 11 to 15, the formal operational stage (www.learningandteaching.info, 2015). The basic premise was that individuals learned through the process of adaptation to their environment and that adaptation occurred through the use of two specific mental schemas—assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation was defined as the process where an individual took material into the mind from the environment and changed the evidence of the senses to make it fit (www.learningandteaching.info, 2015). Accommodation was defined as the difference made to one's mind or concepts by the process of assimilation (www.learningandteaching.info, 2015). Since thought patterns, beliefs, and attitudes were identified as determinants of behavior, this theoretical frame was used in some of the research reviewed in Chapter 2 of this study to explore study participants' opinions and interpretations of their circumstances to help explain desistance.

Human agency theory overview. This theory upheld the belief in the individual's capacity to act independently regardless of structural influences. The main focus of this theory held that the individual was an agent that had the capacity to make choices and thus change behavior. The researcher in this study found several researchers that used this theory to help explain the role that human agency played in recidivism and the capacity of individuals to desist from crime. This research considered the potential role that human agency played in the choices and constructive lifestyle changes made by the study participants that led to their employability and desistance from crime.

Theoretical Rationale for Policy Change

Most Americans learn something about the policy process in high school civics class: an idea becomes a bill, elected officials vote on it, and - if it

all goes well - the bill gets enacted into law. However, knowing the specific steps for ideas to become laws does not tell us much about how to promote policy change successfully or why certain policies move forward and others do not. That is where theories come into play. Theories can help unlock the inner workings of the policymaking process to explain how and why a change may or may not occur. (Stachowiak, 2009, p. 2)

This conceptual analysis explored three perspectives of Policy Change Theory as a three-prong framework to better understand how theory impacted coalition-building, policy development, implementation, and policy change. This exploration focused on the global theory called Advocacy Coalition Framework (also known as Coalition Theory), and analyzed two micro-theories, Prospect Theory and Power Elites Theory, as potential strategies that help influence policy change. In addition, the three-prong theoretical framework enhanced the researcher's understanding of how Policy Change Theory had a direct impact on the decision-making processes of individuals involved in policy formation. Policy Change Theory also enhanced an understanding of how policies inadvertently and negatively affected the recidivism and desistance phenomena in NYS. These theories helped explore the potential impact of policies that impeded funding for PSHE of incarcerated individuals. This study commenced with an analysis based on the works of its founder followed by a practical description from professionals who used Advocacy Coalition Framework in their line of work.

Advocacy coalition framework. Sabatier (2007) indicated that Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) was developed to deal with problems within the policy process involving goal conflicts, technical disputes, and multiple actors from various

levels of government. ACF resulted from Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's experience with the policy process' implementation literature and interest in understanding how technical information played a role in the process (Sabatier, 2007). Since its inception in 1998, ACF was revised and expanded beyond its initial focus on U.S. energy and environmental policy to include a broader scope of investigators, political systems, and policy domains (Sabatier, 2007). Sabatier (2007) indicated that ACF's initial focus on American policy literature led to questions about its pluralistic assumptions by European and Canadian factions. However, this analysis focused on the 1999 abbreviated version which synthesized most of the research conducted since its inception (Sabatier, 2007). The version revolved around twenty-eight studies conducted throughout various geographical areas and entailed research applied to economic and social issues (Sabatier, 2007). The topic of this study fell within the scope of that framework.

Most ACF proponents agreed that policy-making in the U.S. was so complex that participants had to be specialists within subsystems in order to strategically influence policy changes (Sabatier, 2007). Sabatier (2007) upheld the assumption that ACF participants had strong core beliefs and they were motivated to translate those beliefs into actual policy. Also, Sabatier (2007) concluded that scientific and technical information played an important role in the modification of those core beliefs so researchers were deemed central players in the policy process. ACF had well established fundamentals.

Sabatier (2007) stated that Advocacy Coalition Framework upholds three key foundations beginning with (1) a macro-level assumption that most policy making occurs among specialists within a policy subsystem but that their behavior is affected by factors in the broader political and socio-

economic system; (2) a micro-level “model of the individual” that is drawn heavily from social psychology; and (3) a meso-level conviction that the best way to deal with the multiplicity of actors in a subsystem is to aggregate them into “advocacy coalitions” (p. 191).

It was inferred that in the U.S. policy subsystems were constantly at work, over decades, building coalitions to effect policy change that aligned with individuals’ core beliefs (Sabatier, 2007). Such subsystems were considered mature. However, subsystems that were not in existence over 10 years were considered young and lacked having stakeholders who possessed the skills to build coalitions that helped effect favorable policy change (Sabatier, 2007). ACF held that identifying the appropriate scope of a subsystem and the length of its existence were very important (Sabatier, 2007). Sabatier (2007) suggested that a focus on the substantive and geographic scope of a subsystem was fundamental for specialists, researchers included, within the subsystem to carry out negotiations to effect policy change. Sabatier (2007) proposed that normative core beliefs of individuals within a subsystem had to be empirically determined and that those types of beliefs did not impede the possibility of altruistic behaviors.

Sabatier (2007) emphasized that policymaking occurred mainly within policy subsystems and required compromises of beliefs among specialists. However, the behaviors of individuals within those subsystems were determined by external factors that were either stable or dynamic (Sabatier, 2007). Sabatier (2007) stated that “relatively stable parameters include basic attributes of the problem, the basic distribution of natural resources, fundamental sociocultural values and structure, and basic constitutional structure” (p. 193). These exogenous factors remained relatively stable for

over a decade so they rarely provided an incentive for policy and behavior change in subsystems (Sabatier, 2007). Conversely, socioeconomic conditions, changes in governing coalition, and policy decisions from opponents provided impetus for changes in behavior of subsystem participants and major policy (Sabatier, 2007). Therefore, ACF asserted that changes in dynamic factors were necessary precursors to major policy changes (Sabatier, 2007).

ACF assumed that deep core beliefs involved ontological expectations about fundamental values that were products of childhood socialization, therefore, they were difficult to change (Sabatier, 2007). Also, Sabatier (2007) described policy core beliefs as applications of deep core beliefs, thus, difficult to change. However, policy core policy preferences were beliefs that helped policy subsystems influence coalition cohesiveness and strategic behaviors (Sabatier, 2007). Furthermore, these beliefs were essential as they helped unite allies and divided opponents (Sabatier, 2007). Sabatier (2007) stated that “policy core policy preferences might be the stickiest glue that binds coalitions together” (p. 195). At the final level, Sabatier (2007) expressed that secondary beliefs were narrower in scope and dealt with the seriousness and causes of problems in specific geographic areas. Therefore, they were easier to change. Other ACF proponents shared similar claims to that of its founders and further demonstrated the framework’s popularity and reliability across systems (Kübler, 2001).

Scholars proclaimed that ACF was based on five foundational premises which included: (a) that scientific and technical information played a significant role in the policy process, (b) that a ten year time period was necessary to understand policy change, (c) that the policy subsystem was the primary unit of analysis, (d) that the subsystem was

inclusive of all policy players, and (e) that policies and programs were translations of core belief systems of the players (The Regents of the University of Colorado, 2012).

The Regents of the University of Colorado (2012) posited that ACF's central idea identified policies as translations of core belief systems. They reiterated that changing the core belief systems of policy players was key to gaining a better understanding of policy by analyzing policy development, forming coalitions, and anticipating future changes in policy (The Regents of the University of Colorado, 2012).

It was identified that policy change was influenced by various events. Tough-on-crime approaches were counterproductive (Page, 2004). Although penalties for crimes became harsher, recidivism and re-incarceration in NYS were identified as a problem that required action (DCJS, 2011). The Regents of the University of Colorado (2012) proposed that policy change occurred as a direct result of environmental conditions, indirect learning purposes, internal reality shocks or agreements entered by policy players. However, the most significant idea postulated by Advocacy Coalition Framework was that deep core beliefs were fundamental to individuals because they were embedded during the childhood socialization processes. Therefore, strategic alignment to the deep core beliefs and policy core policy preferences of coalition players can positively impact enhancement of policy understanding, policy formation, coalition building, maintenance of coalitions, and predicting future policy changes (The Regents of the University of Colorado, 2012).

Stachowiak (2009) posited that policy change occurred when individuals were coordinated based on shared core policy beliefs as a result of external stimuli. She suggested that Advocacy Coalition Framework was best applicable whenever there

existed a sympathetic administration in office (Stachowiak, 2009). As a case in point, President Obama shared his belief that it was the government's financial and moral obligation to ensure that all Americans have access to higher education opportunities. Incarcerated individuals were part of marginalized populations in America, thus, they were also included in President Obama's proclamation. The Obama administration was sympathetic to the need to educate incarcerated individuals. Therefore, it would be in the best interest of proponents of PSHE to form coalitions with individuals that share the same policy core policy preferences that everyone deserves access to higher education during the incumbency of the current administration. Moreover, Stachowiak (2009) theorized that Advocacy Coalition Framework called for coordination between individuals who shared core beliefs about existing policies, current societal ills, and the coalition's potential to effect policy changes that help solve existing problems. In retrospect, the theory suggested that the core belief about policy was what maintained the coalition's cohesiveness and helped motivate towards change.

ACF provided the basis by which to focus on actors that may, or may not have, directly affected policies. It supported the perspective that all parties involved in policy areas - no matter their socio-economic status, nor their political affiliations, helped influence and effect policy changes. There were researchers who concurred with that perspective. Ike (2009) proposed that any advocacy group that shared similar belief systems could potentially effect policy changes, irrespective of their individual status in society. Moreover, Ike's (2009) study further explored Sabatier's argument about shared belief systems and suggested that Sabatier's proposition was enmeshed with religious beliefs shared by most individuals within coalitions in our society. Doing unto others—

incarcerated individuals—as we wanted done unto us seemed like the moral thing to do. Esperian’s (2010) recommendations upheld that principle.

Ike (2009) implied that policy development and implementation were endemic in our society and the processes were commonly engrossed with such complexity that necessitated the role of models like ACF to help understand changes in the policy process. This model helped provide conceptual simplicity as to how shared beliefs between individuals helped build coalition and effect policy change. In the case of the elimination of Pell for incarcerated individuals, coalitions in support of funding incarcerated individuals’ college education can advocate for its reinstatement.

There exists a dire need for policy changes that benefit incarcerated individuals, correctional staff, families, the communities where incarcerated individuals return, and the society at-large. Ike (2009) projected that sometimes ACF was used to compare and predict outcomes and to create a conceptual focus within coalitions. In part, that required focusing on religious beliefs that helped build consensus and coalition cohesiveness. But it also included raising awareness about policy implications on clients, institutions, and interests groups (Ike, 2009). In this case, the focus revolved on challenging a law that was detrimental, on so many levels, to our society’s ability to overcome its ills concerning a serious problem related to crime, recidivism and mass incarceration - that negatively affected all. In spite of this phenomenon, there still existed a dichotomy between opposing groups. There existed the one that attempted to uphold its self-interests irrespective of the greater good for all, and the other, which understood the importance of reinstating funding of college education for incarcerated individuals. Ike

(2009) referred to this contest as the struggle between the smaller coalition and that of the dominant coalition.

The ACF tenets helped individuals within coalitions better understand and acknowledge that there were counter-groups that attempted to do everything in their power to impede progressive change within the political process (Ike, 2009). It was deemed important for coalitions to understand the views of its policy opponents. For instance, the historical accounts surrounding the elimination of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals was often attributed to the success of a dominant coalition who shared strong beliefs in retribution versus rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals (Gehring, 1997; Page, 2004; Ubah, 2004). Having framed that within the context of high crime and recidivism rates that were used to justify the need for retribution, thus, influenced the elimination of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals.

Ike (2009) propositioned that ACF was used to study conflicts between the small coalitions and dominant coalitions to illustrate how they generated learning and change. Case in point, ACF was utilized to raise awareness regarding the need to build coalitions which critically reflected on the need to advocate for reinstatement of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals to address societal ills while being cognizant of oppositional agendas. A clear understanding about the political power struggles between interest groups positively impacted consensus, coalition building, and policy change (Ike, 2009). Ike (2009) also expressed that “ACF tenets help understand interests groups and coalition activities” (p. 10).

Conversely, the coalition’s ability to effect change was negatively impacted by the core beliefs of opponents who contested PSHE for incarcerated individuals. To

counter that type of opposition, ACF suggested the use of strategies that include persuading stakeholders on the same wavelength to implement policy changes (The Regents of the University of Colorado, 2012). Also, ACF rested on replacing those of oppositional core beliefs with individuals in agreement with either newly implemented policies or those that have been targeted for change. ACF recommended the use of research as well as information technology and exchange to help sway public opinion and influence perceptions towards the need for change (Stachowiak, 2009). Stachowiak (2009) recommended that coalitions engage in comprehensive approaches toward policy changes. More specifically, coalition-building and social movement was identified as a requirement to change public opinion and help reinstate Pell funding for incarcerated individuals. Two conceptual strategies were also recognized as important to help accomplish that goal.

Prospect theory as a strategy to effect policy changes. Stachowiak (2009) postulated that Prospect Theory was a strategy that encompassed presentation and framework of options as a way to influence individuals' willingness to accept proposed policy changes. Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman developed Prospect Theory in 1979 (Stachowiak, 2009). The strategy entailed redefining the coalition's movement as part of society's endeavor to achieve greater good. That good included the cost-benefits argument of PSHE. The central idea of Prospect Theory was to raise awareness by reframing the statement of the problem, thus, gaining collective buy-in for policy changes (Stachowiak, 2009). Case in point, providing college-level education for incarcerated individuals did not lead to increased recidivism rates - the elimination of Pell funding for this marginalized group did (Pew Center on the States, 2011). Stachowiak (2009)

presupposed that people preferred concrete options versus ambiguous ones despite the possibility of less beneficial personal outcomes. Additionally, she presumed that individuals presented with concrete options did not complicate their decision-making by resting on past choices and ways of thinking, but rather they accepted options that were tangible (Stachowiak, 2009).

Implementation and effectiveness of this strategy lie within a coalition's ability to frame or reframe its message to the intended audiences. In essence, if the problems were presented in ways that were concrete, the individuals who shared the same core beliefs were much more likely to join the coalition's movement to effect favorable policy changes (Stachowiak, 2009). Stachowiak (2009) postulated that Prospect Theory was not a stand-alone theory, but rather was one that should be imbedded in a more global theory. Case in point, one considers this strategy and the Power Elites Theory as complementary strategies of Advocacy Coalition Theory.

Power elites theory as strategy to effect policy change. Power elites theory was also a strategy-based theory built on the premise that the power for policy change rested in the hands of elites. It was also known as Power Politics and Political Elites Theory. Power Elites Theory was developed by C. Wright Mills and G. William Domhoff (Stachowiak, 2009). Stachowiak (2009) expounded on three possible ways to effect policy change through (1) direct participation in actual decision making, (2) indirect influence on decision makers, and (3) implicit power that was based on anticipated reactions of individuals or groups on decisions previously made. There was a general belief that coalitions affected policy change by gaining influence with those in positions

of political power via indirect influence. Stachowiak (2009) referred to indirect influence as having the ability to exercise power over elite policy makers.

Effective implementation of this theory required development of relationships with those who had direct or indirect influence over policy decision-making in specific areas of interest to the coalition's movement. Stachowiak (2009) suggested that the focus of this strategy was geared toward the few elites or influentials that had the actual power for change within those specific areas. This approach encompassed strategic targeting of those in power as allies for the advancement of the coalition's political agenda.

Consequently, this led to shifts in social norms, a strengthened base of support, and changes in policy that culminated in a positive impact on the society at-large

(Stachowiak, 2009). The current study and the aforementioned theoretical frameworks led to an enhanced understanding of the Draconian-like laws passed and the problems associated with incarcerated individuals' inability to access funding for PSHE.

Ironically, there were cases where tough-on-crime laws were used to ensure that incarcerated individuals served the maximum penalty for crimes and to deny these human beings the fundamental right to an education - which was perhaps the key to opening up hearts and minds that were driven towards making constructive lifestyle changes instead of continued involvement in a life of crime.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore post-secondary higher education and its implications on employability of formerly incarcerated individuals and their constructive lifestyle changes upon release. A thorough review of various theoretical frames previously used by prior researchers who studied crime and desistance was conducted. It

utilized aspects from those theoretical perspectives as a framework to enhance understanding of the phenomena being studied. The exploration took on the form of an eclectic approach to help expand the readers' experience. The study also explored some of the conceptual underpinnings intertwined in policy theory. The concepts helped increase awareness of how policies are developed and how subsystem participants can employ strategies that effect policy changes. The study sought to enable its readers to embrace the need for coalition building and to utilize effective strategies that effect necessary policy changes.

Research Questions

The following questions warranted further exploration:

1. What effects did post-secondary higher education have on constructive lifestyle changes for individuals in NYS who obtained a college degree while incarcerated?
2. How study participants described their experience in having obtained an associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degree(s) while in prison?
3. What differences existed, if any, between formerly incarcerated individuals who obtained an associate's, bachelor and/or master's degree while incarcerated, and whether or not their educational level predisposed them to obtaining a career versus a job?

Potential Significance of the Study

This study can add to the existing body of research that supports post-secondary higher education and its potential effects on constructive lifestyle changes and desistance from crime. It can positively affect individuals, families, communities, institutions, and

the society at-large. This study may serve as a cornerstone for researchers involved in advocacy research and the policy change process. It can help researchers and policy advocates identify political and historical trends that negatively impact individuals, families, communities, institutions, policy, and overall societal health. Also, this study can provide administrators in penal institutional settings an evidence-based perspective about potential college programming outcomes and help them make informed decisions about the correctional programs that they implement within their institutions. Moreover, it can provide human services personnel in institutional settings with potential interventions to add to their repertoire of social work tools. Additionally, this study can provide the basis by which advocacy coalitions develop and mobilize to effect major policy change for funding college education for incarcerated individuals.

Definition of Terms

Advocacy/participatory worldview, this worldview held that research inquiry had to be intertwined with politics and a political agenda. Creswell (2009) emphasized that a research designed from an advocacy participatory perspective should contain an action agenda for reform that causes changes in policy and the lives of participants.

Constructive lifestyle changes, deliberate changes in one's lifestyle that helped change situations, led to more fulfilling self-regard, self-love, positive attitudes, and adapted behaviors that aligned with societal norms and mores.

Deep core beliefs, defined by Sabatier (2007) as general normative and ontological assumptions about human nature and fundamental values (e.g., liberty, equality, priority welfare of different groups, proper role of government versus markets, and who should participate in governmental decision-making); deep core beliefs were at

the broadest level and they span most policy subsystems where left/right scales operated (p. 194).

Desistance, for purposes of this study, the term was used to define the phenomenon by which criminal offenders abstained and eventually ceased from committing crimes. This study referred to desistance as a process and period of one to five years post-parole supervision or maximum sentence served that led to abstinence and eventual cessation of criminal behavior.

Desisters, this term was used to describe formerly incarcerated individuals who engaged in the process of desistance from crime and have not recidivated.

Lifestyle changes, a process that takes time and requires support; this process can be sparked by the individual, family, friends, and the individual's involvement in education.

Policy core beliefs, Sabatier (2007) professed that these were applications of deep core beliefs that spanned an entire policy subsystem. These were defined by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) as multiple components of policy core beliefs, as (1) the priority of different policy-related values, (2) the relative authority of governments and markets, (3) the proper roles of the general public, elected officials, civil servants, and experts, (4) the relative seriousness and causes of policy problems in the subsystem as a whole.

Policy core policy preferences, Sabatier (2007) emphasized that these were divergent preferences regarding one or more subsystem-wide policy proposals. These "were (1) subsystem-wide in scope, (2) were highly salient, and (3) were a major source of cleavage for some time" (Sabatier, 2007, p. 195).

PSHE, for purposes of this study this was used as an acronym for post-secondary higher education.

Recidivism, for purposes of this study, this concept was used to refer to an individuals' relapse into criminal behavior that led to re-arrest, conviction, plea-bargain, and sentencing for new crimes within a specified amount of time post-release; most of the literature used in this study considered individuals to have recidivated if they returned to prison within one to five years post-release whether released on parole supervision, conditional release or completion of maximum sentence. This study measured recidivism within the one to five-year range post-release.

Chapter Summary

Clinton (1995) made a connection between the elimination of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals and increasing rates of recidivism in NYS. While startling statistics about the phenomena published in 2002 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics further increased our concerns, the reality propelled us to explore potential solutions to this soaring problem. In recent past, PSHE had been identified as an effective intervention to address elevated crime and recidivism rates and improve overall community outcomes (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Chappell, 2004; Clinton, 1995; Esperian, 2010; Jancic, 1998; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998). Therefore, this investigator embarked on a thorough review of the literature surrounding the effects of PSHE on the chances for employability of formerly incarcerated individuals and their constructive lifestyle changes.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Notably in NYS, the elimination of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals had undesirable consequences that had to be dealt with in order to restore order and help curtail crime (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Chappell, 2004; Esperian, 2010; Jensen & Reed, 2006). The increase in recidivism rate was a major problem that seeped into other areas of society and negatively impacted the economy, amongst other damages that it caused (Stevens & Ward, 1997). This chapter focused on an analysis of the relevant research conducted on the effects of post-secondary higher education on employability and constructive lifestyle changes. This research entertained the possibility that PSHE served as the catalyst for those lifestyle changes. Furthermore, those changes were determinant factors that helped increase chances of employability and desistance from crime for former offenders. This positively impacted current recidivism rates.

