EMERGENT VOICES: REINTEGRATION AND DESISTANCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF FORMERLY CRIMINAL JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is a qualitative action research inquiry that examines the implications of human agency and self-determination in successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals. It answers what turning points assisted formerly incarcerated individuals to desist from criminal activity. Social cognitive theory forms the theoretical foundation of the study. Data collection included two surveys and a series of semi-structured interviews. Four formerly incarcerated individuals were interviewed regarding what led them to desist from criminal activity. Six current or former probation and parole officers answered a survey containing open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of what is required for successful reintegration. In all cases, the data showed that formerly incarcerated participants experienced a series of turning points involving a series of shifts in perspective that triggered a change in how they viewed themselves and others. Almost 70% of parole and probation officer participants related the importance of human agency-specific competencies to successful reintegration. The results of this study suggest that developing or facilitating human agency and self-determination may mitigate environmental barriers encountered by reintegrating individuals. These cognitive competencies may augment existing community reentry programming to maximize resources and increase the long-term reintegration success for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, the late Junius “Bill” Williams and Frances Williams, who never wavered in the belief that I would accomplish this goal. It is also dedicated to the potential and tenacity of those who have successfully reintegrated after imprisonment.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The challenge of successful reintegration is a national problem faced by the criminal justice system and local communities. Within the first five years of release, 43% of released prisoners were rearrested; 90% of those were rearrested for probation violations (Markman, Durose, Rantala, & Tiedt, 2016). The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world with 2.3 million people in custody (Glaze & Herberman, 2013). The War on Drugs increased penalties for drug users and drug traffickers and simultaneously increased the length of sentences for these nonviolent offenders. Between 1974 and 2014 this attempt at reducing drug trafficking precipitated a 500% increase in the United States prison population (Glaze & Herberman, 2013; Lynch, 2012; Vitellone, 2013). Consequently, the 1990s was the most punitive decade in United States history as America carried out what one reporter called a "moral jihad" (Hallinan, 1995, p. 8) that led to leading the world in incarceration (Creswell, 2014).

Additionally, recent prison reforms have resulted in the release of nonviolent prisoners, which is likely to cause financial stress to already resource-strapped reintegration service providers. Absent extended capacity and enough funding to sustain operations, many of these former inmates might not receive essential services. Community corrections organizations are faced with the challenges of constrained healthcare reimbursement due to managed care guidelines, the rising cost of services, and the billable-hours-driven business model under which many programs operate. This is tantamount to a restorative justice Catch-22 as the influx of newly released individuals strains community resources (Cooper, Durose, & Snyder, 2014;

Ndrecka, Listwan, & Latessa, 2017). Despite restorative justice initiatives, recidivism remains a challenge. This influx of reintegrating individuals is likely to exacerbate this issue and compromise public safety (Cooper et al., 2014; Latessa & Reitler, 2015).

A systemic reality is that most prisoners return to their communities. This presents an excellent opportunity for incorporating robust reintegration services to reduce recidivism and increase the chances of formerly incarcerated individuals becoming viable contributors to their communities.

Historical Background

Decades of public interest-driven legislation resulted in the 1984 Comprehensive Crime Control Act which created the United States Sentencing Commission (Enns, 2014; Peláez, 2016). That group was responsible for developing and monitoring U.S. sentencing policies, including Sentencing Reform. The Commission paved the way for drug legislation and, within four years, the Anti-Drug Act of 1988 (ADA) was enacted. The ADA established new federal offenses, sanctions, and determinant sentencing legislation that resulted in a repercussive increase in the prison population. This was followed by the Federal Anti-Crime Act, which provided financial incentives to states that implemented the recommendations of the Commission (Cooper, 2015).

While the legislative intent was to increase the number of convictions for drug-related violent crimes, this War on Drugs had the unanticipated consequence of increasing the non-violent inmate population (Vitellone, 2013). Consequently, more offenders were incarcerated for longer terms (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). As the United States met public retribution expectations, cost containment and recidivism remain ongoing challenges (Vera Institute of Justice, 2013).

Incarceration as a deterrent. Concerning public safety, imprisonment has a negligible effect on reducing crime rates, and rehabilitation programming falls short of its recidivism reduction goals (Hunt & Dumville, 2016; Tiedt & Sabol, 2015). The Pew Charitable Trusts (2011) reported three-tenths of one percent reduction in prison admissions, the first decrease in over 38 years. The organization also reported a simultaneous five-year increase in admissions for probation or parole violations (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2011; Tiedt & Sabol, 2015). Many newly released individuals experienced high rates of recidivism within the first 24-months of release. Hunt and Dumville (2016) followed 25,431 federal offenders discharged from their sentences or released into a term of probation. Over an eight-year follow-up period, 49.3% were rearrested for a new crime or probation violation. Researchers also reported a high rate of recidivism during the first two years of release (Markman et al., 2016; Tiedt & Sabol, 2015). Subjects released without parole experienced higher recidivism (52.5%) than those who had been released on probation (35.1%).

In 2013 an estimated 4,751,400 adults were under community supervision (probation and parole). Probationers accounted for 82% of community supervisees (Herberman & Bonczar, 2014). By June 2014, the National Institutes for Justice (NIJ) reported that 67.8% of released prisoners were rearrested within three years of release (Cooper et al., 2014; Herberman & Bonczar, 2014). The Bureau of Justice Statistics further reported that, within five years of release, about three-quarters (76.6 %) of United States prisoners were rearrested. Of those, more than half (56.7%) were rearrested by the end of the first year (Markman et al., 2016). Similar patterns were reported by a Tiedt and Sabol (2015) study that found that re-offenses typically occurred within an average of about 21 months.

Cost of criminal justice. Myers and Olson (2012) reported a fivefold increase in federal policing expenditures. That was an eightfold increase in prison spending from 1982 through 2006 (Kyckelhahn, 2014). During the same period, judicial expenditures incurred for processing new cases increased from $8 billion to $47 billion. All told, criminal justice expenditures rose by 487.5% in 24 years.

Reintegration programs and recidivism. From 2004 to 2011, the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) provided funding for the program development to increase positive outcomes for released prisoners. Lattimore et al. (2012) evaluated the SVORI program, which funded 69 grantees that operated 88 different reentry programs. Thirty-five provided adults-only services, 34 were for juveniles, two provided services to youthful offenders, and 17 targeted various combinations of adults, juveniles, and youthful offenders. All the grantee participants were aged 35 or under. SVORI participants were interviewed 30 days before release and at three months, none months and 15 months post-release.

The initiative was expected to improve recidivism outcomes for SVORI participants through a continuum-based intervention model beginning in-prison, continuing with post-release supervision, and into post-release supervision. In the final report for the initiative, Lattimore et al. (2012) described modest outcomes. Two remarkable findings resulted from the final report (Lattimore et al., 2012, p. 6),

1. Practical services including reentry preparation, life skills programs, and employment services, housing, employment, and drug use did not improve post-release non-recidivism outcomes for men. In some cases, these services appeared to be detrimental to successful reintegration.

2. Services oriented toward individual change including substance abuse treatment, cognitive-focused programs, and education may have modest beneficial effects on non-recidivism outcomes.

The SVORI findings were reflective of a global study of corrections and sentencing strategies among 20 countries, Byrne, Pattavina and Taxman (2015). The researchers reported that reintegration programming did not significantly reduce high recidivism rates.

Statement of the Problem

Because of his administration's sweeping criminal justice reforms, President Barak Obama (2017) wrote, 'I will be the first President in decades to leave office with a federal prison population lower than when I took office' (p. 824). One of the most impactful legislative changes implemented by the Obama Administration was the return of judicial discretion to the courts. This legislation struck to the core of the prison population chaos perpetuated by determinate sentencing legislation of the 1980s and 1990s (Obama, 2017).

Additionally, on March 4, 2014, the U.S. Attorney General announced $173 Million for Criminal Justice Reform (United States Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs, 2014). That was followed by a retroactive reduction in sentencing terms for nonviolent offenders. This precipitated an influx of thousands of inmates into local communities. Before that initiative, an estimated 4,751,400 adults were under community supervision in the form of probation or parole. Probationers accounted for 82% of released inmates who were on probation or parole (Herberman & Bonczar, 2014).

Augmenting this initiative, President Obama granted early-release to approximately 46,000 non-violent offenders. Before the end of his final term in office, an additional 1,927 inmates were granted clemency (Gramlich, & Bialik, 2017; Horwitz, 2015). Despite increased funding for reentry programs, the escalation of offenders returning to their communities will create a capacity strain on community programs. As recidivism rates remain virtually stagnate, almost half of these individuals will likely return to prison within five years.