Review of the Literature

Karpowitz & Kenner (1995) supported the reinstatement of Pell grants for incarcerated individuals. They claimed that PSHE was cost-effective in helping decrease recidivism and re-incarceration rates (Chappell, 2004; Esperian, 2010; Jancic, 1998; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998) and preventing crimes (Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995). Notably, Wheeldon (2011) understood and deemed fit the need to facilitate rehabilitation through PSHE. He based this argument on the universal understanding that incarcerated

individuals had poor literacy and limited skills to succeed in prison and out in a competitive society (Wheeldon, 2011). Therefore, there exists a need to attend to these debilitating limitations. Perhaps we can address them through the use of a research-based effective intervention such as PSHE. If so, we need to either consider reinstatement of Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals or implement other funding options. Although he understood the effectiveness of PSHE, Wheeldon (2011) emphasized the need to recommend future research on its benefits in correctional settings to focus on cost savings, crime prevention and community safety as means to gain support from stakeholders. Proponents of Prospect Theory supported that strategy (Stachowiak, 2009). This study considered some of Wheeldon's recommendations.

Although researchers generally supported PSHE's effectiveness, some had concerns with specific research designs and data collection methods (Lewis, 2006; Wheeldon, 2011). The arguments generated against Pell funding for incarcerated individuals and support for its abolition were based on critiques of certain research designs and deficient interpretations of findings without consideration that PSHE proved to be effective in addressing hosts of problems (Ubah, 2004). Case in point, Lewis (2006) labeled traditional studies that used quasi-experimental designs to study correctional education and recidivism as the sole outcome variable, as inconclusive. He criticized the use of macro-level variables, in this case recidivism, and concluded that traditional models failed to include other plausible variables, thus, research designs were ineffective (Lewis, 2006). However, he was only criticizing an aspect of the design's limitation, not PSHE's effectiveness. While Wheeldon (2011) also communicated some concerns with research designs, data collection, and communication of deliverables, he

did not discount PSHE's effectiveness. He proposed that incarcerated individuals who took advantage of PSHE obtained employment at higher rates upon release, paid taxes, and positively contributed to their community - as opposed to those who returned to a life of crime for lack of education and poor skill-sets (Wheeldon, 2010). Anders & Noblit (2011) also recognized the need to broaden the scope of research by including other variables that potentially contributed to the North Carolina Youth Offender Program's (YOP) effectiveness.

Furthermore, Anders & Noblit (2011) took a more comprehensive approach and identified the need for analyses of other correctional programs to further expand the understanding of PSHE's effectiveness across states. They found that there were low recidivism rates amongst youth who participated in the YOP versus non-participants (Anders & Noblit, 2011). Despite claims by Lewis (2006) that discredited a specific research design, PSHE proved to be an effective intervention to reduce recidivism. Wheeldon (2010) also found that PSHE was more effective than vocational and adult basic education in reducing recidivism. He did, however, recommend the use of mixed methods designs to gain a better understanding about rich data collection and a focus on communicating research results (2010).

Chappell's (2004) study reported a statistically significant correlation between PSHE and reduced recidivism rates. The latter study's quantitative meta-analysis approach made it more appealing since it encompassed incorporating plausible variables that influenced outcomes but supported PSHE's effectiveness. Chappell (2004) proposed a 40% decrease in recidivism for individuals involved in PSHE programs. Fuentes, Rael,

& Duncan (2010), and Jancic (1998) also supported PSHE's effectiveness in helping lower recidivism rates.

The effectiveness of PSHE for incarcerated individuals and the formerly incarcerated continued to be measured against recidivism rates. Anders & Noblit's (2011) mixed methods design focused on a multi-year program evaluation and explored the effectiveness of the YOP in NC prisons. This study also confirmed a positive correlation between educational programming and effective outcomes, including a decrease in recidivism rate for YOP participants. The outcome of YOP was relevant to this project and future studies (Anders & Noblit, 2011) - it reinforced the need for reinstatement of Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals. Its methodology can be replicated in a potential program analysis and study of PSHE and desistance from crime. However, the time needed to conduct a multi-year evaluation can be a negative factor for investigators with time constraints.

Most of the literature on this topic consisted of individual research studies, but Chappell's (2004) was a meta-analysis of all the studies that met the criteria for inclusion in the design. Chappell (2004) suggested that this method, contrary to other research designs, utilized a quantitative meta-analysis approach and confirmed the correlation between PSHE and a decrease in recidivism. Chappell's (2004) study included an analysis of ten years of existing empirical research on PSHE and recidivism. One of the major concerns in her study revolved around the operational definition of recidivism. Chappell (2004) understood the need for a universal definition for recidivism. Chappell's (2004) meta-analysis supported the proposition that the availability of traditional PSHE was associated with lower rates of recidivism; she proposed distance-learning PSHE as a

more cost-effective alternative. She hoped the alternative would interest those in opposition to funding PSHE for incarcerated individuals with taxpayer dollars (Chappell, 2004). This strategy could potentially help pave the way for funding college education for those confined to prison and set the tone for restoration of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals (Taylor, 2005; Ubah, 2004). Ultimately, this alternative and cost-effective intervention could help educate prisoners, contribute to their lifestyle changes and rehabilitation, and potentially help reduce recidivism.

The focus in this literature review has been on college-level education; however, there is research on other correctional programming. Esperian's (2010) study offered strong support for Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses to prepare students for the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) exam as well as college level education. Esperian (2010) reported that these educational services were related to decreases in recidivism and re-incarceration rates. Esperian (2010) also provided a historical background about common attitudes towards prisoners and whether rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals was warranted, or whether incarceration should be considered society's retribution for crimes. Chappell (2004) attempted both to persuade groups who thought retribution was necessary and to sway attitudes towards the rehabilitative purpose of incarceration by proposing distance-learning PSHE.

Esperian (2010) argued that his research supported the argument that educating incarcerated individuals reduced recidivism and eliminated the costs associated with long term warehousing. Moreover, Clinton's (1995) review of the tough-on-crime law set forth a historical background regarding attitudes that negatively impacted rehabilitative programs for prisoners. Studies have illustrated the framework of the politics behind the

elimination of Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals (Clinton, 1995; Esperian, 2010; Ubah, 2004; Werner, 1997). Clinton's (1995) work supported the proposition that a focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment yielded positive outcomes because it contributed to lower recidivism and re-incarceration rates. Esperian (2010) also argued that a broader focus on rehabilitation would have a positive effect on communities and society at-large.

Furthermore, Jensen & Reed (2006) conducted a thematic meta-analysis of the empirical research on adult educational programs from mid-1990s till present. They used the University of Maryland Scale for Scientific Rigor as a tool to rate studies. The evaluators tested program effectiveness. The study strongly supported the proposition that participants in Adult Basic Education, General Equivalency Diploma, PSHE, and vocational programs were less likely to recidivate. In an Executive Summary that encapsulated the Three-State Recidivism Study, Steurer & Smith (2001) suggested that post-secondary higher education had a significant impact on decreasing re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration rates of formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in correctional education programs in the States of Ohio, Minnesota, and Maryland. There existed within the scope of the study of recidivism the general belief that correctional education reduced recidivism and increased chances of employability (Fuentes, Gael & Duncan, 2010; Steurer, Smith, & Tracy, 2001; Wheeldon, 2011).

Steurer (2001) stated that rather than accepting the old adage of locking them up and "throwing away the key," we must consider research findings that show many prisoners can be rehabilitated, through education and

training, and eventually contribute constructively to society upon reentry (p. 1).

In 2002 the Bureau of Justice Statistics' special report noted that arrest records provided inaccurate measures of crime, because research suggested that offenders committed more crimes than arrest records indicated (Langan & Levin, 2002). However, Langan & Levin (2002) conducted a statistical analysis of 15 states' recidivism rates in 1994 and found that out of the 67.5% of incarcerated individuals released, 183,675 of them were rearrested within 3 years and charged with committing 744,480 new crimes. Findings from a Justice Department study of 15 states also revealed that individuals released from prison had been charged with the following crimes within a three year time span: 2,900 homicides; 2,400 kidnappings; 2,400 rapes; 3,200 other sexual assaults; 21,200 robberies; 54,600 assaults; 13,000 other violent crimes; and over 200,000 car thefts, burglaries, and drugs and weapons offenses (as cited by McKean & Ransford, 2004). These statistics were alarming and created a sense of urgency for those engaged in remedying the problems associated with recidivism.

Considering the soaring increase in recidivism, there was an expectation that prison administrators incorporate programs that contributed to transforming incarcerated individuals into law-abiding citizens (McKean & Ransford, 2004). In a study conducted by members of the Center for Impact Research, McKean & Ransford (2004) proposed that education is amongst the top three correctional programs identified as having a significant impact on recidivism reduction. McKean & Ransford (2004) reported that "education reduced recidivism by 29%" (p. 5). Researchers proposed making educational programs accessible to incarcerated individuals by increasing capacity,

removing barriers to funding, and eradicating restrictions to enrollment (McKean & Ransford, 2004). Some researchers suggested moving beyond existing stigmas against this marginalized population.

Copenhaver (2007) conducted a qualitative study of social stigma against formerly incarcerated students upon release in traditional college settings. She incorporated the use of a sociological framework and semi-structured interviews to explore formerly incarcerated students' experiences and outcomes that resulted from social stigma (Copenhaver, 2007). Copenhaver (2007) found that negative self-concepts, low self-esteem, and depression are associated with stigma. She suggested that stigmatized individuals eventually begin to act in ways that are congruent with the social stigmas (Copenhaver, 2007). The findings may shed some light on some of the recidivism statistics discussed in this study. Moreover, Copenhaver (2007) recommended that successful completion of educational programs was critical for both incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals as it helped reduce recidivism rates. She endorsed educational endeavors and elimination of social stigma against this marginalized group as leading to successful outcomes (Copenhaver, 2007).

Recent studies supported PSHE as an effective intervention to curtail recidivism. Fuentes, Rael & Duncan's (2010) program evaluation tested the effects of PSHE on prisoners. They concluded that PSHE was an effective intervention in tackling recidivism (Fuentes, Rael & Duncan, 2010). Specifically, they concluded that the Hope Bridge Program was successful in addressing recidivism through post-secondary higher education. Hope Bridge Program provided a bridge from correctional services to college career pathways and employment to former offenders; it was a program founded by the

Colorado Division of Criminal Justice with the primary goal of reducing recidivism and college drop-out rates to less than 25 percent (Fuentes, Gael & Duncan, 2010). The study used a mixed methods approach to evaluate the program's effectiveness as recommended in Wheeldon's (2010) study. Also supporting PSHE's effectiveness, Linton's (2010) analysis focused on President Obama's goal of restoring the Nation's status as the country with the highest rate of college achievement. Promoting PSHE for this disenfranchised population was a great way to support our Nation's leader in accomplishing that goal, but most importantly, it appeared to be one cost-effective way to tackle societal ills including recidivism, re-incarceration, and unemployment (Fuentes, Gael, & Duncan, 2010). Fuentes, Gael, & Duncan (2010) also concluded that PSHE was essential to helping former offenders successfully transition into the community.

Linton (2010) claimed that education was identified as the most frequent reentry need amongst incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. In arguing for post-secondary higher education for prisoners, Linton (2010) stated that "94% of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals identified post-secondary education as most important success determinant above jobs, housing, and financial assistance" (p. 97). PSHE seemed quite appealing among some factions in society to address hosts of identified problems. Therefore, reinstatement of Pell funding, or in the interim, the implementation of alternative funding options for PSHE for prisoners was necessary (Taylor, 2005).

Karpowitz and Kenner (1995) claimed that PSHE was the most successful and cost-effective preventive method to deter crime. This comprehensive evaluation highlighted the overwhelming support among public officials for Federal aid for

incarcerated students due to its preventative effect on crime (Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995). Karpowitz & Kenner's (1995) persuasive argument in support of reinstatement of Pell grants for prisoners emphasized that resuming support for this intervention would help decrease recidivism rates and save the states monies. Unfortunately, to get everyone's attention, build coalitions that share similar core policy beliefs, and influence policy that was conducive to our society, the problem must be reframed and articulated with a specific focus on costs savings, crime prevention, and community safety. Thus, leading to a collective bargain that can benefit us all, instead of focusing on whether or not prison is for the purpose of retribution or rehabilitation.

Although the studies reviewed in this section varied in methodology, study design, selection of variables, dates conducted, and strategies, there appears to be a general consensus about the effects of PSHE on recidivism, employability, and overall benefits. Some went as far as making realistic recommendations for future strategies in an attempt to gain support for reinstatement of Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals (Chappell, 2004; Taylor, 2005; Werner, 1997). Moreover, Wheeldon (2011) recommended more rigorous approaches to research, more comprehensive approaches to data collection, and politically aware presentation of deliverables to stakeholders beginning with the utilization of mixed methods studies. It appears that persuading the masses into believing in the transformative power of PSHE on incarcerated individuals needs to go beyond gaining support for reinstatement of Pell funding; it would require the utilization of comprehensive and strategic approaches to research including presentation of study outcomes, and development of political strategies and

implementation. In support of PSHE as an effective intervention, Chappell (2004) found a statistically significant correlation between PSHE and lower recidivism rates.

This led to the question: If it worked, why not use it? However, before determining which interventions worked best, we must make sure that we continue conducting research with as much scientific merit as possible. We had to be open to integrating theories to help us better understand the potential effects of PSHE. A more comprehensive approach to research was necessary. There existed the need to further explore the phenomena behind PSHE and its implication on employability of formerly incarcerated individuals, their constructive lifestyle changes, recidivism, and desistance from crime. In the interim, some individuals who understood the need to advocate for reinstatement of Pell for prisoners worked diligently together by tapping into other funding sources to provide this marginalized population with their inherent right to an education.

Taylor (2005) suggested that “until a more stable, nationally accessible renewable funding source is established, such as the restoration of Pell grant eligibility, alternative and patch-work funding methods will be necessary to resurrect post-secondary correctional education options” (p. 226). One potential course of action to help remedy the problem would be to utilize Policy Change Theories, both as theoretical frameworks to help influence favorable decision-making power by elites, and as strategies to help influence policy changes that are beneficial to everyone in the society at-large—including disenfranchised incarcerated populations. Therefore, we should consider all aforementioned studies and their conclusions. Before making decisions on whether or not we stand for retribution for crime, we must make sure to weigh the evidence. Some

of the studies reviewed strongly urged the promotion of laws that leaned towards rehabilitation of prisoners, versus punishment alone, and they supported alternative funding options for college level education for incarcerated individuals as a way to cut costs of mass incarceration, prevent crimes, and contribute to the safety of our communities.

Up to this point, most of the research focused on PSHE's implications on recidivism rates, re-incarceration, employability, and desistance from crime. Albeit, in this study the literature review also focused on analyzing some of the theoretical frames used in previous studies. This helped gain a better understanding about the phenomena and the importance of using an integrated framework to better understand the findings. Warr (1998) conducted a cross-sectional analysis using life-course transitions for a frame to examine desistance from crime. The researcher found that the marriage transition strongly correlated with a decline in time spent with friends and delinquent peers, an outcome which speaks volumes to the relationship between marriage and desistance (Warr, 1998). The same idea was speculated for other major life-course transitions including PSHE, family, and employment. Warr's (1998) study focused mainly on the life-course transition of marriage. He suggested that the process of desistance relied heavily on a social transformation of the individual whom as a result of marriage to a significant other embarked on ending destructive peer relationships and embracing a more rewarding relationship—good marriage (Warr, 1998). This current study examined a coalescence of other transitions that previous studies found to have influence constructive lifestyle changes that led to desistance from crime especially post-secondary higher education.

While a preponderance of the literature placed the process of desistance within a structural or human agency framework, Weaver (2013) posed the argument for desistance from a relational, cultural, and social context. Weaver (2013) implied that meaningful and significant friendships and intimate relationships triggered the type of reflexivity that led to personal and social transformations of individuals. Those types of relationships influenced the development of new identity and potentially enabled, constrained, or sustained desistance from crime (Weaver, 2013). The researcher suggested that in the same token the relational goods of such social relationships contributed to criminal offending, they could potentially play a significant role in the desistance process (Weaver, 2013).

Hearn's (2010) qualitative study utilized unstructured interviews to explore the implications of age and criminal offending, the how and why the desistance process began, and why individuals continued to desist. Hearn (2010) concluded that investment in strengthening social bonds served as deterrence from criminal offending, and that most offenders changed over the life-course and eventually desisted from crime. The researcher emphasized the government's need to educate the general public about potential interventions that enabled desistance (Hearn, 2010).

Paternoster and Bushway (2009) conducted a study based on how identity formation and human agency play an important role in the lives of individuals and their level of engagement in the process of desistance from crime. The researchers developed a framework and theory of desistance that was based on individuals having multiple selves that included the working/present self and the possible/future self, the latter which consisted of what individuals wished to become and what they feared to become—also

referred to and labeled by these researchers as the crystallization of discontent (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). Paternoster & Bushway (2009) suggested that the crystallization of discontent served as the initial motivating factor that led to identity changes that embraced structural breaks in an individual-level time series of desistance. Thus, they provided a theory that was more cognitive and individualistic in nature as opposed to structural theories which accounted for desistance within the context of social structures. They linked active changes in identity with changes in preferences, social networks that supported the identity changes, and ultimately with active engagement in the desistance process (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009).

Due to time constraints, this current study did not focus on individual-level time series to study desistance from crime. That strategy would have required time-series testing and that was beyond the scope of this study. This study considered Paternoster & Bushway's (2009) recommendation for future inquiry to focus on whether the crystallization of discontent preceded changes in identity, preferences, and social networks. It focused on the survey participants' experiences and shared responses about noticeable changes in their identity, preferences, social networks, and whether these changes took place following perceived failures. Paternoster & Bushway (2009) proposed that crime cessation was more likely to occur if identity change or cognitive transformation came with a specific and realistic strategy (p. 48). This study explored whether participants' employed such strategies that helped change criminal propensity.

Sampson and Laub (2000), on the other hand, provided a frame that solely accounted for desistance in terms of reactions to social structures within which individuals lived. They posited that individuals merely reacted to the events that

occurred in their lives, and thus, did not intentionally choose to desist from crime (Sampson & Laub, 2000). Their perspective held to the notion that desistance occurred by default (Sampson & Laub, 2000), and that perspective was contrary to what most researchers believed. Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph's (2002) long-term follow-up study of adolescent female and male delinquents also countered Sampson & Laub's (2000) findings. They suggested that neither marriage nor job stability were strongly linked to desistance from crime (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph, 2002). Giordano et al. (2002) also countered the belief in desistance by default by emphasizing that structural acquisitions like marriage and employment required active participation. Case in point, desistance required human agency and choice on part of individuals who wanted to engage in constructive lifestyle changes and refrain from living a life of crime.

The current study aligned with cognitive developmental theories and human agency that emphasize choice as important factors in the desistance process, but it also considers how structural events such as good marriages, jobs, and peer groups can help sustain the level of engagement in the process of desistance from crime (Sampson & Laub, 2000). Therefore, it further explored the role that PSHE played in cognitive transformation, human development, social structures and its implications on the desistance process.

Maruna (2004) also supported and expanded the cognitive development perspective by incorporating attributions as cognitive aspects of desistance. Maruna (2004) used data gathered from the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) to explore the role attributions and exploratory styles played in the desistance process. Maruna (2004) stated that *"the goal of LDS research was to understand the psychological mindset that*

seemed to best support efforts to go straight and maintain desistance from crime” (p. 188).

Chapter Summary

In retrospect, a preponderance of the literature supported post-secondary higher education for incarcerated individuals as a means to increase chances of employability and to influence constructive lifestyle changes that led to desistance from crime and impacted recidivism rates (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Chappell, 2004; Clinton, 1995; Esperian, 2010; Fuentes, Gael, & Duncan, 2010; Jancic, 1998; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Linton, 2010; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998). There appeared to be a general concern in the literature regarding the use of traditional quasi-experimental designs and the use of recidivism as a sole outcome variable (Chappell, 2004; Lewis, 2006; Wheeldon, 2011). However, this limitation was controlled for in other study designs, specifically in Anders & Noblit’s (2011) program evaluation which considered multiple plausible variables other than recidivism alone. This study considered their recommendations and followed in the example of sound research. Furthermore, the literature expressed concerns about the operational definition of recidivism and the need for a universal definition (Chappell, 2004). This study used a definition of recidivism that was consistent with the most current studies and it was defined in the definition of terms section of Chapter 1. Moreover, Wheeldon (2011) expressed trepidation with data collection and communication of deliverables by some traditional studies. However, this study attempted to prevent the limitations identified in previous studies, and its qualitative design included research strategies that were aligned with an advocacy/participatory worldview.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design

This study explored the survey research participants' experiences and opinions about the potential effects of post-secondary higher education on their constructive lifestyle changes that helped them abstain from crime. The study also concentrated on some of the questioning and implications of earlier studies on college-level education and its effects on employability of formerly incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, the study sought to discover whether differences existed between men who obtained an associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degree while incarcerated and whether or not college education levels had anything to do with their ability to obtain a profession versus a job. Moreover, this study helped analyze the effectiveness of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program. Finally, it explored the formerly incarcerated student's recommendations. The researcher hoped that the participants' recommendation could help improve Hudson Link's services, and help shape advocacy coalitions to potentially affect national policy change to reinstate Pell funding or provide an alternative option to help invest in post-secondary higher education for prisoners.

This study included a qualitative design that explored the phenomena behind post-secondary higher education and its implications on employability and constructive lifestyle changes among formerly incarcerated individuals. This survey study included a six-step process for content analysis that helped answer the research questions. The processes included: 1) familiarization and organization of data, 2) transferring of the survey data between computer software programs, 3) identification of emergent

preliminary codes, 4) development of emergent themes among codes, 5) exploration of responses to demographic questions, emergent themes and a priori codes of prior research findings and theories, and 6) production of final reports.

This study consisted of a preliminary stage where a survey tool was developed using Qualtrics, was refined, piloted, and the research questions assessed for relevance to the research problem. The questionnaire was then administered through Qualtrics to a randomly selected panel of Hudson Link alumni. The data-gathering stage of this study encompassed surveying the randomly selected sample. Inclusion for this study entailed that all individuals met the specific criteria outlined for this study. The researcher in this study then utilized an integrated approach to content analysis that incorporated the use of a conventional and directed approach to analysis. The analysis was conducted on three separate levels. Firstly, the researcher analyzed the demographic data to help understand the general characteristics of the entire research sample and more importantly to develop a conceptual profile of each participant. Secondly, the researcher content analyzed segments of the data that helped answer the research questions. Additionally, the researcher analyzed segments of the data that served as an analysis of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program.

This exploration was based on an advocacy/participatory worldview that utilized survey research to help gain rich insights that helped explain the phenomena. This worldview supported the need for this research to include an action agenda for reform. Creswell (2009) specified that this worldview required that research inquiry be intertwined with politics and a political agenda that could potentially help change the lives of marginalized populations. This current study sought to follow in that direction

and could potentially help support advocacy coalitions' efforts to reinstate Pell funding for incarcerated individuals, or provide a venue for alternative funding options.

Sample

The sample in this study comprised of the alumni from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program. The research participants were formerly incarcerated men who were students and graduated from the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison college program, completed their associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degree requirements during their incarceration in one of the five NYS correctional facilities participating in the program, and were discharged from parole at least one to five years post-release.

The study sample included a panel of men selected from the Hudson Link alumni. They made up the final survey panel that was compiled in Qualtrics and were selected to participate in completing the survey to be used in this study. A random sampling procedure was used for the selection of survey respondents. The study sample consisted of 10 male survey respondents who were randomly selected from the Hudson Link alumni. The research respondents were all within the set criteria of this study. The sampling procedures were instrumental to this exploration since all of the participants underwent transitions as incarcerated men, students and graduates of the prison-based college program, all were former parolees, they experienced the workforce upon release, and all underwent constructive lifestyle changes. The age, gender, ethnicity, race, religious, and political affiliations of all survey respondents in this study was not considered as determinants to qualify or disqualify them as participants, neither in the preliminary stage which was a tool-development stage, nor at any stage of this study.

History of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison. Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison was founded in 1998 at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. Hudson Link, as it was commonly known, was a non-profit organization that came to fruition as a result of a coalition that developed between incarcerated individuals, religious leaders, and academic volunteers who responded to the elimination Pell and Tap funding for incarcerated individuals. Through private funding and partnerships with educational institutions, religious institutions, and community-based organizations, Hudson Link provide incarcerated students in five correctional facilities in NYS an opportunity to obtain a college education through private funding.

Hudson Link's philosophy was to transform lives through education and help break the cycle of crime and poverty. It was committed to establishing connections between prison administration, educational partners, religious communities, and incarcerated students to address hosts of concerns.

Hudson Link enhanced these relationships through the transformative power of education for the purpose of reducing re-incarceration and crime rates, lesson taxpayer's burden, and to make prisons safer and more manageable. Hudson Link has since its inception partnered with Nyack College, Mercy College, Siena College, SUNY Sullivan Community College, Vassar College, individuals of political influence, and others with religious affiliations to provide incarcerated individuals an opportunity to earn their degrees. Hudson Link's programs expanded its services to incarcerated individuals in Sing Sing Correctional Facility, Sullivan Correctional Facility, Greene Correctional Facility, Fishkill Correctional Facility, and Taconic Correctional Facility.

Setting. The surveys were administered through Qualtrics, an online research software tool. Qualtrics is a private research software company located in Provo, Utah. The company was founded in 2002 by Scott M. Smith, Ryan Smith, Jared Smith, and Stuart Orgill (www.qualtrics.com, 2015). The debriefing session was held during one of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison's alumni meeting, in an adjacent room with the capacity to hold 25 individuals.

Human rights and protections. Once Institutional Review Board approval was received, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the expected duration of their involvement, description of procedures, potential strengths and foreseeable risks of the study, their rights to privacy and confidentiality, and their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to implementation of this study. The participants were notified through the informed consent developed by this investigator at the beginning of the study about potential risks of expressed latent contents and foreseeable risks inherent in survey research. All participants were asked to participate in a debriefing session to address potential psychological harms at the end of this study. As stated previously, the debriefing session would be held after the completion of the study, during one of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison's alumni meeting, in an adjacent room with the capacity to hold 25 individuals.

Appropriate measures were taken to safeguard participants' confidentiality to the degree allowed. The participants were referred to as *R01*, *R02*, and so on for all survey respondents during the course of this study. They all were referred to by the encryptions provided to them to protect their confidentiality. The names of the participants were not

associated with any specific data used throughout this study. The signed informed consent forms were the only documents that contained participants' names; however, they were kept separated from the data to protect participants' confidentiality.

The signed informed consents were kept in a locked file cabinet at the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison office. The data obtained online through Qualtrics was password protected, and the paper documents were kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. The signed informed consents, electronic data, and paper documents were maintained in specified locations at least three years after completion of this study; records were effectively destroyed and no longer accessible to anyone thereafter.

Potential risks of the study. Methods for gathering and analyzing data posed added risk of breach of confidentiality and invasion of privacy (Unerman, 2000). There were other inherent psychological risks in this study. One concern had to do with potential breach of confidentiality, and could have occurred in the event of a break-in at Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison's office, or in researcher's office space where the participants' consent forms were kept.

The other identified risk to the participants could have taken on the form of evasion of privacy during and after completion of the survey. During the piloting phase and when the survey was administered, the participants were inclined to share their thoughts, opinions, feelings that they would have otherwise preferred to maintain private. Additionally, there existed similar risks during the content analysis and reporting phases where the shared thoughts, opinions, feelings, and behaviors of survey participants were reported by this investigator to help answer the research questions.

Moreover, throughout the course of completing the survey, participants may have experienced stress, guilt, and embarrassment. This risk was inherent in the methodology that was used in this study. Unerman (2000) concluded that these types of psychological changes were transitory, recurrent, or permanent; however, he emphasized that most psychological risks were either minimal, or transitory. The investigator in this study hoped that the inherent risks were minimal or transitory but provided the follow-up session to ensure that the various forms of psychological risks were addressed through debriefing.

Upon completion of this research study, the researcher contacted participants via email to express appreciation to the participants, encouraged them to ask questions about the research, informed them that the results would be used for advocacy purposes, and they were notified that the results were available.

Sample recruitment accessibility. Recruitment of the study sample was made possible through the investigator's involvement with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison. The investigator in this study was an active volunteer for Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program and has worked collaboratively with the Executive Director and some Board members on multiple projects related to the topic of this study. Because of the investigator's involvement in such projects, attendance at Hudson Link's monthly meetings, and the investigator's participation in information panels related to the topic of this study, the investigator established credibility with the organization, and thus, was granted access to Hudson Link's mailing list with the names and email addresses of its alumni.

Initially, a list of the alumni email addresses was extracted from Hudson Link's global addresses. The researcher used the Hudson Link alumni list to develop a panel in Qualtrics that consisted of at least ten potential survey respondents. The preliminary sample to be surveyed for tool development was also purposefully selected from the same list of Hudson Link alumni. The preliminary survey panel included five Hudson Link alumni who lived outside of the U.S. and met the specific criteria outlined for participants in this study to pretest the questions. The individuals that were purposefully selected to be part of the preliminary sample were not included in the larger survey sample. Once the research questions were organized, worded, developed and formatted in Qualtrics, they were pretested on this preliminary panel. The questions were then refined and prepared for distribution to the final survey panel that consisted of ten Hudson Link alumni who voluntarily decided to participate as respondents of this study.

Once the questionnaire was refined, an electronic mail was sent to all of Hudson Link's alumni requesting voluntary participation in the survey research. The email contents included a summary of the research methodology and design, a synopsis of informed consent, and the study participants' rights and protections. All of Hudson Link's alumni, with the exception of those five individuals who pretested the survey and lived outside of the U.S., were considered for participation in the final survey panel. Ten of Hudson Link's alumni were randomly selected and included in the final survey panel. The final questionnaire was administered through Qualtrics to all ten Hudson Link alumni included in the final survey panel of this study.

The survey sample was selected in the following order. Ten of the participants were randomly selected to partake in the survey. The email addresses were numbered 1

thru 50 for all 50 alumni who met the criteria specified for this study. Once the list of addressees was numbered, a label was assigned to each item on the list. Since the alumni population size that met the criteria specified had two digits, the labels were assigned as 01, 02, 03, ..., 50. The researcher then chose a starting point in the Table of Random Numbers and started the selection of the first two digits from left to right. The investigator continued with this selection process systematically and sequentially until all 10 participants for the survey panel were selected. If two of the digits were replicated in the selection process, only one pair was included in the sample. The random sample was comprised of the 10 assigned encryptions for those digits that were randomly selected.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

This study utilized a multi-stage design for data collection that include a preliminary survey piloting stage where the research questions were tested and developed, and the data-gathering stage where the refined questionnaire was administered to the sample. The preliminary stage included an initial piloting of the research questions, and the primary data collection procedure that was used in this study—surveyed a sample formerly-incarcerated men from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison college program. Both the piloting of the research questions and the primary survey were administered through Qualtrics. Qualtrics was a private research software company that had been recognized as one of the industry’s leading providers of online survey software. The data-gathering stage of this study incorporated the use of survey data collection.

Collecting data using an online survey tool. The purpose and rationale for having distributed the survey to Hudson Link alumni was threefold. The first set of nine

questions in the survey were designed to help gather the general characteristics of the sample population of this study. The second set of six questions were designed to help explore the effects of post-secondary higher education and college degree levels on the employability and constructive lifestyle changes of the survey respondents. The third set of four questions were designed to help assess the effectiveness of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program. Finally, the last of twenty questions on the survey was designed to elicit ideas or recommendation for advocacy purposes.

All of the individuals on the panel were surveyed through Qualtrics. They were asked to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire helped this researcher collect demographic data of the study sample, and data relevant to survey respondents' experiences, perceptions, and feelings about post-secondary higher education and its implications on employability and constructive lifestyle changes. It also helped the researcher learn about their perceptions of how education levels predisposed them to obtain a career versus a profession.

The researcher was the primary instrument during the data collection process. The researcher explored the topic of this study and sought answers to the research questions. The researcher explored how participants perceived post-secondary higher education and the implications that it may have had on their specific lifestyle changes. Moreover, the researcher explored how participants described their experiences by having obtained an associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degrees while in prison. The researcher also explored perceptions about factors that may have impacted their ability to obtain employment upon release. The survey took anywhere from 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

The survey participants were asked to answer a series of questions. The first set of nine questions helped explore the sample's demographic composition. The second set of questions numbered ten through fourteen and question nineteen were designed to operationalize the research questions generated for this study. The operationalized survey questions helped explore what respondents thought about (1) the potential effects of post-secondary higher education on their constructive lifestyle changes, their descriptions concerning personal (2) experiences in having obtained an associate's, bachelor, and/or master's degree while in prison, and the survey explored their opinions on (3) whether or not their educational levels predisposed them to obtaining a career versus a profession. These questions drove this inquiry. The third set of four questions helped explore participants' perceptions about Hudson Link's effectiveness.

The researcher employed a survey strategy of inquiry by operationalizing questions to elicit participants' feelings, views, and opinions about the specific phenomena being studied. It explored the transitions that they underwent as incarcerated students, college graduates, and upon their return into society. During this process the researcher paid special attention to the answers regarding the choices made by the respondents, the difficulties they experienced, and advances they made upon their release from prison. Moreover, the researcher used the survey to elicit the respondents' ideas or recommendations for program improvement, or policy advocacy to address the identified problem.

Limitations to survey research. In most cases the researcher decided what content was, or was not important so there may have been something missing that could have been of importance to the study. Also, the survey questions were left open to

interpretation so the respondents' answers were subjective. Moreover, Creswell (2009) mentioned selection-bias as a limitation to survey research, however, this was the case for most, if not all procedures used in all other studies. Survey research also has its advantages and those advantages made a difference in this study. This researcher outlined some of those advantages.

The advantages to survey research. The data gathering procedure used in this study appeared to be a less-time consuming procedure for gathering data. Surveys were practical (Creswell, 2009). The survey was distributed and the data collected at one point in time through Qualtrics. A random sampling procedure was used; the researcher accessed the names of all Hudson Link alumni so the population was sampled directly. This was clearly a time-efficient procedure for gathering data.

Process for survey design development. The researcher engaged in a thorough review of the research problem and purpose of this study. Based on the outcome of that review, the researcher chose the information that was required for the survey. Also, the researcher decided on the question content and developed the questions' wording. The questions were then organized into a meaningful order and format. Since the researcher had the names of potential respondents—Hudson Link alumni, a purposeful sample was selected for the piloting of the questionnaire and random sampling was an effective procedure for the panel that was surveyed (Creswell, 2009). The researcher initially pretested the questionnaire by administering it through Qualtrics to a preliminary panel of five Hudson Link alumni who were purposefully selected and were not allowed to participate in the final survey panel of this study. This process was instrumental to the

development of the final survey that was administered to the respondents who were randomly selected for this study.

Instruments. Multiple instruments were used in this study. During the initial stage of this study, an online survey tool, Qualtrics, was used to develop, pilot, edit, and refine the survey questions that operationalized the research questions. The survey was also used to gather the demographic characteristics of the panel of this study for purpose of providing a conceptual profile of each participant. Once the survey was finalized, the online survey tool was used to create a panel from Hudson Link's alumni. Sequentially, the panel was surveyed.

The questionnaire was administered through Qualtrics, an online survey software tool which was used to test whether or not the research questions developed for this study measured what they intended to measure. The questionnaire comprised of three data sets of questions. The first set of questions numbered 1 thru 9 helped gather participants' demographic information: age range, sex, marital status, family composition, amount of time released from prison, parole status, job type or occupation, and level of degrees achieved. The second data set of questions included questions 10 thru 15 and question 19, all of which focused on exploration of the research questions. The third data set included questions 16 thru 19 which served as a basic evaluation guide to assess the effectiveness of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program. Question 20 was developed to help explore respondents' ideas and recommendations.

Nvivo 10 was used during the content analysis phase of this study. Nvivo 10 was recognized as a comprehensive qualitative data analysis software package that helped simplify the content analysis process in this study. Nvivo 10 was used to transcribe,

organize, analyze, and interpret the survey data. Nvivo 10 was also used to create a coding-book that helped document identified themes, and establish definitions for those themes. This helped maintain consistency throughout the data coding process.

Notes were taken to record the processes used throughout this study. The notes were also used for the purpose of identifying new steps in the process. The notes helped identify crucial steps in this study that had been overlooked by the researcher during the planning phase of this study.

Piloting. During the preliminary stage of this study, the operationalized research questions were piloted. The online survey tool Qualtrics was used to develop the questionnaire. Once the questionnaire was developed, a panel was created and the survey was piloted. The questionnaire was administered to a panel of five Hudson Link alumni. All of the pilot participants met the specific criteria established for the research sample that was surveyed in this study. However, all of the participants for the pilot sample resided outside of the United States. They were purposely selected to participate in the survey development and refinement phase of this study. The pilot panel participants were not included in the final survey panel of this study to maintain the survey tool's reliability.

The primary purpose of piloting the questionnaire was to test the research questions that were used to explore the topic of this study. The piloting process allowed for the tool's development and refinement. The research questions helped guide this exploration. The survey was strategically designed with three specific purposes in mind. The first set of nine questions helped gather demographic data about the survey sample. The purpose of gathering the demographic data of the sample population was to provide

readers with a contextual frame that would help readers better understand some of the findings of this study. The researcher explored the general characteristics of the sample population to gain insight about their unique experiences with the phenomena. The demographic information also helped develop a contextual profile for the group of respondents. The second set of six questions helped answer the research questions of this study. The research questions were operationalized into specific categories that helped provide relevant information about the effects of post-secondary higher education. Finally, the third set of questions helped analyze and assess the effectiveness of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program.

Data Analysis

This study used an integrated content analysis approach for the data set. The integrated approach required the use of both conventional and directed techniques to analyze and help interpret meaning from the survey data contents that were obtained from the participants' responses. Researchers suggested that the major difference between the conventional content analysis and the directed content analysis approaches were in their coding schemes, the roots of codes, and threats to trustworthiness (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The researcher in this study identified the major differences between these two techniques. The differences were in their coding schemes and origins of codes. The conventional technique required that the researcher scrutinize the data sets for emergent themes; the themes derived directly from the data sets that were analyzed. The directed technique encompassed the use of *a priori* coding scheme. This technique required that the analytic procedure commenced with a focus on previously established theories and findings of previous research.

The content analysis conducted for this study included several steps in the process. During the first step of the conventional content analysis the researcher identified the emergent themes and subthemes directly from the data contents that were analyzed. The researcher engaged in this analytic process by focusing on three respective categories of inquiry. The categories of inquiry included the following data sets in sequence: nine questions that helped the researcher analyze the general characteristics of the sample; six questions that helped explore the research questions of this study; and four questions that helped explore the effectiveness of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program.

The initial coding scheme for the conventional content analysis process used for this study required extraction of themes and subthemes directly from the raw data provided by the respondents. This procedure was ensued for all three categories of inquiry. Engrossed in that process, the researcher identified relevant themes that helped gain a conceptual profile of the research participants, it helped answer the research questions, it led to rich insights about the phenomena, and helped assess Hudson Link's effectiveness.

The second coding scheme for the directed content analysis process utilized preexisting theories and research findings as guidance for exploring the data codes that emerged from this study. This process included exploring the meaningful patterns between the emergent codes that were extracted during the conventional coding procedure, and the *a priori* codes of preexisting theories and findings within the literature reviewed in chapter two of this study. The researcher explored the patterns and made some comprehensive inferences. Since there were no concrete single theories in the

literature that helped explain the phenomena, the integrated approach best suited this exploratory style of research.

Integrated conventional and directed content analysis approach for surveys.

A content analysis was conducted upon completion of the data-gathering phase of this survey research. The investigator used an integrated approach to content analysis for this study. The investigator commenced the content analysis for the data using a conventional approach based on inductive reasoning where themes coded derived directly from the raw data contents that were obtained from the respondents.

The conventional approach followed a multi-step process. The researcher began the process by reviewing each respondent's answers on Qualtrics. Themes were the primary unit of this content analysis. The researcher first read and reviewed the survey data for each respondent in Qualtrics. The researcher then converted the survey data into a PDF file and exported it into Nvivo 10, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International. Nvivo 10 was specifically designed for qualitative researchers working with very rich text-based and/or multimedia information, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data were required (www.qsrinternational.com, 2015). The researcher created a file in Nvivo 10 entitled *surveys*. The Qualtrics' PDF files for each respondent were uploaded onto Nvivo 10 and stored in *surveys* for a more focused read and analysis.

The survey data for each respondent was read and reread. The researcher identified and labeled the interesting and relevant information. The information that was labeled derived directly from the data from each respondent. Annotations were made

using the memo feature in Nvivo 10 to document the interesting information that was found. A list of the items was composed for further review and coding purposes.

The researcher then read the contents from the list. The contents were organized into three specific data set categories. The categories were arranged sequentially in the following order: demographic characteristics of the survey sample; the effects of post-secondary higher education on employability and constructive lifestyle changes; and evaluation on the effectiveness of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program. Each of the three categories comprised of data sets relevant to its specific topic of inquiry. The first data set included responses to questions one through nine from the survey. The second data set included responses to questions ten through fourteen and question nineteen from the survey. The third data set included responses to questions fifteen through eighteen from the survey. Finally, question 20 served as a way to explore respondents' recommendations. The researcher engaged in the content analysis according to the exact sequential order of the prearranged categories.

The coding strategy designed for this study required the use of triangulation within its coding process to help ascertain a degree of inter-coder reliability. This technique required a complete analysis during the coding process for the second data set category. This category was entitled the effects of post-secondary higher education on employability and constructive lifestyle changes. The codes were comprised from input of three separate parties. The parties included the researcher as coder, a trained coder, and an expert coder. Initially, the researcher and trained coder engaged separately in reviewing the second data set to extract preliminary codes. The researcher and trained coder scrutinized and extracted the relevant data. The extracted data was coded into

themes. The themes were then scrutinized and grouped together as either major themes, or minor themes. The researcher and trained coder then reexamined the themes in detail to ensure that no differences existed between codes. Once the researcher and trained coder agreed on the preliminary themes, a table was drawn to depict the preliminary themes that were established by the researcher and trained coder. The expert coder then reviewed the participants' responses to the second data set along with a review of the table that depicted the preliminary themes established by the researcher and trained coder.

The expert coder thoroughly analyzed the preliminary codes and organized them into major themes and subthemes. The researcher then compared and contrasted the themes to determine their relevance. The expert coder assisted the researcher and established the major themes and subthemes that were used by the researcher for the integrated analysis. Additionally, the researcher went over the data to ensure that all relevant themes and sub-themes were documented in the coding-book. Finally, the researcher created a table depicting the established themes that were used for analysis (see Table 4.10 and Table 4.11).