The Pew Charitable Trusts (2011) reported that 31% of individuals released from Michigan jails and prisons would recidivate. As former prisoners reenter Michigan communities, it places an increased demand on community corrections resources as Department of Justice grants to community corrections, intervention programs, and post-release supervision has dropped by 43% (Vera Institute of Justice, 2013). The problem addressed in this study is the implications of human agency in successful reintegration. Examining the perspectives of successfully reintegrated individuals may provide insight into the desistance dynamic, and how that insight be used to increase positive and sustainable post-release outcomes of reintegrating individuals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of successfully reintegrated men and women who were formerly involved in the United States criminal justice system. It also identified and documented, from the participants' perspectives, the turning points that facilitated their decisions to desist from criminal activity. The goal was to present this information to local reintegration service providers. This information was intended to offer knowledge that may augment existing reentry programs, increase a reduction in recidivism for their programs and facilitate sustained reintegration success for reintegration individuals in their communities.

The Significance of the Study

The significance of the research was that, although several studies focused on reducing recidivism, few focused on what it is within the individual that results in successfully navigating the reintegration phase. There are two often-ignored problems with current reintegration paradigms: (a) lack of focus on turning points in an individual's decision to desist from criminal activity, and (b) failure to acknowledge the implications of human agency in desistance decisions

(Carlsson, 2012). Bandura (2012, 2018) underscored the significance of human agency and self-determination in desistance from criminal activity.

Additional significance of this study was the inclusion of participants who had been out of prison for eight years or more without recidivating. Many qualitative studies have short-term post-release time frames. It is essential to study post-release subjects who have demonstrated long-term successful reintegration. For example, a Harvard study conducted by Western, Braga and Kohl (2017) sampled individuals within one to five years post-release. Fine et al., (2012) discussed the example of a four-year multi-method participatory action research project inside a prison college program. The focus was on education and the subjects were all female inmates. Valuable qualitative information resulted. However, the exclusion of males and the use of incarcerated subjects did not address what is at the core of individual long-term reintegration success. In yet another case, an Urban Institute study included participants who had release dates that averaged 10 years (Stohr, Walsh, & Hemmens, 2012). However, that project focused on participant views of service delivery and support systems as opposed to turning points and desistance decisions (Visher & Travis, 2011).

Self-determination or autonomous decision-making has implications to desistance from criminal activity. An understanding of their significance can effectively inform reentry planning and programs (Dickson & Polaschek, 2015). This study adds to the body of reintegration knowledge by facilitating understanding of how self-determination competencies can increase long-term participant outcomes and foster intrinsic, as opposed to extrinsic, motivation to desist from criminal activity (Deci & Ryan, 2015; Link & Williams, 2015; Walker, Bowen, Brown, & Sleath, 2015).

Research Design

This action research (AR) study used a qualitative approach focused on the best in people and employed a systematic inquiry with a view toward strengthening a restorative justice system's capacity to achieve heightened potential. It facilitated a strengths-based understanding of reintegration from the perspectives of formerly incarcerated individuals (Creswell, 2014; Stringer, 2013). The data gained from the study was anticipated to facilitate increased long-term outcomes of individuals serviced by community reintegration organizations and provide new perspectives to drive innovative approaches to community service delivery (Rowe et al., 2012).

This AR study, while not strictly appreciative action research (AAR), incorporated components of AAR principles. Specifically, the current study included two of the four stages of the Four-Ds of AAR. The first two stages of dream and discovery were reflected in the protocol. Stages 3 and 4, design and destiny, were outside of the scope of the study. The final two appreciative inquiry stages involve action by community stakeholders with whom the findings will be shared. The study also reflected AAR in that it was designed to provide new perspectives of reintegration service delivery. The findings will be presented to community service providers. It is at that point that the design and delivery stages of AAR may be implemented (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011).

The way in which this study was reflective of AAR was that it was a systematic exploration through a strength-based data collection that recognized the best in the individual while valuing participant perspectives. Additionally, the inquiry was explorative and discovery-directed. It was in a manner that was open to new potential, perspectives, and possibilities. The protocol affirmed participant perspectives on their past and current strengths, successes, and participant potential. Further, the findings will facilitate an appreciative view of reintegration service delivery and facilitate a paradigm shift from a problem-centric to an opportunity-centric

perspective of overcoming challenges commonly faced by reintegrating individuals (Robinson, Priede, Farrall, Shapland, & McNeill, 2012; Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011). AAR aspects are discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

Researcher positionality was that of outsider-studies-insiders (Bernard, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Stringer, 2013). The researcher role was that of the interviewer in individual interviews. The participants were the subject matter experts (SME) concerning participant experiences.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The overarching question for this action research study was, what are turning points that assisted successfully reintegrated formerly incarcerated individuals to desist from criminal activity? The following subquestions were presented to former inmates in the interest of addressing the overarching question.