At the beginning of the conventional analysis, the researcher focused solely on a manifest level of analysis. The researcher immersed in the first data set and analyzed the respondents' demographic information. He focused on exploring the demographic characteristics and profile of the survey participants in this study. Once the survey data was collected, the participants' responses were assessed, the data analyzed, divided and organized into its demographic categories. The categories ranged from age, marital status, family composition, how long respondents were released from prison, parole

status upon release, current parole status, job type or occupation, and type of degrees achieved during incarceration. A table was drawn based on those categories. The categories were analyzed and used to get a clearer picture of the participants' demographics. A table for each of the categories was drawn and for most of the demographic information a graph was also drawn. This provided a visual representation about the demographic data. The responses were thoroughly explored, profiles were developed, and profile summaries were written for each of the ten respondents to provide readers a contextual profile of the survey sample.

The researcher then provided a descriptive account of the entire sample and also constructed a profile for each respondent based on the data that emerged. Profiles were constructed for all participants. Moreover, tables and figures were drawn to provide readers with a visual representation of the sample. The descriptive accounts simply highlighted the manifest themes and important features that derived from the raw data. The analysis for the second data set required a deeper level of analysis.

The researcher conducted a more profound analysis for the second data set that encompassed questions ten through fourteen and question nineteen of the survey. This data set was operationalized from the research questions of this study. Each question in this data set was designed to help the researcher explore the phenomena. The themes that were extracted from respondents' responses to these questions during the data coding process were analyzed. A directed content analysis approach best suited the second data set. The researcher explored the role that maturational, structural-functional, cognitive development, and human agency factors played in the lives of the survey study participants. Through this focus and deeper level of analysis, the researcher was able to

make more meaningful connections between the emergent codes of this study and preexisting codes derived from previous research findings and theories. This deeper level of analysis allowed the researcher to make more significant inferences about the effects of post-secondary higher education.

The integrated approach required that the researcher conduct a directed content analysis. The directed content analysis approach included a more focused review based on preexisting theories and research findings discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. The purpose was to identify specific contents for a more focused review. The directed content analysis approach conducted at this phase of the study focused more on deductive reasoning.

The researcher immersed in the data. The researcher highlighted small bits of text in the coding book to be analyzed. The newly extracted themes and *a priori* codes of previous research conducted were examined in more detail. The specific segments of data that derived from the survey contents of this study were thoroughly assessed and analyzed. The researcher engaged in a re-review of the existing research findings that were reviewed in Chapter 2 about the effects of PSHE and the new findings that emerged from the survey participants in this study as a basis to guide this higher level of content analysis process. The themes were compared to those found in previous research. The researcher in this study then used the structure and relationships between codes, their descriptions, and the themes that derived from the survey participants to make inferences about potential relationships of PSHE and its implications on employability and constructive lifestyle changes. The thorough review allowed the researcher to make

connections between the patterns of themes and made comprehensive inferences about the phenomena. The researcher provided a more interpretive analysis of the data sets.

Researcher Background

The researcher was employed as a Program Coordinator in a non-profit organization that provided wraparound services for formerly incarcerated individuals, and for children and families of incarcerated parents. The researcher's type and place of employment was not directly connected to this study. The researcher had over 15 years of experience working in the non-profit sector providing services to individuals and families infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, mental illness, recidivism, and host of other societal ills. The researcher held various managerial and administrative level positions throughout his career. In that capacity, the researcher became acclimated with policy, coalition building, and policy advocacy. The researcher was responsible for various functions including program analysis, implementation, strategic planning, capacity building, professional development, and organizational leadership.

The researcher was also a formerly incarcerated individual who began pursuing his educational endeavors while incarcerated. Upon release from prison, and despite ineligibility for TAP and Pell grant funding, the researcher invested and engaged in the process of completing a bachelor in the behavioral sciences from a private college in 2005, and a master's in social work from CUNY in 2010. The researcher's commitment to attain higher education also led him to enroll and undergo doctoral studies in an Ed.D. in Executive Leadership program; the researcher completed the course work for the program and currently completed this dissertation project.

In retrospect of personal and professional experience, it was important that the researcher remained cognizant of the potential impact of researcher bias when engaging in the design and analysis of findings of this study. To protect against potential researcher bias, experts from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison assisted throughout all phases of the study. Additionally, the researcher utilized the services of an expert involved in the field of education for over 25 years to serve as an independent coder to secure inter-coder reliability during the identification of themes process, data coding, and analysis phases of this study.

The trained coder and researcher both engaged in an initial review and analysis of the survey data for questions 10 thru 14 of the survey. The researcher and trained coder independently identified themes that derived from each survey respondent's data, developed a list of the themes, and documented them on a report that included responses from participants that corresponded with the identified themes. A table with two columns was developed: one column was designated for themes coded by the trained coder; the other column was designated for the themes identified by the researcher. The themes from the list were then transcribed onto the table. A third expert in the field of education for over 15 years was used to analyze the table, compare the themes identified in the table, establish agreement between subthemes and major themes coded by trained coder and researcher, and to establish inter-coder reliability.

Chapter Summary

Researchers have asserted that content analysis helped provide useful information about phenomena and helped investigators answer research questions (Sommer and Sommer, 2002). This was a systematic way of gathering, organizing, coding, and

analyzing information obtained from the survey research. This research methodology and design was quite useful in exploring the potential implications that post-secondary higher education had on the employability of formerly-incarcerated students, and their ability to make constructive lifestyle changes that led to desistance from crime and positively impacted recidivism rates in NYS.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, the researcher analyzed the data collected for this study. The researcher engaged in an integrated approach to content analysis. In the first phase of the analysis, the researcher used a conventional strategy based on inductive reasoning. During that phase the researcher content analyzed the data set and provided a descriptive account of the sample's demographic information. The second phase of this analysis shifted to a deductive reasoning strategy and a directed content analysis. During that phase of the analysis the researcher explored some of the questioning and inferences of earlier studies on post-secondary higher education and its implications on the employability of formerly incarcerated individuals and their constructive lifestyle changes.

The data for this research design was collected through Qualtrics, an online survey software. The survey was activated in Qualtrics for two weeks. The survey was administered to ten formerly incarcerated students and graduates of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison's college program. The survey data was then collected and the survey was closed after the two weeks period. The survey data was then transferred to an online qualitative data analysis software package called Nvivo 10 where a file entitled *surveys* was created. Nvivo 10 was used to simplify the content analysis process used for this study.

The researcher explored the first set of nine multiple-choice questions in the survey to help distinguish the demographic characteristics of the surveyed sample and to

help formulate a profile of each study participant. Also, the researcher content analyzed the second set of six open-ended questions in the survey to help explore the formerly incarcerated male students' thoughts, opinions, and feelings about post-secondary higher education and its implications on their employability and constructive lifestyle changes. This phase of the analysis depended on deductive reasoning. Moreover, the researcher conducted an analysis of the third set of four questions to help evaluate the effectiveness of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program, and it used the final questions to explore respondents' recommendations.

This analysis was performed through the process of coding data in six steps to explore the meaningful patterns between emergent themes in the study and *a priori* codes of prior research findings and theories. The steps taken to conduct the analysis were as follow: familiarization and organization of data; transferring of the survey data between computer software programs; identification of emergent preliminary codes; development of emergent themes among codes; exploration of responses to demographic questions, emergent themes and a priori codes of prior research findings and theories; and production of final reports.

The survey consisted of 20 questions—the first set of nine of questions were related to the demographic characteristics of the sample population; the second set of six questions were geared towards inquiry surrounding potential factors that may have impacted employability and constructive lifestyle changes; the third set of four questions served as a program analysis for the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program, and one final question was designed to obtain respondents' recommendations.

The content analysis used for this study consisted of three phases. The researcher content analyzed the data obtained from the survey respondents through the following procedure:

During the first phase of this study the researcher conducted an analysis of the data obtained from questions one thru nine regarding the specific demographic characteristics of each survey respondent to better understand the research sample. This portion of the analysis revolved around gaining a better understanding about the survey research participants and to explore how various factors influenced attitudes and behavioral changes:

1. Analysis of responses related to the age range of respondents to identify possible psychosocial stage of respondents at the time of the study.
2. Analysis of responses related to respondents' marital and family composition; these statuses could help better understand the potential relational, socio-cultural, and structural effects on the constructive lifestyle changes of respondents.
3. Analysis of responses related to respondents' parole status to explore parole status's potential influence on lifestyle changes.
4. Analysis of responses related to job type or occupation to help understand the impact that respondents' level of college education had on helping them obtain a career versus a profession.

Secondly, the researcher conducted an analysis of the data obtained from questions ten thru fourteen and question nineteen to help understand respondents' thoughts, opinions and feelings about the implications that post-secondary higher

education had on their employability and their ability to make constructive lifestyle changes.

This analysis focused on key themes that derived from respondents' responses to survey questions and *a priori* codes of previous theories and findings. This portion of the analysis consisted of the following steps:

1. Analysis of responses to determine what “motivated” respondents to engage in post-secondary higher education.
2. Analysis to determine the level of human agency and its impact on the process of lifestyle changes.
3. Analysis of responses to determine the role that relational, cultural, and social components played in respondents' constructive lifestyle changes.
4. Analysis of responses to determine the role that structural components like employment impacted respondents' ability to make constructive lifestyle changes.
5. Analysis of responses to determine the role that respondents' level of education had on respondents' ability to obtain a career versus a profession and how it impacted their lives.

In the third and final phase, the researcher conducted an analysis of the data obtained from questions fifteen thru eighteen to explore the effectiveness of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program as experienced by respondents.

1. Analysis of responses to determine the role and the effectiveness that Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison's college program played in lives of survey respondents.

Research Questions

The following questions warranted this exploration:

1. What effects did post-secondary higher education have on constructive lifestyle changes for individuals in NYS who obtained a college degree while incarcerated?
2. How did study participants described their experience in obtaining associate's, bachelor, and/or master's degree while in prison?
3. What differences existed, if any, between formerly incarcerated individuals who obtained an associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degree while incarcerated, and whether or not their educational level predisposed them to obtaining a career versus a profession?

Qualitative Data Analysis and Findings

The reader should know that all respondents were asked the exact same questions; however, a disclaimer was added to the “risks and benefits” section of the IRB approved informed consent form that was read and signed by all survey respondents and granted them permission to decline answering any questions. Also, the disclaimer highlighted a clause that reminded the respondents *not to disclose possible involvement in any illegal conduct including drug use, sexual behavior, or alcohol use* in their responses to the questions.

The questions designed for this inquiry by this researcher in Qualtrics were categorical in nature. The first set of nine questions helped gather the demographic characteristics of the sample surveyed in this study. The second set of six questions were open-ended questions. These questions were designed to gather data about the roles that

maturational, cognitive development, structural-functional, and human agency played in their constructive lifestyle changes. The third set of five questions were also open-ended and revolved around respondents' programmatic experiences with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison's college program. The final question in the survey allowed for participants to share their recommendations.

This analysis was performed through the process of coding data in six steps to explore the meaningful patterns between emergent and *a priori* codes of prior theories and research findings.

Step 1: Familiarization and organization of data. The first step involved familiarization with the demographic data provided by the respondents. The survey responses that were obtained through the online survey tool Qualtrics were read and reread by the researcher. The researcher became acquainted with the demographic categories and various components of the data as outlined in the introduction of this chapter. This simplistic initial analysis of the demographic categories by the researcher helped provide the readers with a contextual profile for each respondent to help readers make meaningful connections with respondents and gain more enriching insights into their unique shared experiences. The purpose was to become acquainted with the data in order to strategically organize the data into their specific components. The components included categories of inquiry into the sample's demographic characteristic inquiry, review of operationalized inquiry that helped answer the research question, and review of inquiry that helped evaluate the prison college program that survey participants graduated from.

Step 2: Transferring of the survey data between computer software

programs. Upon completion of the initial data review in Qualtrics, the contents were transferred into Nvivo 10. Prior to exporting the data, the researcher converted the survey responses into PDF files in Qualtrics. The surveys were transferred as PDF files into the qualitative research analysis tool Nvivo 10 for coding purposes. The researcher created a file in Nvivo 10 entitled *surveys*. The survey participants' responses were then read, reread, and organized into various categories in Nvivo 10 for further review and coding.

Step 3: Identification of emergent preliminary codes. This step required further review of the identified categories during step two of this analysis. It encompassed a review from both the researcher of this study and a separate review from a trained coder for the purpose of identifying the preliminary themes and subthemes that emerged from participants' responses. The researcher read and reread participants' responses for questions ten through fourteen, and nineteen of the surveys. The researcher identified various themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. Sequentially, the researcher created a list of themes and subthemes (Appendix E). This process also included a separate review from a trained coder. The trained coder also immersed in the data, identified themes and subthemes that emerged from participants' responses to questions ten through fourteen, and nineteen. The trained coder also created a list consisting of identified preliminary themes (Appendix E). The trained coder provided the list to the researcher. The preliminary themes and subthemes were then recorded in the coding book by the researcher who also created the nodes in Nvivo 10 for further exploration and their development (Appendix E).

Step 4: Development of emergent themes among codes. This step included a re-review of the preliminary themes and subthemes extracted by both the researcher and trained coder by an expert coder during step three. There were two reasons for contracting an expert coder during this developmental step. Primarily the researcher wanted the expert to aid in the development and establishment of the major themes and subthemes that became the key codes for the in-depth content analysis. Secondly, the researcher in this study sought to incorporate a type of triangulation strategy into this coding process to establish a gist of inter-coder reliability. Henceforth, the expert coder immersed in a review of segments of the survey responses for questions ten through fourteen. The expert coder also evaluated the list of preliminary codes that were identified by the researcher and trained coder during step three. Once engaged in this coding process, the expert coder reevaluated the preliminary codes and created a list of major themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. The researcher then reviewed the three lists of identified themes and thoroughly analyzed them until all of the codes were exclusive and exhaustive. The researcher then created tables to provide a visual representation of the established major themes and subthemes (Table 4.10 and 4.11). The established major themes and subthemes were prepared for the in-depth content analysis. The in-depth analysis encompassed further exploration of the established codes that emerged from these processes (Tables 4.9 and 4.10) and the *a priori* codes established from prior research finding and existing theories discussed in Chapter 2 of this study (Table 4.11).

Step 5: Exploration of responses to demographic questions, emergent themes, and *a priori* codes of prior research findings and theories. This step required a review

of the first set of nine questions. The researcher analyzed the responses for each of the demographic data questions. The researcher commenced the analysis by reviewing both the questions and answers of each respondent in sequence beginning with question one and ending on question nine. The topics of inquiry for each of the nine questions varied. The researcher sought to gather respondents' age range, relationship status, family composition, release date status, parole status upon release, current parole status, parole supervision discharge status, respondents' job type or occupation, and their highest degree completed. The researcher wanted to identify the psychosocial stage of respondents at the time of the study. Moreover, the researcher explored the marital status and family composition to help better understand the potential structural-functional effects on the constructive lifestyle changes of respondents. He conducted an analysis of responses related to respondents' parole status to parole status's potential influence on lifestyle changes. Furthermore, the researcher conducted an analysis of responses related to job type or occupation. He wanted to understand the impact of respondents' level of college education on helping them obtain a career versus a profession. The researcher then created tables and figures for each data set. The researcher completed this portion of the analysis for the first set of nine questions on respondents' demographic data by analyzing the demographic content and writing a descriptive summary for the demographic categories.

The researcher then initiated the analysis for the second data set of six questions. The researcher commenced this portion of the analysis with question ten thru fourteen, and question nineteen of the data set. This portion of the analysis required a line-by-line analysis. This step required a complete review of all the emergent codes that derived

from this study and the *a priori* codes and finding from the existing literature. The emergent codes were extracted directly from the text contents of this study. The codes were then documented in the coding book and definitions were developed for each one of the codes. The researcher then engaged in an analysis of all the codes that had emerged. The codes that emerged from this data set were then compared to existing *a priori* codes and findings from previous research.

The researcher content analyzed the data set to explore the factors that had motivated respondents to engage in post-secondary higher education while incarcerated. The researcher also explored the responses to determine the how human agency, the role that relational, socio-cultural and structural components like family, friends, and employment played in respondents' constructive lifestyle changes. Moreover, the researcher conducted an analysis of responses to question nineteen of this data set to determine the role and impact of having earned a degree on respondents' employability and constructive lifestyle changes.

Step 6: Production of final report. Throughout the coding and analysis process, the researcher documented the processes and procedures by typing memos in Nvivo 10. The memos included recording the process for each of the six steps used to analyze the data. The researcher wrote a memo for each step. The researcher typed the memos in Nvivo 10. The researcher commenced documenting the following steps in sequence: familiarization and organization of data; transferring of the data between computer software programs; identification of emergent preliminary codes; development of emergent themes among codes; exploration of emergent themes and *a priori* codes of prior research findings and theories; and producing final report. The researcher produced

a final report based on documented memos of the processes and procedures conducted throughout this study. This six-steps coding and analysis procedure was significant to this study to help explore the meaningful patterns between emergent and *a priori* codes of prior research findings and theories. This deeper level of analysis allowed the researcher to make more meaningful inferences and produce the most comprehensive findings.

Descriptive Analysis of Responses to Questions Concerning Demographic

Information of Survey Respondents

Question number one: What is your age range? In terms of the age ranges of survey respondents, the answer groupings varied from 21 thru 30—there were no respondents from this group; grouping 31 thru 45 accounted for 40% of the sample, and grouping 46 and over accounted for a remaining 60% (10 respondents in total) of the sample. Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1 represents the age range of the survey respondents in this study.

Table 4.1

Age Range of Survey Respondents

| Range | # of Response | % of Responses |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| 21-30 | 0 | 0% |
| 31-45 | 4 | 40% |
| 46 and over | 6 | 60% |
| Total | 10 | 100% |

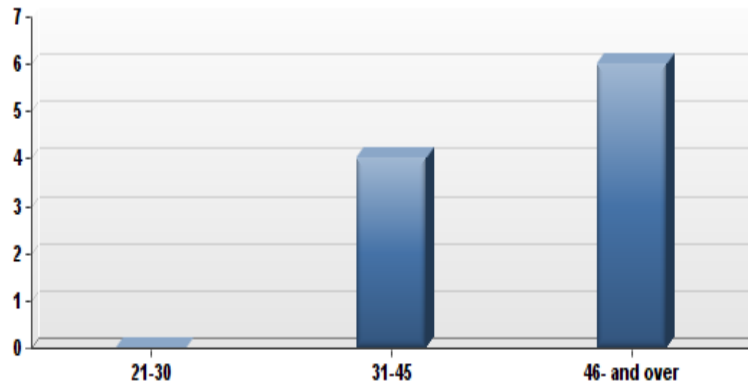


Figure 4.1. Age range of survey respondents.

Question number two: Which of the following best describes your current relationship status? In terms of marital status, forty percent (4 respondents) were *married*, thirty percent were divorced (3 respondents), ten percent were *widowed* (1 respondent), ten percent identified as being *single but cohabiting with significant other*, and ten percent (1 respondent) identified as *single, never married*. Table 4.2 and Figure 4.2 represent the relationship status of survey respondents.

Table 4.2

Relationship Status of Survey Respondents

| Answers | # of Responses | % of Responses |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Married | 4 | 40% |
| Divorce | 3 | 30% |
| Separated | 0 | 0% |
| Widowed | 1 | 10% |
| In domestic partnership | 0 | 0% |
| Single but cohabiting with significant other | 1 | 10% |
| Single never married | 1 | 10% |
| Total | 10 | 100% |

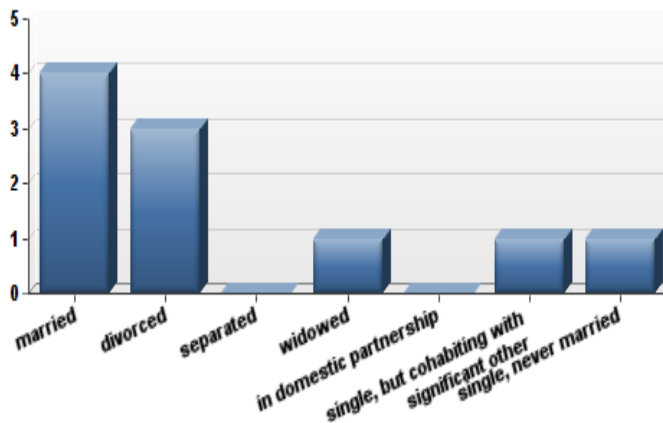


Figure 4.2. Relationship Status of Survey Respondents.

Question three: How many children do you have? In terms of how many children the survey respondents reported having, thirty percent (3) reported having at

least one child, 10 percent (1) reported having two children, thirty percent (3) reported having three or more children, while thirty percent (3) of the respondents reported having no children. Table 4.3 and Figure 4.3 represent the number of children reported by survey respondents.

Table 4.3

Number of Children Reported by Survey Respondents

| Answers | # of Responses | % of Responses |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| One | 3 | 30% |
| Two | 1 | 10% |
| Three or more | 3 | 30% |
| None | 3 | 30% |
| Total | 10 | 100% |

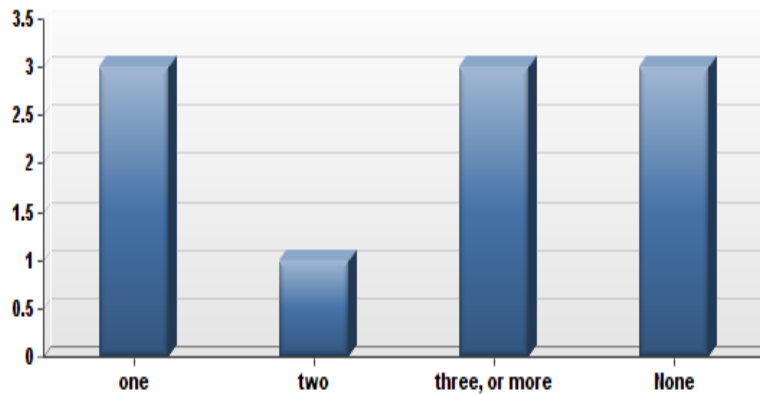


Figure 4.3. Number of children reported by survey respondents.

Question number four: When were you released from prison? In terms of how long survey respondents were released from prison, eighty percent (8 respondents) of the surveyed sample reported having been released from prison *five years and over*,

and twenty percent (2 respondents) of the sample reported having been released *less than five years ago*. None of the respondents reported having been releases from prison *less than one year ago*, or *one to three years ago*. Table 4.4 and Figure 4.4 represent how long the survey respondents had been released from prison.

Table 4.4

Length of Time Released from Prison

| Answer | # of Responses | % of Responses |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Less than 1 year ago | 0 | 0% |
| 1-3 years ago | 0 | 0% |
| Less than 5 years ago | 2 | 20% |
| 5 years and over | 8 | 80% |
| Total | 10 | 100% |

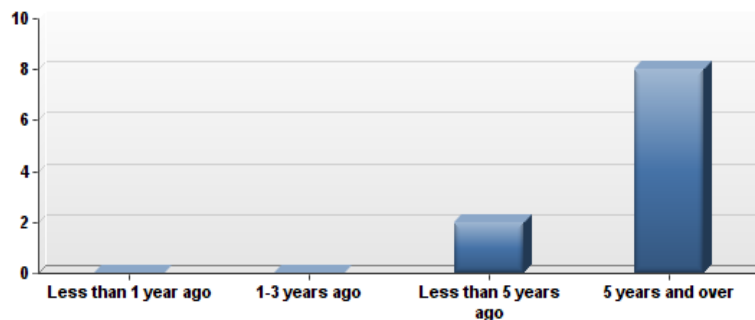


Figure 4.4. How long survey respondent had been released from prison.

Question five: Upon release, were you on parole supervision? In terms of the amount of survey respondents who were on parole supervision at the time of release from prison, ninety percent (9 respondents) were on parole supervision at the time of release,

and ten percent (one respondent) was not on parole supervision at the time of release.

Table 4.5 and Figure 4.5 represent the number of survey respondents who were on parole supervision at the time of release and the number for those who were not on parole supervision at the time of release.

Table 4.5

Number of Parolees Versus Non-Parolees Upon Release

| Answer | # of Responses | % of Responses |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| Parolee | 9 | 90% |
| Non-parolee | 1 | 10% |
| Total | 10 | 100% |

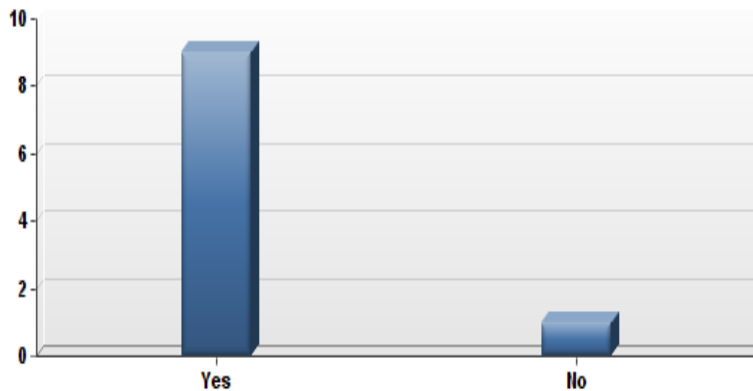


Figure 4.5. The number of parolees and non-parolees upon release.

Question number six: Are you still on parole? In terms of respondents still on parole supervision, one hundred percent of the survey respondents were off parole

supervision at the time of this study. Table 4.6 and Figure 4.6 represent the total number of survey respondents currently off parole supervision at the time of this study.

Table 4.6

Respondents Off Parole at Time of Study

| Answer | # of Responses | % of Responses |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| Parolee | 0 | 0% |
| Non-parolee | 10 | 100% |
| Total | 10 | 100% |

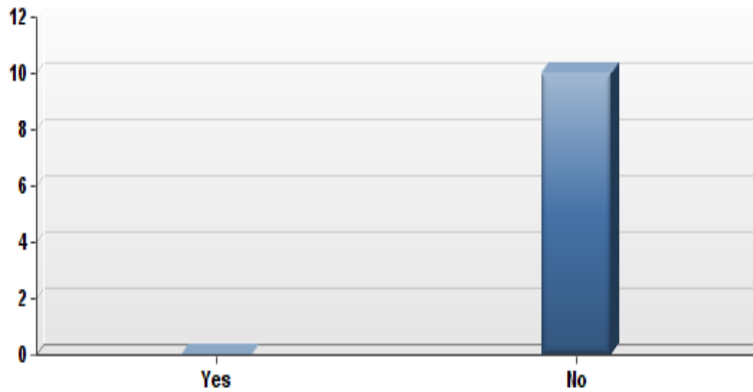


Figure 4.6. Respondents off parole at the time of study.

Question number seven: If not currently on parole, how long have you been off parole? In terms of the length of time that survey respondents were off parole at the time of this study, ten percent (1 respondent) of the sample reported having been off parole *less than one year*, fifty percent (5 respondents) reported having been off *one to four years*, and forty percent (4 respondents) reported having been off parole *five years*

and over. Table 4.7 and Figure 4.7 represent the length of time that survey respondents were off parole at the time of this study.

Table 4.7

Length of Time Off Parole

| Answer | # of Responses | % of Responses |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Less than 1 year | 1 | 10% |
| 1-4 years | 5 | 50% |
| 5 years and over | 4 | 4% |
| Total | 10 | 100% |

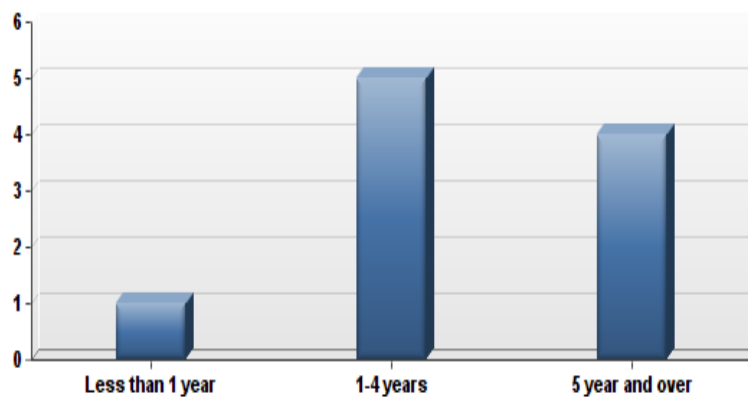


Figure 4.7. Length of time off parole.

Question number eight: What is your current job type, or occupation? In terms of job type or occupation, the survey respondents varied from holding administrative level positions in the non-profit sector (three respondents), middle-

manager positions (four respondents), self-employed (one respondent), currently unemployed (one respondent), and on worker’s compensation (one respondent).

Question nine: What was the highest degree completed during your incarceration? In terms of highest degree completed, at least 10 percent of the survey sample had obtained a *Doctorate degree* during their incarceration, 70 percent had obtained their *Master degree*, 10 percent had obtained a *Bachelor degree*, and 10 percent of the survey sample had *obtained college credits but did not complete degree requirements*. Table 4.8 and Figure 4.8 represent the highest level of degree completed by the survey respondents.

Table 4.8

Highest Degree Completed During Incarceration

| Answer | # of Responses | % of Responses |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Associate | 0 | 0% |
| Bachelor | 1 | 10% |
| Master | 7 | 70% |
| Doctorate | 1 | 10% |
| Other (obtained college credits but did not complete degree requirements) | 1 | 10% |
| Vocational Education | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 10 | 100% |

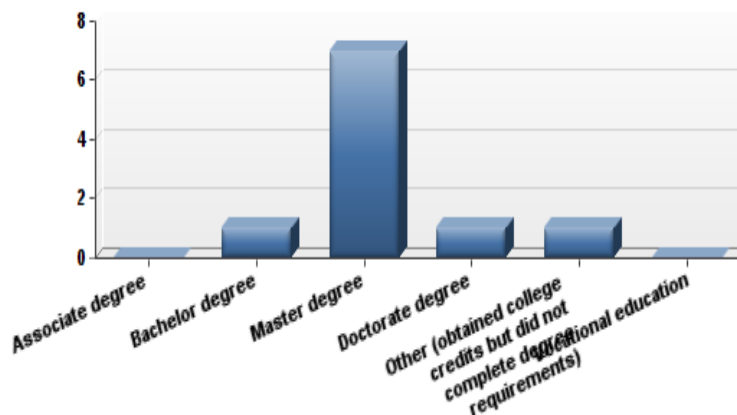


Figure 4.8. The highest degree completed during incarceration.

In sum, the survey respondents who participated in this study through the online survey met the following requirements: (a) were alumni from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program, (b) were formerly incarcerated men who were students and graduated from the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison college program, (c) completed their associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degree requirements during their incarceration in one of the five NYS correctional facilities participating in the program, and (d) were discharged from parole at least one to five years post-release. The survey sample consisted of ten male alumni of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program with a vast array of demographic difference and similarities in beliefs.

Respondent profile. This section provided a profile of each survey respondent, beginning with an examination of their socio-demographic information, engagement in Hudson Link's services, educational accomplishments while incarcerated, current employment status and field of expertise, and a review of respondent's lived experiences. This section was designed to provide a baseline context for the study. The intent of this section was to connect this researcher with each respondent's history, determine the role

that human agency and structural components played in respondent's ability to change. This ultimately helped explore the potential effects that post-secondary higher education had on their employability and decisions to engage in constructive lifestyle changes that increased their chances of desistance from crime and impacted recidivism rates in NYS.

In an effort to protect respondents' identity, the name initials and chronicles were modified. This researcher intended to provide a contextual profile for each respondent while reducing the possible connections to individual survey respondents. This strategy was deemed most effective given the common biases that exist in society against the formerly incarcerated population, the small sample size, and respondents' ties to the workforce and communities where they lived.

DD (R01). DD was a male within the age range 46 and over. He reported being a divorcee and parent of three, or more children. He was released from prison on parole supervision over five years ago and discharged from parole one to four years ago. He reported being employed in the social services field and held an administrative level position in his place of employment. DD held a bachelor degree while under tutelage of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison college program. Upon his release, he went on to obtain his master degree specializing in social services. He was a member of Hudson Link's alumni and a proponent of post-secondary higher education.

DM (R02). DM was a male within the age range of 31-45. He reported being single and never married. He was released from prison less than five years ago on parole supervision and was discharged from parole less than one year ago. He reported being a Personal Assistant to a person with disability and was a manager in the social service field. He also held a Board of Directors position for an organization that promoted

college level education for incarcerated individuals. DM held a bachelor and master degree in his field of employment. He was an active and distinguished member of Hudson Link's alumni.

MI (R03). MI was a male within the 46 and over age range. He reported being a divorcee and no children. He was released from prison over 5 years ago on parole supervision. He was also discharged from parole at least one to four years ago. He reported employment in the social services field. MI held a supervisory level position. He also held a bachelor and master degree in same field of employment. MI was a significant figure during the expansion of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison college program and continues to be an active alumni collaboratively involved in Hudson Link's funding activities.

JR (R04). JR was a male within the 46 and over age range. He reported being married and was a parent of one child. JR was released from prison on parole supervision more than three and less than five years ago. He was discharged from parole one to two years ago. He was employed in the social services field. JR received his bachelor and master degrees in the same field of employment while in prison. He was an active member of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison's alumni and was dedicated to helping Hudson Link identify potential funders.

JD (R05). JD was a male within the 46 and over age range. He reported being married and a parent of three or more children. JD was released from prison on parole supervision over five years ago. JD was discharged from parole one to four years ago. He was employed in the social services field and held an administrative level position. JD obtained a double bachelor and master degree while incarcerated; all of his degrees

are in the social services field. JD began his course of study for double bachelor degrees prior to the elimination of Pell Grant funding for incarcerated individuals, and he went on to receive his master degree while a student of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program. He was an active member of Hudson Link's alumni and a committed proponent and activist for post-secondary higher education funding for incarcerated individuals.

JP (R06). JP was a male within the 31 to 45 age range. JP reported being single but cohabiting with a significant other. JP was the parent of one child. JP was released from prison on parole supervision more than five years ago; he was also discharged from parole more than five years ago. JP was currently on worker's compensation due to a work related injury. He completed a college level certificate program in the social services field while incarcerated; the certificate program was spearheaded by the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison administrators in collaboration with administrators from the New York Theological Seminary. He obtained college credits after completing the program but did not complete degree requirements for an associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degree.

TR (R07). TR was a male within the 46 and over age range. TR reported being widowed and is a parent of two children. TR was released from prison on parole supervision more than five years ago and was discharged from parole more than five years ago. TR held an administrative level position in the social services field. He was a member of one of the first cohorts to graduate from the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison college program. He received both a bachelor and master degrees during his participation as a student of Hudson Link. Upon his release, TR went on to

achieve a doctorate degree in his field of employment. Like many of the Hudson Link alumni, TR continues to be an active member and service collaborator.

JV (R08). JV was a male within the 31 to 45 years age range. He reported being married and not parenting any children. JV was released on parole supervision more than five years ago. He reported having been discharged from parole one to four years ago. He was employed in the social services field and holds a bachelor, and two master's degrees in the same field of employment. JV was not only one of the first students to graduate from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison college program, but he also played a significant role in the development of the program and its quality improvement.

FB (R09). FB was a male within the 31 to 45 years age range. He was married and reported parenting three or more children. FB was released from prison over five years ago; he was not on parole supervision at the time of his release. After many years of incarceration, FB was exonerated for the crimes he had been convicted of and released shortly thereafter. FB was self-employed and works in the social services field. He received a bachelor degree in the same field of employment while incarcerated. FB maintained exceptional grades when undergoing his course of study and he was a proud Hudson Link alumni.

RS (R10). RS was a male reportedly in the 46 and over age range. RS was a divorcee and a parent of one child. RS was released on parole supervision over five years ago. He was also discharged from parole over five years ago. He was employed in the social services field and held a bachelor, and master's degree in the same field of employment. RS completed his bachelor degree requirements prior to the elimination of Pell Grant funding for incarcerated individuals and went to complete his master's course

study while under the tutelage of Hudson Link. During his release he became a Hudson Link collaborator. He was one of the most prominent members of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison alumni and a proponent of post-secondary higher education.

Themes established by expert coder. These themes were extracted from the survey data through a systematic process. The first step included a re-review of the preliminary themes and subthemes extracted by both the researcher and trained coder from the expert coder during step three. The expert coder also immersed in a review of segments of the survey responses for questions ten through fourteen. The researcher wanted the expert coder to aid in the development and establishment of the major themes and subthemes. The expert coder evaluated the list of preliminary codes that were identified by the researcher and trained coder during step three. Once engaged in this coding process, the expert coder reevaluated the preliminary codes and created a list of major themes and subthemes that emerged from the data.

The researcher then reviewed the three lists of identified themes and thoroughly analyzed them until all of the codes were exclusive and exhaustive. The researcher then created a table to provide a visual representation of the established major themes and subthemes that were analyzed. Table 4.9 and 4.10 represents the established major themes and subthemes that were prepared for this content analysis.

Table 4.9

Established Major Codes: Expert

| Theme | Definition |
|-------------------------|---|
| Preparation for Reentry | A process that begins the day of an individual's detainment or incarceration. The preparation process includes acquiring valuable skills and work experience through vocational programs, programs like Hudson Link, and occupational education courses. This process includes all of the activities and programming conducted to prepare incarcerated individuals for their return to society as productive, law-abiding, and contributing members of society. |
| Support | This concept requires action on part of family or friends. The support can be physical, psychological, spiritual, or financial. Support requires a genuine embrace by family or friends through the previously mentioned means to the formerly incarcerated individual or incarcerated individual as a way to enable the individual to function or act in a matter according to existing societal norms and mores. |
| Change in Self | This type of change encompasses changes in belief system, values, and attitudes that often lead to behavioral changes. This process requires introspection, challenging faulty principles, goal setting, self-talk, visualization, discerning one's inner voice, and using the inner voice to encourage and motivate change. |

Table 4.10

Established Sub Themes: Expert

| Sub Theme | Definition |
|---|---|
| Job Preparation | Activities undertaken to prepare for a job or career. These activities include but are not limited to acquiring an education, continuing job training, attaining a college degree, exploring interest in career, interning, and volunteering to work to acquire and enhance job performance skills, and aligning the career move with personal interest and attitude. |
| Education Key to a Better Job | Education identified as the key factor by individuals with prospects of finding skill comparable employment that ensures a competitive salary. Education perceived as being linked to quality employment, successful career, and higher salaries. |
| Friends and Family provide emotional and financial support | Financial support is the type of tangible support provided by family and friends to a formerly or currently incarcerated individual to help meet immediate needs that require monetary value for reintegration. Emotional support is the type of support that encompasses emotional nurturance on part of family or friends. Both forms of support provide formerly incarcerated individuals a sense of belonging, encouragement, and motivation necessary for successful reintegration into society. |
| Friends and Family See Education as a Real Attempt to Change Life Circumstances | Education perceived as having transformational power to help change life circumstances. Education perceived as empowering, increasing chances of employability, changing belief system, attitude, and behavior. |
| Change in Belief System | Changes in self-destructive behaviors that required challenging negative internal chatter, thoughts, and emotions that contribute to development of faulty principles in core belief system. These changes often lead to more constructive lifestyle changes that align to the norms and mores of society. |

| Sub Theme | Definition |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Increased Self-confidence | Sense of being secure in one's power and ability to change and effect change. |
| Spiritual Enlightenment | Sense of having attained a consciousness and understanding of the self as it relates to spiritual enlightenment. This enlightenment encompasses having reached a level of self-realization beyond the ego. |
| Becoming a Role Model | A person whose constructive behaviors exhibit personal success that can be emulated by others. |
| Stronger Ability to Communicate | Becoming efficient at conveying information about something. This ability is based on delivering information through speaking, writing, and utilizing non-verbal cues to raise others awareness about something. |
| Quality of Life | This is a multidimensional concept that encompasses acquiring the best possible physical, psychological, spiritual, social, and financial well-being. |
| Self-awareness | The capacity for introspection and ability to recognize one's individuality. |
| Make Amends | One's way of demonstrating remorse for past wrongs and reestablishing one's self through acts of conscious atonement. |

Existing theory and themes in literature. The directed analysis encompassed further exploration of the established codes that emerged from these processes and the *a priori* codes established from prior research finding and existing theories reviewed and discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. Table 4.11 represents the *a priori* codes from prior theories and research findings.

Table 4.11

Theory and Themes Found within the Lifestyle Change and Desistance Literature

| Theory | Theme |
|-----------------------|--|
| Maturational | <p>Decline in criminal behavior over the life course; change was part of maturational reform process; most criminals mature out of criminal activity.</p> <p>Ontogenic, means aging out; individuals grow out of criminal behavior.</p> <p>Psychobiological, neurobiological influences on brain behavior and consequently on human behavior; this also correlates with the age-crime theory.</p> |
| Structural-functional | <p>The bond between the individual and society via norms and mores are key factors in the desistance process; individuals and society make conscious effort to change and accept the changed individual; life course transitions and desistance; trajectories of change; the investment in social bonds is gradual and cumulative; desistance is influenced by “quality” marital bonds over time.</p> <p>Family, peer groups, and school plays a significant role in the adolescent’s change in behavior.</p> <p>Employment, good marriage, and parenthood play a significant role in adult’s change in criminal behavior; this is consistent with control theory; these factors help reduce exposure to delinquent peers and thus help reduce criminal behavior over the life course.</p> <p>Sociogenic, means development of social bonds; steady job and the love of a women help develop social bonds that decrease exposure to criminal behavior.</p> |
| Human Agency | <p>The individual’s volition, choice, decision to give up crime is necessary for desistance to occur.</p> |
| Cognitive Development | <p>The individual incorporates attributions or neutralizations to desist; the individual chooses how to think about criminal behavior and consequences.</p> |

Analysis of Responses to Open-ended Questions

This part of the analysis explored the factors that motivated participants to engage in higher education, the role of family, friends, employment, level of education, and having earned a degree impacted the formerly incarcerated individuals. These questions were also designed to help explore the roles that maturational, cognitive development, structural-functional, and human agency played in their constructive lifestyle changes.

Question ten: What factors do you believe motivated you to engage in higher education while incarcerated? The researcher found this question to be of significant importance to this study. During the literature review of this study, the researcher identified motivation to be a key factor intricately involved in formerly incarcerated individuals' desire to engage in behaviors and activities that brought about constructive changes. Those changes were pivotal towards successful reintegration. Although the reasons for having engaged in a college education during incarceration varied for the respondents, there were some similarities and overlapping details that were identified in their responses to this question. The researcher wanted to explore the research participants' experiences, and more specifically, the reasons behind their participation in a college program during their incarceration.