1. What themes exist in the personal stories of formerly incarcerated individuals, who have successfully reintegrated into society after engagement in the criminal justice system?

2. What turning points do individuals formerly involved in the criminal justice system identify as facilitating their decisions to desist from criminal activity?

3. How can what is learned from the data be used to educate community providers and to augment existing community reintegration programs?

The overarching goal of the study was to identify and document, from the participants' perspectives, turning points that facilitated the decision to desist from criminal activity. The following goals were also relevant to the study.

1. To understand the perspectives of successfully reintegrated individuals formerly involved in the criminal justice system as it relates to their decisions to desist from criminal activity.

2. To acquire a contextual understanding of formerly criminal justice-involved individuals' perspectives on turning points that led to their decisions to desist from criminal activity.

3. To leverage the research findings to facilitate long-term recidivism reduction outcomes for participants in community reintegration programs, by augmenting existing community services.

Assumptions and Limitations

Several assumptions underpinned the research design. One such assumption was that participants were truthful in answering the survey questions; especially concerning exclusive criteria related to mental health, sex offender registry requirements, date of most recent release, and criminal justice history. It was also assumed that formerly incarcerated individuals in the United States would willingly participate in the study without compensation. Another assumption was that instilling purpose, hope, and vision in formerly incarcerated individuals would positively affect, establish, and maintain positive, sustainable outcomes that would mitigate cumulative disadvantages perpetuated by having a criminal justice background (Sampson, & Laub, 2016; Wentland, Waller, & Brastow, 2014).

A further assumption was that, regardless of stigmatization, a negative self-perception would have a negative impact on desistance from crime (Valera, Brotzman, Wilson, & Reid, 2017). In other words, desistance results from overcoming the Golem Effect. The Golem Effect states that individual outcomes are negatively impacted by diminished expectations. Conversely, desistance can be facilitated by the Pygmalion effect, which states that individual outcomes are elevated by higher self-expectations and improved self-image (Göbbels, Willis, & Ward, 2014; Maruna & LeBel, 2015; Maruna, LeBel, Naples, & Mitchell, 2013).

It was also assumed that progressive and positive changes to an individual's self-perception, including leveraging the past in achieving a new self-perception, would result in sustainable positive post-release outcomes. Stevens (2012) held that desistance results from identifiable changes to an individual's self-perception and self-narrative, and that this is achieved through the development of a new, improved self-identification that no longer cognitively or

emotionally fits with the offending-self. Therefore, it was assumed that participants had developed cognitive competencies that resulted in well-informed, healthier, choices as they developed a new sense of self-worth, self-efficacy, and personal responsibility (Kao et al., 2014). This cognitive restructuring was assumed to empower sustainable outcomes as participants learn to leverage the past to move from victim of, to victor over, traumatic life experiences common among this population (Pettus-Davis, 2014).

A theoretical assumption was that individuals could acquire new behaviors and knowledge through an internal process that empowers individual redirecting of behavior according to set goals. The desire to accomplish those goals was assumed to be a motivating factor in goal achievement. It was further assumed that behavioral change could be achieved through self-regulation, which is a learned competency. In other words, based on the consequences of prior behaviors an individual agentically alters current behaviors (Barone, Maddux, & Snyder, 2012; Yong, Williams, Provan, Clarke, & Sinclair, 2015).

Finally, additional theoretical assumptions were that (a) individual lives could be affected by personal historical context, (b) individual lives could be influenced by personal choice and resulting behaviors, (c) individual lives could be socially interrelated, and (d) the meaning that individuals contemporaneously assign to heterogeneous life events could determine when or if transition occurs (Lopes et al., 2012).

The study had several limitations. While anonymity was partially achieved by conducting phone interviews and using an anonymized identification system to track responses, participant electronic devices were outside of researcher control. Such devices included personal computers, mobile phones, tablets, and all manner of hand-held devices. Through informed consent, respondents were advised of risks associated with technological interaction; the importance of a

private setting during telephone interviews; and that there was no reasonable expectation of privacy if the participant chose to communicate over unsecured networks, tablets, or cell phones. As secure as the survey website was, hackers' access to participant information is possible if the respondents accessed the online survey via unsecured networks (Craig, 2009; Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Molnar, Buka, and Kessler (2013) related that 78% of women and 82% of male offenders had at least one lifetime event of mood, anxiety, or substance disorders. The United States National Comorbidity Survey (NCS) reported that 48.5% of women and 51.2% of men met lifetime disorder criteria. Individuals with a history inclusive of criminal sexual (CSA) assault were 4.25 times more likely to have used drugs than those without CSA histories (Wolff, & Shi, 2012). The high incidence of mental health disorders among the target population, and protocol dependence on self-reporting, could have resulted in the participation of individuals in active treatment. The researcher had no way of knowing if this occurred.