DD R01 noted that preparation after prison was necessary. *DD R01* made a conscious effort to engage in post-secondary higher education during his incarceration as a way to prepare for the job market upon release. Successful reintegration into society warranted attainment of a college education. His motivation derived from an external stimulus that required attainment of a college degree to as a way to be more marketable for employment upon release. Preparation for release seemed to be the motivating factor

behind his engagement in higher education. In regards to his motivating factor, *DD R01* stated *knowing that I need to prepare for my release to enter into the job market*. He believed that education was necessary for employability and successful reintegration. He obtained a bachelor degree during his incarceration. *DD R01* perceived a college education as the key to employability. Moreover, *DD R01* obtained a master degree upon release and now holds an administrative level position at his place of employment in a social services provider organization.

DM R02 provided an interesting reason as to what motivated him to engage in college education while incarcerated. He stated that he understood there was a need to change how he approached life. His motivation for engagement in college education was more intrinsically stimulated. In his response to this question, *DM R02* specified that he needed to change how he approached life and it can be inferred by his response that his introspection derived from a desire to change destructive belief systems and behaviors that ultimately landed him in prison. The reason he engaged in college education while incarcerated was captured in his statement *the belief that I no longer wanted to continue living life the way I was living. I needed to change my behaviors and education was the best viable option*. He wanted to change his current life circumstances and adapt more meaningful belief systems that would help him secure a constructive lifestyle. *DM R02* was motivated by his desire to change his behaviors to align with his newly adapted and constructive belief systems. He holds a bachelor and master degrees and works as a Personal Assistant to a person with disabilities.

MI R03 was motivated to engage in college level education to uplift himself from the mire of incarceration. He was impressed with the examples established by fellow

incarcerated seminary students and civilian faculty. MI R03 stated that he was *inspired to become a better person*. He was also motivated by a yearning desire for spirituality and to gain knowledge regarding the study of religions. *MI R03* was moved by his endeavor to attain spiritual enlightenment. He achieved both his bachelor and master degree while incarcerated.

While a few of the respondents were motivated through external stimuli, there were specific individuals who were motivated through internal provocations. One respondent was motivated to engage in college level education by a desire to experience a sense of freedom from his physically incarcerated state. *JR R04* stated that *higher education while in prison allowed me to feel a sense of freedom*. He also went on to say that higher education increased the quality of his life. The researcher can infer from *JR R04* response to this question that what motivated him most was a desire to be mentally free in spite of his imprisoned physical state. In his response to the question about the factors that motivated him to engage in higher education while incarcerated, there appeared to be a desire to be mentally and spiritually free from the strongholds of negative circumstance. *JR R04* obtained his master degree while incarcerated and was employed as a Program Coordinator in a social services organization since his release from prison and became a proponent of college level education for prisoners.

JD R05 response to this question was also quite interesting. His eagerness to pursue a college level education was inspired, not exclusively, by a desire to be prepared for reintegration but inclusively a desire to pursue a constructive lifestyle and to become a positive role model for others. *JD R05* stated that *one of the major motivational factors for seeking higher education, was the thought of one day being released and pursuing a*

positive life and being a positive role model. He received a double bachelor and master degrees during his incarceration and has held administrative level positions in the social services field. His accomplishments have allotted him the opportunity to the claim of having become a positive role model.

In response to the question about what motivating factors lead to respondent's engagement in higher education while incarcerated, *JP R06* stated:

“I had reached a critical point in my incarceration that brought me to the realization that I wanted, and needed something better for my life. So I knew that if I didn't do anything for myself, nobody would. Apart from that, I swore that I would NOT return...”

The implication behind *JP R06*'s response to the question regarding the motivating factor behind his pursuit of higher education during his incarceration reminded the researcher about Paternoster & Bushway's (2009) concept about the crystallization of discontent. Paternoster & Bushway (2009) claimed that desistance from crime was a process that was more cognitive and individualistic than others had anticipated. They had inferred that within the desistance process the incarcerated individual, the *working-self*, was faced with the possibility of spending the rest of his life in prison and going on to become the *feared-self* (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). That crystallization of discontent along with the thought of a *possible-self* enjoying life as a free citizen provided the initial motivation that led to a change in identity and desistance from crime (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). In this specific case, the researcher deduced that *JP R06* experienced the crystallization of discontent during his pursuit of higher education. *JP R06* acquired a significant amount of college credits that are equivalent to

the requirement for a degree, and he graduated from a certificate program during his incarceration. He was on worker's compensation for a work related injury.

Some of the respondents alluded to a desire for atonement and engagement in altruistic behavior as the motivating factors that led to their pursuit of higher education. Among them was *TR R07* who attained a bachelor and master degree during his incarceration and went on to obtain a Doctorate upon release. He stated *I wanted an opportunity to position myself to give something back to the community that I became a liability to*. *TR R07* was allotted that opportunity and committed his life to help at-risk youth stay away from crime and out of prison.

JV R08 stated that *it was something positive to do and I valued earning a degree*. Having considered his statement, the researcher implied that *something positive to do* could be interpreted as making right for past wrongs. This also falls along the lines of atonement. *JV R08* achieved his educational endeavors and attained a bachelor and master degrees during his incarceration and went on to complete a second master degree upon his release from prison. *JV R08* committed his life to the provision of services for marginalized groups and became a laborious advocate for funding of college level education for prisoners.

FB R09 presented his resilience and desire to prove his innocence as the motivating factors that led him on an educational journey where he achieved his bachelor degree while incarcerated. His desire to prove his innocence could literally be categorized as wanting to achieve his freedom. *FB R09* stated *I was set to begin college but was arrested a month before classes began. In prison, I sought to continue this goal and also needed to learn better communication to prove my innocence*. His commitment

towards higher education during incarceration was motivated by his internal desire to be free.

RS R10's response to the question about factors that he believed had motivated him to engage in higher education during his incarceration support the concepts of salvation, commitment to critical thinking, and atonement. He penned the following response:

I felt that the only thing that would save me from the experience of incarceration was education. I also felt that education would be the best thing to help me understand why I was sent to prison. I needed to understand my plight in a way where I understood it wholly.

He later went on to demonstrate and realize those goals upon his release. RS R10 acquired his bachelor and master degree while incarcerated. He also committed his life to working with youth in urban communities.

The survey research participants provided a wealth of information. They shared both unique and similar experiences concerning the motivational factors that led them to embark on their educational journeys and influenced their constructive lifestyle changes. There seemed to be some similarities in the themes that derived from participants' responses. Among them were the respondents' desires to experience a sense of freedom, to adapt constructive lifestyles, to make amends for past mistakes, and to increase chances of employability. Although the origin of their motivation varied, many of the respondents shared similar stories of success upon release. In sum, whether their motivation was stimulated internally or externally was not as important as their success in employability, adaptability of constructive lifestyles, and more importantly, their

commitment to be assets instead of liabilities to the communities where they returned to upon release.

Question eleven: What role did your family play in your life upon release from prison? The literature review in chapter 2 shed light on the importance of structural factors in the lives of formerly incarcerated individuals engaged in adapting constructive lifestyle changes that led to desistance from crime. The institution of family lies within the boundaries of the structural framework. In order to gain a better understanding about the role and correlation between the family and each respondent's ability to make constructive lifestyle changes that led to desistance, the researcher analyzed the participants' responses to this question.

In reference to the question *DD R01* stated *they supported me mentally and financially*. While his response was kind of abstract, some of the other respondents shared similar statements. *DM R02* stated *my family played the primary role of providing housing, financial and emotional support*. Since money and housing have been identified as essential to help meet material and safety needs, the researcher can infer that the family plays a significant role in the lives of formerly incarcerated individuals and their ability to change and desist. The financial support received from family also served the respondents as a springboard and incentive to gain employment in order to make a much easier transition without the threat of going hungry and without shelter. Their responses to this question revealed some of the concrete resources that were provided by their families; however, their families also provided them with intangible support.

The emotional support received by the respondents also played a critical role in their reintegration process. It helped them overcome some of the stressors and barriers

often associated with lack of financial income. This type of support also helped them maintain more healthier and positive outlooks on their reintegration process. *MI R03* stated *my family played a very significant role because they were there to embrace me back into society with their love, understanding, kindness, and care.* *JR R04* also demonstrated the importance of emotional support from family. He echoed similar sentiments in his response to the question. *JR R04* indicated that by his comment *my family was very supportive upon my release: loving, caring, financially, emotionally.*

JD R05 also stated:

“my family provided a huge level of support. My mother in particular helped me get helped me get around in the city, in addition to providing me some financial assistance. My wife was also a constant source of support on various levels.”

Their families did not just provide housing and financial support alone, they complimented those tangible provisions with the type of reinforcement necessary to help them get through their mental states. Such states were ascribed to the experiences that they encountered upon release. The researcher can infer that emotional and spiritual support helped them become appreciative of those providing assistance to them. In other words, it helped them build strong connections with their families. Those meaningful bonds that were developed potentially led to positive changes that can account for their successful reentry and their ability to maintain engaged in the desistance process.

It would be unwise to attribute any form of support as effective, in and by itself, rather the combined forms and various levels of support were fundamental to successful reentry for the participants. The overall support provided by the respondents' families were significant.

JP R06 claimed that all of his basic needs were met. In his response, he mentioned *my only responsibility was to stay out of trouble and away from negative things that would cause me to recidivate*. This was a case of positive reinforcement. The family had an expectation. In return for their support, he would have to hold himself accountable to higher standards that guaranteed desistance. *TR R07* conveyed a similar response: *all of the essentials were provided to me from the entire family*. He also stated *my family was very supportive of my return to society*, and *JV R08* specified *my family was my support network for a home, financial support, and also for employment*. Moreover, *FB R09* who had been falsely accused of committing a crime and was exonerated for it declared a statement about his family that *their encouragement also helped me inspire lawyers to help me*.

The researcher postulated that provision of support by the family members of formerly incarcerated individuals was a significant factor necessary for their successful reentry. Nonetheless, their families also played a critical role in the conditioning and re-socialization of the individuals by having reinforced positive behaviors that warranted the rewards provided. Critical reflection of the shared experiences by respondents led the researcher to surmise that positive reinforcement utilized by the families was an effective tool that complimented the negative punishment imposed upon the individuals during their incarceration for past behaviors. Thus, the researcher assumed that the families engaged in respondents' conditioning and re-socialization upon release and this had significant outcomes.

One of the respondents shared what appeared to be quite a different experience from the others. *RS R10* asserted that he lacked the necessary support needed from

family. However, the researcher assumed that he was referring to financial support as opposed to the various levels of support that could have been provided to him upon release from a source other than himself. In retrospect, he stated *my family didn't play much of a role because I didn't have much of a family*. He did, however, have a mother present in his life upon release. Nonetheless, he declared that *my mother who was my only real support could not truly support me in ways that I needed. She battled her own struggles and I understood that she could only play a certain role in my life and I accepted that*. That last phrase of his response to the question indeed implied that his mother had played, to some degree, a role in his reintegration process. Perhaps the researcher can infer that it could have been some intangible form of support similar to that experienced by the others.

The responses to question ten revealed rich insights about some of the roles that the families of the formerly incarcerated individuals played in their reintegration process. The families provided them support in various forms and levels ranging from financial assistance to emotional and moral support. These various types of support, their various levels, and various degrees of support provided the respondents with incentives for constructive change. Those changes were part of a process that led the respondents on a journey towards successful reintegration and desistance from crime.

Question twelve: What role did your friends play in your life upon release from prison? Like the institution of family, there also exists within the realm of the structural framework the concept of friendship. The term friendship was termed as a relationship of mutual affection between two or more people that borders on a stronger form of interpersonal bond than an association (Merriam-Webster, 2003). Since the

concept of friendship falls within the structural framework, the researcher sought to explore the role played by friends in the lives of the research participants upon their release from prison. This led to an analysis of responses for this question.

DD R01 provided a very blunt answer. In reference to friends, he stated *they supported me mentally and financially*. Whereas, *DM R02* provided a more meaningful and reflective answer. He suggested *my friends upon release were those men who I had formed a bond with within prison walls. They played a major role in guiding me through the transition process based on their experiences*.

While *MI R03* suggested that his friends played a small role because most of his true friends had either moved away or were deceased. *JR R04* also stated that they were very supportive, had provided guidance, and shared their experiences with the reentry process. He claimed that his friends had assisted him with job leads, clothing, and helped him with job placement.

The role of friends is similar to that of the family. *DM R02*'s response to this question suggested that his friends were those men with whom he had developed bonds with during his incarceration. Thus, it can be inferred that friends were deemed as an extended family. *JD R05* confirmed that in his response to this question. *JD R05* stated: "my friends were actually more than family, because these were the same 'friends' that were with me behind the wall so the sense of support was equivalent to that of family."

JP R06 suggested that his were invaluable friendships that enabled him to cope certain thing that he could not have entrusted his biological family with. *TR R07* stated that *they were there through my process of reintegration*. Moreover, *JV R08* implied that his friends served as a strong network of support that helped him with employment upon

release. *FB R09* also insinuated that his friends were loyal throughout his ordeal and that they assisted him socially and financially. It was important to note that some of the respondents perceived their friends to have become extended family members and at least one of the respondent's felt that the friendships he had developed could be entrusted with matters otherwise not privy to biological family members. One implication behind this perception is that friendships with individuals who have experienced a similar ordeal are perceived as sensitive and non-judgmental. That perception can lead to development of a more meaningful friendship and acceptance of the individual as an extended family member.

RS R10 supported that claim. He stated:

“I consider my friends are the guys I was incarcerated with, and they were extremely important in my life. We stayed in touch, we supported each other and kept tabs on each other even if it wasn't or isn't often. They are important to me and there is a bond that I share with them that could never be broken.”

The respondents provided great insights about the role of friends in the lives of formerly incarcerated individuals upon release. Similar to the role of family the friends were described as emotionally and financially supportive. They were deemed helpful and considered to be a great support network, they were awesome providers of guidance driven by having undergone similar shared experiences with the reentry process. Last but not least, they were resourceful in terms of assisting the respondents in preparation for employment. This leads to an analysis of the next question of the second data set.

Question thirteen: What role did employment play in your life upon release from prison? Prior research findings have identified employment for adults as having a

significant impact on successful reentry. This formal institution also falls within the structural framework. The researcher was interested in learning respondents' perspectives about the implications that employment had on their reentry process.

Most of the respondents elaborated on various roles that employment played in their lives upon release. DD R01 shared his experience and stated *it helped me stabilize my life and my children*. Employment served as a way to gain financial stability and provided him with the leverage needed to support his family. Other respondents concurred. DM R02 stated that *being employed a month after release gave me the stability needed to begin setting goals, obtain my apartment, credit card, license, and car*. Employment allowed him to regain a sense of self-assurance in his capacity to successfully reintegrate and that helped him make a smooth transition. He later indicated that viable employment was the number one factor preventing him from reverting to old belief systems. DM R02's response also alluded that *economic stability is the #1 factor in men and women believing in themselves and being able to provide for their needs*.

One of the respondents identified the link between education, training while incarcerated, and employment. MI R03 suggested that employment played a major role for him upon release. He iterated that it was easy to obtain employment. Perhaps that was due to the training and education he had undergone while incarcerated. JR R04 shared that he obtained employment shortly after being released from prison. He mentioned *I gained employment 87 days after my release from prison; I felt independent, free, purposeful and meaningful; I felt like a citizen*. His answer sheds light on the importance of being accepted back into the workforce. It speaks volumes to the

structural frame that emphasized the need for development of a bond between society and the formerly incarcerated individual as a way to reduce the potential for recidivism.

JD R05 claimed that employment provided him with the resources necessary to care for himself and his family upon release. He indicated that *seeking and landing a job was paramount* to successful reentry. JP R06 echoed a similar response and suggested that employment enabled him to gain a sense of pride because he was able to make ends meet and purchase things he wanted. He emphasized that he had experienced a sense of pride due to earning his keep as opposed to engaging in illegal activities.

There was one respondent who commented on having obtained a job for an entry level position a couple of months after being release due to the level of training and education he received while incarcerated. TR R07 was promoted five years later to an administrative level position. His job stability and promotion are a reflection of the type of structural relationship that demonstrates acceptance and development of a significant bond between the formerly incarcerated individual and society. JV R08 also stated *I started working within one week of my release and it gave me purpose, income and confidence*. FB R09 suggested that *employment was paramount to reentry to support my wife and children*, and RS R10 claimed that employment was extremely important. The latter stated *it gave me a sense of belonging and normalcy. Being employed today has made my past easier to swallow*.

The researcher infers that that level of acceptance can positively impact the transition of the individual into the workforce and ultimately his successful reintegration into society at large.

The participants' responses have demonstrated an appreciation over the implications of employment on their lives upon release. The benefits of having attained employment were innumerable for these formerly incarcerated individuals. However, one of the most significant benefits identified by the researcher was that the men were accepted in the workplace and treated as any other staff member would have been treated, in spite of existing stigmas about the formerly incarcerated population.

Question fourteen: What role did your level of education play in your life upon release from prison? The researcher identified post-secondary higher education as a huge investment of time, effort, and money that led to opportunities. This type of investment made a difference in the lives of the research participants. However, the researcher did not explore respondents' employment gross income to determine whether their various levels of education predisposed them to earning higher salaries. The researcher did explore respondents' varying educational levels and their current job type or occupation so inferences were made based on these categories.

In response to this question, *DD R01* suggested that *obtaining a Master's Degree made me more marketable*. *DM R02* emphasized that his level of education served as leverage in the job market. He claimed that his level of education had a significant impact and helped change his life. *JR R04* also proposed that his Master's degree allowed him to compete in the job market. One of the respondents shared quite a different experience than most about his educational level. This respondent obtained double bachelors and a master degree while incarcerated and has held various administrative level positions. *JD R05* stated:

“At first it really didn’t matter, because even though I had a higher level of education I lacked the experience. I will say that once I acquired some experience the level of education was definitely something that placed me on a competitive level to seek and secure good paying jobs.”

Although his educational level did not immediately predispose him to securing a *good paying job* upon release, he eventually was able to move up the ladder and acquired an administrative level job which may have impacted his lifetime salary. Burnsed (2011) stated:

“Those with bachelor’s degrees who work either in management or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) earn more, on average, than people with advanced degrees of any level who work in fields like education, sales, and community service.”

JD R05 has held an administrative level position at the place of his employment. It sufficed to suggest that levels of education with the appropriate work experience predisposes formerly incarcerated individuals to land managerial jobs or careers that pay a competitive salary. *JP R06* implied that his educational level helped him search and obtain meaningful employment. In his response about the role that level of education played in his life upon release, he stated *it helped me search out and obtain employment that I liked and wanted to be a part of*. It was clearly more about an alignment, perhaps with his core beliefs, between the individual and the type of job he accessed.

TR R07 suggested that his level of education provided him *an opportunity to grow into a solid manager, and ultimately a director*. *RS R10* stated *I have 2 master degrees and as I’ve explained earlier, education has allowed me to understand my situation a bit*

clearer. His educational level predisposed him to making connections between his personal deviation from the norms of social behavior and existing societal ills related to poverty, oppression, and unjust laws.

In sum, the role that levels of education played in the lives of respondents upon release from prison varied from making them more marketable for the job market to helping them access meaningful jobs with competitive salary to empowering them with the capacity to become analytical thinkers. The overall benefits of between the participants' levels of education were obvious. Educational levels predisposed the participants to better opportunities. Most of them reported attaining employment shortly upon release from prison, holding administrative and upper management positions at their places of employment, job stability, and longevity.

Question nineteen: How has earning a degree impacted your life? The respondents' answers to this question have convinced the researcher of the importance of acquiring a college degree. In contemporary times, earning a degree has become a necessity especially for women and minorities (Burnsed, 2011). Formerly incarcerated individuals fall into the latter category. Burnsed (2011) stated that "*Latinos and African-Americans with master's degrees earn nearly the same in their lifetime—roughly \$2.50 million—as white workers who have a bachelor's degree.*" This question sought to explore some of the implications behind having acquired a degree on respondents' lives.

Some of the respondents supported the notion that a college degree was not only integral to their financial success but to other areas of their lives. *DD R01* claimed that he was able to stabilize his life as a result of having acquired his college degree. For *DM R02* having acquired a degree motivated his family members to engage in post-secondary

higher education to acquire their own college degrees. It was evident that earning a college degree was impactful on various levels for both the respondents' and their families. *MI R03* stated that earning a degree *had a major impact on my life because I became a better person*, and *JR R04* also claimed that *it has enriched my life and made me a valued member of society*. Most of the respondents echoed the significance of having attained a college degree.

JD R05 composed his response to this question and highlighted various implications. He inferred that his earned degree had opened doors of opportunity and enabled him to make positive choices in his life. *JD R05* suggested that his college degrees helped *derailed my chances at recidivism and changed the course of my life*. That inference helped support the belief in the transformative power of education to help formerly incarcerated individuals transcend beyond the stigmas and barriers that would otherwise lead them to continue living destructive lifestyles. *JP R06* supported that claim when he implied that earning a degree had solidified his commitment to do whatever he set his mind to accomplish. For some of the respondents the benefits of engaging in higher education and earning a degree were evident earlier in the process while they were still incarcerated. *JV R08* stated *I believe it was key to me surviving my incarceration mentally sound and purpose driven* and *FB R09* suggested that earning a degree gave him self-worth and confidence. *RS R10* affirmed many of those claims and added that earning a degree while in prison gave him a higher purpose and helped him change direction from his destructive lifestyle.

Earning a college has become a necessity for individuals interested in earning higher salary in their lifetime (Burnsed, 2011). It can be said that the same was true for

these formerly incarcerated individuals who were interested in preparing themselves to compete in the job market upon release, to transform their lives and lead productive lives as returning citizens, and those interested in making amends to their families and communities for past wrongs. The impact of having earned their college degrees surpassed their need to earn higher salary in our competitive society.

Informal program evaluation of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison College program. This informal program evaluation followed a systematic method similar to the one used in previous sections analyzed. The purpose of this part of the study of the study was to collect and analyze the data collected to help answer questions about Hudson Link's effectiveness and to gather recommendations from its former participants to improve the program. The researcher sought to accomplish this objective by asking the respondents to share their personal experiences as former students, graduate, and now alumni of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison college program. The questions followed a sequential order in the survey that was administered and respondents were asked to answer the same questions in order.

Question fifteen: How were you received by Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program? *DD R01* shared his experience. He stated *Hudson Link was very supportive with me obtaining my BS and MS degrees. Without the support of Hudson Link, I don't think that would have been possible.* *DM R02* claimed that he was received with opened arms. Hudson Link assisted him by providing him with a laptop computer, clothes, shoes, and they assisted him with the use of technology during his job search. *MI R03* also echoed that claim. He went further to mention that he had worked closely with Hudson Link during his incarceration through provision of services. *JR R04*

also mentioned that he was accepted with opened arms and assisted on various levels during his transition into the community. *JD R05* suggested that he had received limited support because he had already been home four years before he reconnected to Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison college program. *JP R06* and *TR R07* specified that they were treated with respect by the Hudson Link staff. They were content with how they were received by the staff. Both *JV R09* and *RS R10* also added that they had been provided with laptop computers, clothes, shoes, and technical assistance during their job search process by Hudson Link.

Question sixteen: What would you have liked more of from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program? Although Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison helps its alumni upon release, they only provide referral services to its alumni. Most of Hudson Link's services are catered to incarcerated individuals and the same goes for their families. *DD R01* stated *I would have liked them to be more hands on with alumni and our immediate family.* Hudson Link's geographic location posed barriers for its alumni. *DM R02* suggested *that they should have been located in New York City rather than upstate* and that *they would have more minority hiring within the organization.* Since most of Hudson Link's alumni reside within the five boroughs in NYC, the organization may want to look into establishing an extension site in one of their offsite locations in NYC. They may want to look into where they hold the monthly alumni meetings. While physical location was identified as a barrier to alumni services, Hudson Link should consider working on other areas of improvement.

In response to the question about what alumni would have liked more of from Hudson Link, *MI R03* suggested *I would have liked more tutors, instructors, teachers,*

and counselors from Hudson Link. As has been noted previously, Hudson Link functions as a non-profit organization and its annual budget leaves much to be desired. The organization's annual budget barely meets its running costs so they depend on private donations to ensure that overhead costs and services for incarcerated students are covered. Hudson Link lacks substantial financial backing. This poses financial risks for the organization. Therefore, Hudson Link depends largely on in-kind services for their students and alumni. Hudson Link mostly uses volunteers to tutor, teach, and run its offices. Because of its financial standings, Hudson Link provides minimal services to its alumni.

JR R04 shared an interesting opinion of ways to raise monies so that Hudson Link could potentially increase and improve its service provision to both incarcerated students and alumni. He stated *HL needs to find a way to engage its alumni for purposes of marketing HL to the public and funders...* *JD R05* also indicated that Hudson Link should *seek out the alumni more and allow them to become more involved with HL.*

Although Hudson Link expanded its services throughout five NYS prisons since its implementation at Sing Sing Correctional Facility, some of its alumni feel the need to maximize its potential by expanding services to other correctional facilities irrespective of their security statuses. In other words, he felt that Hudson Link should be implemented in minimum, medium, and maximum security facilities alike. *JP R06* suggested that Hudson Link should *continue doing their work in prisons and expand it to other prisons.* One of the respondents even suggested that Hudson Link should expand their degree programs to include a variety of degrees in the various fields and doctoral studies. In response to this question, *TR R07* also suggested *to take the education level*

higher. This type of attitude and suggestion for expansion was indicative of the alumni's appreciation of Hudson Link and belief in its effective service provision.

In spite of its effectiveness, one of its alumni emphasized the need for improvement. *FB R09* suggested that Hudson Link could have provided him with direct financial assistance to help him pay for college courses upon release. *RS R10* also felt that *Hudson Link should have been in more prisons*.

Question seventeen: What would have liked less of from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program? This question served of little purpose for this study. Most of the respondents either did not respond or responded not applicable to this question. There seemed to be a general consensus among the respondents in regards to this message. In the previous question most respondents provided recommendations for Hudson Link's improvement so their lack of responses to this question or scribbling *not applicable* as an answer supports their attitudes and belief in the program's effectiveness and desired need for improvement.

Question eighteen: How did Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program help you? Responses to some of previous questions alluded to some of the services that Hudson Link provided them and various ways that Hudson Link helped them upon release. The respondents' answers to this question solidified those previous responses and confirmed a degree of Hudson Link's effectiveness in servicing its alumni.

DD R01 affirmed that Hudson Link provided him with the necessary support to complete his degree requirements, and *DM R02* stated that *besides the laptop and clothes, I am currently employed because of Hudson Link*. He claimed that Hudson Link staff had referred him to his current employer where he has been working the past three years. *MI*

R03 alleged that Hudson Link had helped him become involved to a degree where he positioned himself to help other students and alumni. JR R04 claimed that Hudson Link helped improve his quality of life. JD R05 also echoed the words of MI R03. JD R05 stated *I was actually involved in HL since its inception. I was an assistant to some of the professors so we can say HL gave me an opportunity to give back.*

While the respondents suggested appreciation for the basic resources they had received from Hudson Link, JP R06 was grateful for the intangible resources and the opportunities that he was afforded by Hudson Link. JP R06 suggested that Hudson Link enabled him to become a thinker. In response to this question, TR R07 commented and claimed that those opportunities also led to development of important networks for him upon release. JV R08 stated that Hudson Link *gave me purpose while incarcerated and support upon release*, and FB R09 claimed that *HL helped me pursue dreams I had before being wrongfully convicted*. In general, RS R10 stated that *Hudson Link provides a better opportunity for men and women wanting to better their lives*. Hudson Link for Higher Education provided respondents with various resources necessary for successful reintegration into their communities. The wealth provided to respondents by Hudson Link ranged from tangible resources to human capital development, from opportunities for self-improvement to chances to give back to peers and their communities, and from the tangible to the intangible assets.

Question twenty: Do you have any recommendations? This question was of great importance to this research; however, six out of the ten survey participants did not respond to this question. The purpose of this question was to gather the respondents' recommendations for future research, practice, policy advocacy, policy proposal,

suggestions for Hudson Link's quality improvement, workforce development, and overall recommendations to address the ills related to the elimination of Pell funding for incarcerated individuals. It would have been preferable to provide recommendations in chapter 5 for future researchers, practitioners, policy coalitions and advocates, and for readers directly from the respondents' perspectives rather than that of the researcher alone.

Four of the respondents provided their recommendations, but most of their recommendations were for Hudson Link's maintenance of quality services and improvement. *MI R03* suggested that Hudson Link should work collaboratively with the media to expand the public's awareness and find potential funders to help support post-secondary higher education for prisoners. He also recommended that Hudson Link continue to hold their annual funding events and alumni monthly gatherings to help support the alumni and their families. *TR R07* recommended that Hudson Link continue to establish relationships with NYS Department of Correctional Services' administration and others throughout prisons across the country to seek support and implements programs for incarcerated individuals in every prison. *JV R08* advised Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison to continue to hold high standards for the program, its students, and alumni recommended that HL enhance its creativity by utilizing its alumni for fundraising events.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher content analyzed the data collected for this study. The researcher engaged in an integrated approach to content analysis. During the first phase of the analysis, the researcher used a conventional strategy based on inductive

reasoning for the first data set analyzed and provided a descriptive account of the study sample's demographic information. During the second phase the researcher content analyzed the second data set utilizing a deductive reasoning strategy and conducted a directed content analysis. The researcher explored some of the questioning and inferences of earlier studies on post-secondary higher education and its implications on the employability of formerly incarcerated men in NYS and their constructive lifestyle changes. During the third phase of the analysis, the researcher conducted a basic evaluation of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison college program.

The researcher explored the first set of nine multiple-choice questions in the survey to help distinguish the demographic characteristics of the surveyed sample and to help formulate a profile of each study participant. Also, the researcher content analyzed the second set of six open-ended questions in the survey to help explore the formerly incarcerated male students' thoughts, opinions, and feelings about post-secondary higher education and its implications on their employability, and constructive lifestyle changes. This phase of the analysis depended on a deductive reasoning strategy. Moreover, the researcher conducted an analysis of the third set of four questions to help evaluate the effectiveness of the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program, and it used the final questions to explore respondents' recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter the researcher will discuss the findings of this study and share the implications drawn from the content analyzed data. Additionally, the researcher will

impart readers with extrapolations for future studies on post-secondary higher education as it relates to the employability of formerly incarcerated individuals and constructive lifestyle changes that impacted their desistance from crime process. This chapter will discuss the implications that post-secondary higher education has on the employability of 10 male formerly incarcerated college graduates. The researcher will also disclose whether or not the objectives of this study were accomplished.

Since the elimination of Pell Grant funding for incarcerated individuals, recidivism continues to increase in NYS (BJS, 2007; Clinton, 1995). Tough-on-crime laws do not remedy the problem with soaring recidivism rates. The cost for mass incarceration are astronomical and continuously increasing; the consequences are costly on many levels. The expense for warehousing each prisoner per year is as high as \$60,067 (Mann, 2014). Moreover, the Vera Institute of Justice (2012) reported a \$3.6 billion budget for support of NYS prisons and an additional \$2.7 billion budget to support the Department of Corrections and Community Supervisions. In this case, we have to contradict Niccolo Machiavelli's claim because *that end* does not justify the means. There is a dire need to implement a cost-effective strategy to address the problems associated with recidivism and mass incarceration. Evidence suggests that post-secondary higher education can increase chances of employability for formerly incarcerated individuals (Esperian, 2010; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998) and decrease recidivism rates while increasing chances of desistance from crime (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Chappell, 2004; Esperian, 2010; Fuentes, Rael & Duncan, 2010; Jancic, 1998; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Travis, 2011; Warr, 1998; Wheeldon, 2010). Since it is a cost-

effective way to address the problem, it would be in everyone's interests to support programs that promote PSHE for incarcerated individuals.

According to Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison (2015) it takes only \$5,000 per year for an incarcerated individual to obtain a bachelor's degree. This study supports the argument for cost benefits effects of PSHE. The researcher infers that PSHE was positively correlated with respondents' employability and desistance from crime that positively impacts recidivism. Study participants' account suggests that post-secondary higher education is key to feeling a sense of freedom while incarcerated. They attribute their ability to obtain employment upon release, their pursuit of career paths, desistance, and their successful reintegration into society to college education and degrees. If it works, why not use it? After all, who do you prefer to have as your neighbor?

The researcher's interest with this study came about as a result of his personal experience of living a destructive lifestyle during adolescence that led to his involvement in crime, being arrested, experiencing a trial, violent felony convictions, and serving most of his young adult life in prison. During his incarceration, he was exposed to incarcerated college students who had undergone constructive lifestyle changes that better prepared them for their reintegration process. It became clear to him that many of the individuals who had obtained their degrees while incarcerated were not recidivating upon release, as opposed to those who lacked college credentials and skills - which he saw return to prison on numerous occasions during his stretch of incarceration.

The formerly incarcerated researcher commenced his educational journey through involvement in a prison college program that led to completion of a Certificate Program in Ministry and Human Services at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. Unfortunately, as a

result of the elimination of Pell Grant funding for prisoners in 1995, he was not able to complete his degree requirements while incarcerated. Nonetheless, he was able to complete his bachelor's degree shortly after his release in 2005 and went on to complete his master's degree in 2010 at which time he was also discharged from parole without ever going back to prison; he did not even have a parole violation.

Due to his own experience, the researcher intended to conduct this qualitative survey study to share the respondents' feelings, views, opinions, and experiences with post-secondary higher education and its implications on constructive lifestyle changes which led to their employability and desistance from crime. The objective is to shed light on the negative consequences behind the elimination of Pell Grant funding for incarcerated individuals while adding emphasis to the importance of utilizing post-secondary higher education to help prepare them for return back to their families, the job market, communities, and society at-large. This study demonstrates that those individuals who received a college education while incarcerated, fared better upon release and successfully reintegrated. As a result of acquiring a college education, the survey study participants were better prepared for employment, most of them became productive members in their communities and larger society upon release, and they were less likely to recidivate.

Implication of Findings

The implications of this study derived from content analyzed data. The data was obtained from 10 male formerly incarcerated students who graduated from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison's college program located in one of the five participating correctional facilities in NYS. These men were released from prison and discharged from

parole at least one to five years post-release from prison. The content analyzed data allowed for a discussion concerning the findings and implications of this study.

The implications that post-secondary higher education (PSHE) had on formerly incarcerated individuals who obtained their college degrees while incarcerated in a NYS prison. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher implies that PSHE increased the study participants' ability to adequately prepare for their reentry process. Respondents' decision to enroll in a post-secondary higher education program while incarcerated, increased their chances of obtaining employment upon release and helped them desist from crime. PSHE leads to constructive lifestyle changes and those changes can impact recidivism. Human agency plays a significant role in individuals' ability to desist. Hearn (2010) claimed that the individual's volition, choice, and decision to give up crime, is necessary before desistance could occur. The respondents may have incorporated attributions that helped them engage in the process of desistance; that idea is consistent with the cognitive development frame discussed in Chapter 1 of this study. The respondents' engagement in PSHE helped them acquire degrees while in prison. They wanted to be prepared to compete in the marketplace and make a decent salary to support their families upon release.

As previously mentioned, preparation for reentry is a process that begins the first day of an individual's detainment or incarceration. The process includes acquiring valuable skills and work experiences through completion of vocational programs and programs that offer college courses such as: Hudson Link. Participants that graduated from Hudson Link and obtained their degrees while incarcerated, were able to make successful transitions back into their roles as husbands, fathers, employees, graduate

students, and constructive citizens of society. The findings are consistent with the structural-functional theory commonly used as a theoretical frame in some of the literature discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. The literature emphasized that the bond between formerly incarcerated individuals and society reinforces the norms and mores that are key factors in the desistance process (Laub, Samson & Nagin, 1998; Samson & Laub, 1993; Visser & Travis, 2003; Warr, 1998; Weaver, 2013). Prior research suggests that individuals and society need to make conscious efforts to change and accept the changed individual as a productive member of society (Laub, Samson & Nagin, 1998; Samson & Laub, 1993; Visser & Travis, 2003; Warr, 1998; Weaver, 2013). The investment in social bond is gradual and cumulative; however, it leads to constructive changes in behavior that positively influences desistance from crime (Laub, Samson & Nagin, 1998; Samson & Laub, 1993; Visser & Travis, 2003; Warr, 1998; Weaver, 2013).

All of the research participants engaged in PHSE during their incarceration, graduated from Hudson Link, and obtained their degrees while in prison, and thus, were able to make such investments upon release. Therefore, the researcher implies that PSHE leads to changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that allowed them to redevelop social bonds. In sum, all of the participants who engaged in PSHE and acquired their college degrees were able to make constructive lifestyle changes that allowed them to desist from crime.

This study supports the costs-benefits argument that attributes PSHE to increasing chances of employment for formerly incarcerated individuals and increases their chances of desistance from crime. Thus, PSHE can potentially decrease the soaring cost of mass incarceration and recidivism rates.

The impact of having obtained an associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degree while in prison. The research suggests that individuals with higher levels of education earn more and are more likely than others to be employed (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013). While friends and family identified education as a real attempt by the formerly incarcerated individuals to change life circumstances, most of the individuals identified their degree acquisition as an opportunity to compete for competitive salary employment in the workforce. Participants perceived education itself as having transformational power that allowed them to change attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Those changes along with having acquired a college degree, increased their chances for employability upon release. Based on the contents analyzed in this study, the researcher infers that individuals who acquire their college degree whether an associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's, can increase their chances of employability. Additionally, research suggests that the higher the degree attained, the higher the lifetime salary (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013).

The implications for employability of formerly incarcerated individuals who acquired their degrees are astounding; however, the findings from this survey research illuminated some of the imperceptible properties behind the acquisition of a college degree. Some of the minor themes that emerged from this study helped the researcher arrive at specific conclusions concerning the intangible benefits of a college degree. Some of the participants attributed their changes in belief systems, increased self-confidence, and even their spiritual enlightenment, to having acquired a college education and degree (Table 4.15).

The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, a recent merger between the NYS Department of Correctional Services and the Division of Parole, should consider the benefits of funding college education for incarcerated individuals. The findings of this study provide the basis for the researcher to make implications about the benefits of a college degree similar to those already mentioned in previous research. The Executive Budget for the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision for fiscal year 2014 was 3.1 billion (Fischer, 2014).

The findings of this study are aligned with those of previous studies that suggest that post-secondary higher education and acquisition of a college degree can increase chances of employability for formerly incarcerated individuals (Esperian, 2010; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Warr, 1998). The findings also aligned with studies that suggest that PSHE helps decrease recidivism rates and increase chances of formerly incarcerated individuals to desist from crime (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Chappell, 2004; Esperian, 2010; Fuentes, Rael & Duncan, 2010; Jancic, 1998; Jensen & Reed, 2006; Karpowitz & Kenner, 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Steurer & Smith, 2001; Travis, 2011; Warr, 1998; Wheeldon, 2010).

Considering the astronomical budget for the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision for fiscal year 2014, funding college education for prisoner appears to be a cost-effective way to address the current recidivism rates in NYS. The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Comparisons should be open to the idea of working closely with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison to help implement more programs and expand access to college education throughout all NYS facilities.

While Commissioner Brian Fischer proposed the need for a \$3.1 billion budget in fiscal year 2013/2014, Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison (2015) suggests that it takes only \$5,000 per year for an incarcerated individual to obtain a bachelor's degree. The researcher implies that funding college education for incarcerated individuals seems like a worthy investment and effective way to increase employment opportunities, promote desistance from crime, and address recidivism rates. Whether through support for reinstatement of Pell Grants or alternative funding options for incarcerated individuals' college education, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision can play a significant role in this conversation.

Educational level predisposed formerly incarcerated individuals to obtaining a career versus a profession. The findings of this study lean towards the notion that the educational levels of the participants impacted their ability to engage in careers versus professions. Career and profession are two words that are construed as having similar meaning; however, that is far from the truth. The word profession in this study was used to identify a field of study which individuals are trained in and the word career was used to denote the pursuit of individuals' lifelong ambition. The researcher found that nine out of the ten participants were on a career path and that their educational levels were perceived as having impacted that ability. As previously mentioned, research has suggested that the higher one's educational level, the higher their lifelong salary (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013). While this research did not explore the lifelong salary of participants, it did explore their levels of education. Therefore, the researcher implies that the participants' level of education predisposed them to pursuing lifelong careers versus a profession.

The researcher recommends that organizations such as: Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, and promoters of PSHE for prisoners, collectively work towards advocacy for its funding. Moreover, they should promote college majors that are consistent with career goals of individuals that are aligned with contemporary lifelong career opportunities.

Limitations

In this section the researcher outlined some of the characteristic of the research design that potentially affected the findings of this study. Although the researcher intended to conduct sound research and put safeguards in place to minimize the limitations inherent with this research methodology, some limitations still occurred in this study.

Limitation one. The sample in this study consisted only of men. In other words, this study lacked the perspective of women about post-secondary higher education and implications on their constructive lifestyle changes and outcomes on their desistance process. During the sample selection process, it was made clear to the researcher by professional practitioners from Hudson Link that most women undergo gender-specific issues during and after their incarceration which impacts their ability to complete their degree requirements. The implications of this study are gender-specific to men so generalizations cannot be made to account for women's experiences with the phenomena.

Limitation two. This study utilized a qualitative design that helped explore the phenomena. A mixed method strategy could have provided the researcher an opportunity to also measure the cause-effect relationship of the phenomena. The use of a mixed methods strategy could have help the researcher measure the effects of post-secondary

higher education on the employability of formerly incarcerated men, the lifestyle changes undergone by them, the effects on NYS recidivism rates, and the effects on their ability to desist from criminal behavior. Creswell (2009) suggested that mixed methods could help develop richer insights that cannot be fully understood using either a qualitative or quantitative strategy alone.

Limitation three. Although survey research provided a cost-effective way to survey formerly incarcerated individuals and obtain data to explore the implications of post-secondary higher education on lifestyle changes of men and their desistance process, it lacked the ability to gather richer data that could have been obtained through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviewing of the participants could have provided the researcher an opportunity to explore the hidden and symbolic contents expressed by participants that goes unexplored in surveying. The researcher was unable to explore the latent contents of data that could have been significant in understanding the data and making more comprehensive inferences.

Limitation four. The researcher in this study decided what content was or was not important to include in the survey that was administered to the sample. There may be something the researcher overlooked during the survey development phase that could have been of importance to the study. The researcher selected the questions to be included in the survey tool. Therefore, the questions selected for the survey may not have completely operationalized the research questions that the study sought to provide answers to. Also, the survey questions were left open to interpretation so the respondents' answers were also subjective.

For example, the last question on the survey was one that presumed that respondents had knowledge of the topic of this study and that they would provide detailed recommendations about the problem, effective interventions, proposals for major policy change to address the problem, and ideas about improving programs such as: Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison. However, respondents' responses to question twenty of the survey were vague and lacking.

Recommendations

Whereas research concerning the implications behind post-secondary higher education on formerly incarcerated individuals' employability and constructive lifestyle changes is scarce, there is a dire need to address the host of ill consequences in our communities associated with lack of funding for incarcerated individuals' college education. The researcher hopes that this survey research will serve to increase the interest of researchers to conduct future studies on the subject. Furthermore, the researcher longs to add powerful perspectives from the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals who obtained their degrees while in prison and successfully engaged in the desistance process to our national conversation about recidivism and the expenses associated with it. The findings of this survey research helped the researcher better understand the problem and provided the basis for making thoughtful recommendations.

Recommendation one. The researcher recommends that future studies on this subject be conducted to include the perspectives of women. The sample for this study consisted of men only. Although Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison provides services in a correctional facility that houses women, they were excluded from this study

to ensure their safety from potentially harmful disclosures. During the sample preparation for this study, the researcher learned that names and email addresses of former Hudson Link women participants and alumna could not be included in the study sample due to barriers that protected their information from being disclosed. It was discovered that some of the alumna reported previous involvement in domestic violence situations. The researcher recommends that appropriate safeguards be put in place to ensure their participation in future studies about post-secondary higher education and its implications. Future studies can include women's perspectives about the phenomena and provide useful insight to help devise more effective strategies that are gender-specific to address the problem.

Recommendation two. Although a qualitative design was appropriate for this survey research, the researcher recommends the use of mixed method approaches to studying the effects of post-secondary higher education on employability and lifestyle changes that affect recidivism rates and desistance from crime. Mixed method approaches can help develop rich insights that cannot be fully understood using either one of two methods - qualitative or quantitative - alone (Creswell, 2009). The use of the two methods combined can provide researchers, practitioners, policy advocates, and policy players a vast perspective about the phenomena to help develop comprehensive approaches to tackling the issues discussed.

Recommendation three. The researcher makes this recommendation for practitioners. While correctional administrators do not create policy regarding the offer of free college education opportunities, they have the authority to accept programs like Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison. Correctional administrators should use the

findings of this study to help them make decisions about the correctional programs that they implement for incarcerated individuals within the institutions that they operate. Furthermore, human service providers should use the outcomes of this study to help them implement and support evidence-based practices with the previously specified population. All practitioners in correctional institutional settings should work collaboratively with educators, religious leaders, and proponents of college education for prisoners like those involved in Hudson Link to implement effective college education programs.

Recommendation four. Discrimination based on stigmas against formerly incarcerated individuals too often serves as barriers to their employability regardless of the rehabilitative processes they have undergone throughout the incarceration period (Cania, 2012). Their skillsets and professional credentials tend to be overlooked by employers who prefer to focus on the labels commonly ascribed to individuals who plead guilty or have been convicted of committing a felony offense according to the law. Discriminatory practices against formerly incarcerated individuals are prevalent in the job market. These type of practices need to be eradicated as they may be linked to the increase in recidivism rates in NYS and abroad.

This researcher recommends that employers do not discriminate against potentially qualified formerly incarcerated individuals that apply for jobs except in stipulations established Article 23-A of the New York Correctional Law. This researcher further recommends that both formerly incarcerated individuals and employers, get acclimated with a law which was established to promote employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals. This law established stipulations that employers must

adhere to. Article 23-A stipulates that employers refrain from denying or terminating employment based on prior criminal convictions. Cania (2012) iterated that there are two exceptions to this law. The stipulations read as follow: 1. Where there is a direct relationship between some or all of the previous criminal offenses and the specific job or position the individual is seeking or holds; or 2. When hiring or continuing to employ the individual would present an unreasonable risk to the employer's property, specific individuals, or the general public.

Violation of that law and its clauses also constitutes a violation of the New York State Human Rights Law which prohibits employers from inquiring about violation-level offenses, youthful offender arbitrations, and arrests that did not result in convictions (Cania, 2012). The researcher's recommendations are twofold. In part, one purpose was to increase employers' opportunities to find qualified employees that are committed to carrying out their job responsibilities and can provide exceptional services whether formerly incarcerated or not. The second purpose was to increase formerly incarcerated individuals' awareness about Article 23-A so they can get acclimated with the law and exercise their rights to employment opportunities to help reduce recidivism rates in NYS.

Recommendation five. The findings of this study provide significant insight to researchers, policy advocates, and policy players about the positive effects of post-secondary higher education on employability, desistance from crime, and recidivism. Therefore, the researcher recommends that they engage in coalition building to include: researchers, policy advocates, policy players, formerly incarcerated individuals, and community activist to supports college education for prisoners. Also, it is recommended that coalitions develop interventions and policy change strategies that help reinstate

federal and state funding for prisoner's college education or that efforts are expanded to support alternative funding options such as those mentioned in this study. There is a dire need to form a coalition with collaborative efforts to address the needs for education of this marginalized and oppressed group. The coalition has to challenge conventions that regulate the application of principles in policy and confront the legitimacy of the customary practices that have plagued us. To address the issues outlined, it is recommended that readers familiarize themselves with the theoretical rationale for policy change discussed in Chapter 1 of this study and implement such strategies to effect major policy change that supports college education for incarcerated individuals.

Conclusions

Considering the rising costs of mass incarceration and consistently soaring recidivism rates, there is a dire need to conduct research that focuses on this problem and marginalized population. Although it is slowly gaining interest, research on formerly incarcerated individuals and factors that impact successful reentry are lacking. There is clearly a gap in the literature concerning this marginalized population that needs to be met in order to comprehensively be able to address the issues associated with crime recidivism. More importantly, the research community needs to conduct more advocacy participatory research on the effects of post-secondary higher education on the process of desistance so that rich data can be gathered for the purpose of developing effective strategies that contain action agendas to help effect policy change, reinstate Pell Grants, and support college education for incarcerated individuals.

This study employed a qualitative survey research design based on advocacy participatory worldview. This design can add to previous studies and findings because it

includes a review of policy change theory and strategies. The research design for this study provides an advocacy participatory perspective that contains an action agenda for advocacy coalitions to implement strategies that help change existing policy and ultimately increase access to PSHE for incarcerated individuals. This can increase chances of employability and desistance from crime while reducing recidivism.

The focus of this study is to explore the effects of post-secondary higher education (PSHE) on formerly incarcerated students upon release. It explores some of the questioning and findings of earlier studies on college-level education and its implications on constructive lifestyle changes that lead to employability and desistance from crime. It also discovers whether differences exist between individuals who obtained an associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degree while incarcerated and whether or not college education levels had anything to do with their ability to pursue careers versus a profession.

The purpose of surveying the panel of 10 formerly incarcerated New York State men is to explore their thoughts, opinions, and feelings about college education as it relates to employability and constructive lifestyle changes. The study uses an online survey tool to capture their experiences as students and graduates of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison (Hudson Link) program and helps explain how PSHE impacted their lives.

The findings of this study provide answers to the research questions that drove this inquiry. In regards to the question 1) what effects does post-secondary higher education have on constructive lifestyle changes for individuals in NYS who obtained a college degree while incarcerated? The researcher implies that PSHE can increase

chances of obtaining employment upon release. It can also lead individuals to adapt constructive lifestyle changes that can impact their ability to desistance from crime, and decrease recidivism. Moreover, post-secondary higher education can help increase chances of employability of formerly incarcerated individuals upon release. Thus, providing them employment opportunities to help them make successful transitions to their roles as husbands, fathers, employees, and constructive members in their communities.

The findings of this study also allowed the researcher to make inferences to answer the next question 2) how do study participants describe their experience in obtaining associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degree while in prison? Based on the answers from study participants, the researcher implies that college degrees can impact individuals' ability to prepare and present themselves as marketable candidates for employment upon release. This study finds that obtaining a degree while in prison can increase individuals' level of self-confidence, for some it leads to spiritual enlightenment, increases their ability to communicate, and propels individuals to become role models. In addition, the family members of incarcerated individuals can perceive their investment in college education as a real attempt to change their life circumstances.

Finally, the findings of this study allowed the researcher to answer the final research question 3) what differences exist, if any, between formerly incarcerated individuals who obtained an associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degree while incarcerated, and whether or not their educational level predisposed them to obtaining a career versus a job? Consistent with the literature, the researcher believes that the higher the degree, the better the job, and the higher the lifetime salary. This study also supports

the idea that educational levels predisposes individuals' to obtaining long term careers versus the pursuit of dead-end jobs and professions.

This study adds to the body of research that supports post-secondary higher education's positive impact on the employability of formerly incarcerated individuals and their ability to desist from crime, thus, helping decrease current recidivism rates. Taylor (2005) suggests that we must find alternative and patch-work funding options for incarcerated individuals in NYS. One potential course of action to help remedy the problem would be to reframe the problem and articulate it with a specific focus on financial savings, crime prevention, and community safety in order to begin building an advocacy coalition. The advocacy coalition can collectively prepare effective strategies that help influence favorable decision-making power by elites. The advocacy coalition can help influence policy changes that are beneficial to everyone in the society at-large, including disenfranchised incarcerated populations.

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Appendix A

St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent

Title of study:

An Exploration into the Phenomena Behind Post-secondary Higher Education and its Implications on Employability and Constructive Lifestyle Changes Among Formerly-incarcerated Individuals

Name of researcher: Samuel Arroyo

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Janice Kelly

Phone for further information:



Purpose of study:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to survey a panel of 10 formerly incarcerated New York State men in order to explore their thoughts, opinions, and feelings about college education as it relates to employability, and constructive lifestyle changes. The study will use an online survey tool to capture their experiences as students and graduates of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison (Hudson Link) program and help explain how post-secondary higher education (PSHE) impacted their lives.

Study Procedures:

This study will use a qualitative design that encompasses inviting formerly incarcerated male alumni from the Hudson Link college program who have been discharged from parole to complete a questionnaire through Qualtrics, an online survey software tool. The survey will be used to collect data to help explore the Hudson Link alumni's thoughts, opinions, and feelings about the effects of PSHE. Also, it will gather demographic data on the sample population. The survey will help identify common themes and categories used by survey participants. Hudson Link has approved the study and provided me with a list of alumni. Ten of the Hudson Link alumni will then be randomly selected to participate in the survey. The interviewer will be the primary instrument during the data collection and analysis. Once the data is collected, read and reread, the themes and categories will be identified and coded for analysis. The data set will be content analyzed

using an integrated strategy that incorporates both a conventional approach based on inductive reasoning followed by a directed approach based on deductive reasoning. The goal will be to explore the implications that post-secondary higher education had on employability, and constructive lifestyle changes among formerly-incarcerated individuals.

Approval of study:

This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Place of study: Hudson Link's office space Length of participation: 1month

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:

The risks of this study are minimal. The topic in the study may discomfort some respondents. However, you may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose. **Please do not disclose any illegal conduct including drug use, sexual behavior, or alcohol use in your responses to survey questions.** There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study may provide information that will help researchers gain a more comprehensive understanding about the effectiveness of post-secondary higher education on formerly incarcerated men and help form a research-informed basis for advocacy groups interested the benefits of PSHE and funding of college programs for incarcerated individuals.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:

Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- A disclaimer has been added to this Informed Consent Form that states “**Please do not disclose any illegal conduct including drug use, sexual behavior, or alcohol use in your responses to survey questions.**”
- Assigning code name/numbers for participants that will be used on all researcher's notes and documents.
- Notes, transcribed notes and any other identifying participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in personal possession of the researcher. The signed consents and survey participants' information will be effectively destroyed effectively upon completion of the study project.
- The researcher and the committee members will review the researcher's collected data. Information from this research will be used solely for the purposes of this study and any publication that may result from this study project. Any final publication will not contain the names of the individuals that have consented to participate in this study, or any identifiable information.

- Each participant has the opportunity to obtain a transcribed copy of his/her interview.
- Participants should tell the researcher if a copy of the interview is desired.
- Participant data will be kept confidential except.

Your rights:

As a 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 anytime without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

| | | |
|---------------------------|-----------|--|
| Print name (Participant) | Signature | |
| | Date | |
| Print name (Investigator) | Signature | |
| | Date | |

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above for appropriate referrals.

Appendix B

IRB Approval Letter



December 10, 2014

Samuel Arroyo

St John Fisher College

Dear Mr. Arroyo:

████████████████████

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved your Expedited Review project, "An Exploration into the Phenomena Behind Post-secondary Higher Education and Its Implications on Employability and Constructive Lifestyle Changes."

Following federal guidelines, research related records should be maintained in a secure area for three years following the completion of the project at which time they may be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about this process or your responsibilities, please contact me at ██████████

Sincerely,

Eileen Lynd-Balta, Ph.D.

Chair, Institutional Review Board

ELB:jdr

Eileen Lynd-Balta

Appendix C

Letter to Survey Participants

Samuel Arroyo
[REDACTED]

Dear alumnus:

I am a doctoral candidate at St. John Fisher College. I am currently beginning my research for my dissertation and was hoping you would be willing to participate. The title of my research project is *An Exploration Into the Phenomena Behind Post-secondary Higher Education and Its Implications on Employability and Desistance from Crime*. You have probably heard about this project during one of your Hudson Link alumni monthly meetings. I will be administering a survey through Qualtrics, an online survey tool, to 10 alumni who will be randomly selected from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison's alumni global email address list. The survey should not take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

Before you complete the survey I can confirm the following:

- My dissertation chair and project supervisor, Dr. Janice Kelly, from St. John Fisher College, Sean Pica, Executive Director of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison have given permission for this research to be carried out.
- Your confidentiality will be maintained at all times and comments will not be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used that might identify you to a third party. Disclaimer: **Please do not disclose any illegal conduct including drug use, sexual behavior, or alcohol use in your responses to survey questions.**
- You will be free to withdraw from the research at any time and/or request that your survey not be used.
- I will write to you upon completion of the research and a copy of my dissertation will be made available to you upon request.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to help me with my research. If you have any questions concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about the extent of your participation, please contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED]

I want to thank you for taking the time out to read this and consider my request. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely Yours,

Samuel Arroyo
[REDACTED]

Appendix D
Survey-English

Default Question Block

Q1. What is your age range? (Please select one)

21-30

31-45

46- and over

Q2. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status? (Please select one of the items below)

married

divorced

separated

widowed

in domestic partnership

single, but cohabiting with significant other

single, never married

Q3. How many children do you have?

one

two

three, or more

None

Q4. When were you released from prison:

Less than 1 year ago

1-3 years ago

Less than 5 years ago

5 years and over

Q5. Upon release, were you on parole supervision?

Yes

No

Q6. Are you still on parole?

Yes

No

Q7. If not currently on parole supervision, how long have you been off parole?

Less than 1 year

1-4 years

5 year and over

Q8. What is your current job type, or occupation? (Please provide an answer)

Q9. What was the highest degree completed during your incarceration? (Please check on all items that apply)

Associate degree

Bachelor degree

Master degree

Doctorate degree

Other (obtained college credits but did not complete degree requirements)

Vocational education

Q10. What factors do you believe motivated you to engage in higher education while incarcerated? (Please write a summary that best describes your opinion based on your experience)

Q11. What role did your family play in your life upon release from prison? (Please provide a response that best captures your experience)

Q12. What role did your friends play in your life upon release from prison? (Please provide a response that best captures your experience)

Q13. What role did employment play in your life upon release from prison? (Please provide a response that best captures your experience)

Q14. What role did your level of education (Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate) play in your life upon release from prison? (Please provide a response that best captures your experience)

Q15. How were you received by Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program?

Q16. What would you have liked more of from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program?

Q17. What would you have liked less of from Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program?

Q18. How did Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison program help you?

Q19. How has earning your degree impacted your life?

Q20. Do you have any recommendations?

Appendix E

Code Book

Preliminary Emergent Themes: Researcher and Trained Coder

Table A.1

Preliminary Emergent Themes: Researcher

| Respondent | Codes Per Questions |
|------------|---|
| R01 DD | 10 - Need to be prepared for job market/Become employable 11, 12 - Family and friends were supporters both financially and emotionally; friends as extended family 13 - Employment is pivotal for successful reentry; helped stabilize financially and enhanced family bonds 14 - Education is key to employability |
| R02 DM | 10 - Change in belief system and behavior; education is key to change 11, 12 - Viable family support; providers of essential needs (money, housing, emotional); identification of friends as extended family; friends utilized personal reentry experience to help guide in transitional process 13 - Employment provided economic stability that led to increased self-confidence; employment is key to prevent from reverting back to old ways of thinking/belief systems 14 - Education boosts self-confidence and increased chances of employability; education provided broader perspective and helped become more analytical |
| R03 MI | 10 - Desire to follow and lead by example; desire to attain spiritual enlightenment; need for self-improvement 11 - Family providers of moral support 12 - Friends passes away or moved on (deteriorated relationships) 13, 14 - Education and training were key to obtain employment; educational level opened doors for establishing new friendships and networks/support systems |
| R04 JD | 10 - Pursuit of positive life; becoming a role model 11 - Family as financial and moral support; family helped navigate systems |

- 12 - Friends perceived as extended family
 13 - Employment necessary to fulfill parole stipulations; employment provided means to support family
 14 - Education needed to break cycle of crime
- R05 FB 10 - Desire to become better communicator
 11 - Family upheld high standards; family assisted throughout process of proving innocence
 12 - Friends provided financial assistance and helped with social reintegration
 13 - Employment provided means to support family; used prison ordeal as way to hone skills that paved the way for financial income
 14 - Education level helped enhance communication skills, but did not directly help in gaining employment
- R06 JP 10 - Need to change; determined not to return to prison; crystallization of discontent/feared self.
 11 - Family provided life's basic needs (housing, food, etc)
 12 - Friends perceived as extended family; friends enabled ability to cope with transitions and tribulations associated with the transition process; friends offered invaluable support and way to vent out frustrations
 13 - Employment provided a sense of pride and helped refrain from criminal activity linked to spending idle time
 14 - Education level helped maintain meaningful employment
- R07 JR 10 - Education provided sense of freedom, improved quality of life
 11 - Family provided financial and moral support
 12 - Friends provided guidance through shared experiences; friends perceived as extended family
 13 - Employment provided sense of security, purpose, meaning, and feeling of belonging to society
 14 - Education level made marketable and employable
- R08 JV 10 - Motivated to occupy time in prison; value earning a degree
 11 - Family served as a support network (money, housing, employment)
 12 - Friends part of support network
 13 - Employment provided purpose, confidence and income stability
- R09 RS 10 - Need sense of self-awareness, to understand plight, and to be

saved

11 - Mom provided moral support while dealing with own struggles

12 - Friends perceived as extended family; friends provided mutual support

13 - Employment provided a sense of belonging to society and normalcy

14 - Educational level helped understand past experiences and behaviors; education enhanced understanding of life's misfortunes and injustices

R10 TR

10 - Desire to make amends with community by giving back

11 - Family providers of housing and other necessities

12 - Friends supported throughout incarceration and community reintegration

13 - Employment place stability

14 - Educational level led to skill-development and job opportunities; education provided leverage for employment and helped mold into better person

Table A.2

Preliminary Emergent Themes: Trained Coder

| Respondent | Codes Per Questions |
|------------|---|
| R01 DD | 10- preparation for life after prison was necessary 11, 12, 13, 14 – family, friends, education, and employment necessary for successful release |
| R02 DM | 10 – understanding that there was a need for change on how he approached life 11, 13 – family and employment provided stable environment needed for success 12- support from people with similar experiences and positive outcomes was necessary for successful release. |
| R03 MI | 10 – education in prison opens eyes and minds to new possibilities 11 – feeling of kindness and understanding made transition possible 13, 14 – ex con status will create obstacles after release but education helps |
| R04 JD | 10 – Preparation for life after prison with an education is necessary for success 11, 12 – family and friends are needed for transition to life after prison 13, 14 – Employment and education provides resources needed to break the cycle of crime |
| R05 FB | 10, 13 – education provides knowledge and resources needed to take steps toward successful future 11, 12– help from family and friends is important for successful transition 14 – education as tool for personal growth not just employment, but just as important |
| R06 JP | 10 – understanding that there was a need for change on how he approached life; Preparation for life after prison with an education is necessary for success 11, 13 – family and employment provided stable environment needed for success 12- support from people with similar experiences and positive |

- outcomes was necessary for successful release.
14 – degree provided opportunities in employment in areas of interest
- R07 JR 10 –education as not just a preparation for life, but life itself
11, 13 – family and employment provided stable environment needed for success
12- support from people with similar experiences and positive outcomes was necessary for successful release
14 – degree provided opportunities in employment in areas of interest
- R08 JV 10 – understanding that there was a need for change on how he approached life; Preparation for life after prison with an education is necessary for success
11, 12, 13, 14 – family, friends, education, and employment necessary for successful release
- R09 RS 10 – education provides knowledge and resources needed to take steps toward successful future
11- 12- support from people with similar experiences and positive outcomes was necessary for successful release
13- employment provided stable environment needed for success
14 – education as tool for personal growth not just employment
- R10 TR 10 – understanding that there was a need for change on how he approached life; Preparation for life after prison with an education is necessary for success
11, 12 – help from family and friends is important for successful transition
14 – education as tool for personal growth not just employment, but just as important; degree provided opportunities in employment in areas of interest
13 – employment provides knowledge and resources needed to take steps toward stable and successful future