Because the action research process is nonlinear, it was required of the researcher to apply critical reflection competencies at all stages of the research (Stringer, 2013). Programs, policies, and practices are open to the interpretations and judgments of the stakeholders. Therefore, convincing community partners of the value of the research project required planning, marketing, and a robust communication plan.

Recruitment presented a challenge because the initial recruitment area was restricted to a single local metropolitan area. Two adjustments to the geographic area were made during data collection. The first adjustment extended recruitment to the entire state. The second adjustment extended recruitment to the entire United States (Stringer, 2013). After the extension to the

national recruitment area, the researcher was able to recruit volunteers. All adjustments received prior IRB approval.

Definition of Terms

What follows are definitions of terms used to describe key concepts related to the study. These terms are specific to, or have unique meanings for the context of the study.

Cumulative disadvantage. This term refers to the prospective negative social-structural ramifications faced by individuals formerly involved in the criminal justice system. This phenomenon has implications for turning points in the lives of former offenders throughout the life course (Lopes et al., 2012).

Desistance. Desistance refers to is the process through which a series of turning points result in a decision to discontinue criminal activity (Walker et al., 2015).

Formerly incarcerated individuals. This term refers to an individual who has been convicted and served time for a crime and completed parole, probation, or a sentence to community corrections. The term relates to the criminological term, ex-offenders, which is used, interchangeably, with the term formerly criminal justice-involved individuals.

Golem effect. The Golem Effect states that individual outcomes are negatively impacted by diminished expectations of themselves (Göbbels et al., 2014; Maruna & LeBel, 2015; Maruna et al., 2013).

Human agency. Human agency is the dynamic force that drives individual change. It includes self-expression, self-perception, and self-determination, all of which are essential to transformation (Maschi, Morrisey, & Leigey, 2013). As it relates to turning points, human agency refers to personal choice and the degree to which that influences the trajectory of the life-course (Carlsson, 2012; Farrall, Sharpe, Hunter, & Calverley, 2011).

Life course. Life course refers to a comprehensive longitudinal connection between individuals and the historical context in which these individuals reached various life-decisions (Maschi et al., 2013). The life course perspective is central to understanding the pathways to prison and community reintegration (Sampson, & Laub, 2016).

Megan's Law. Megan's Law is a term referring to federal, state, and local legislation requiring that convicted sex offenders register residential addresses (Wentland et al., 2014).

Pygmalion effect. The Pygmalion effect indicates that individual outcomes are positively impacted by diminished expectations of themselves (Göbbels et al., 2014; Maruna & LeBel, 2015; Maruna et al., 2013).

Recidivism. This term refers to an individual's post-incarceration, reversion into criminal behavior. An individual is determined to have recidivated when they engage in criminal acts that result in an arrest, a reconviction, or a reincarceration. The recidivating act may, or may not, result from a new sentence (Markman et al., 2016).

Turning points. This term relates to a heterogeneous and progressive reorientation of priorities because of cognitive or developmental alternations that alter the life-course of individuals. Such a change in trajectory occurs when an individual considers personally significant lifestyle changes against the backdrop of former life choices. Turning points are retrospectively identified because it involves a passing to time that reveals a sustainable change in the individual's direction (Carlsson, 2012; Sampson & Laub, 2016; Walker et al., 2015).

Expected Findings

Analysis of the data was expected to support research showing that turning points are not static but occur through a progression of interrelated events that progress an individual toward a decision to desist from criminal activity (Carlsson, 2012; Walker et al., 2015; Sampson & Laub,

2016). An aspect of that progression was anticipated to include reconstruction of identity as individuals reframe their pre- and post-criminological views of life events.

Results of the study are intended to be shared with community service providers to impart a new perspective on reintegration service design and delivery. These results are expected to assist existing community reentry stakeholders in augmenting programs that restructure cognition, empower participants to reframe their past, master effective coping strategies, eliminate self-defeating decision-making, foster a sense of positive self-esteem; and develop efficacy toward increased quality of life throughout the post-release life-course.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The research was based on the theoretical framework of action research. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 identifies and discusses scholarly research related to human agency, turning points, and self-determination. Chapter 3 discusses the study methodology regarding research purpose, design, population, participants, and protocol. Chapter 4 addresses data collection and analysis. Results are detailed, and the findings discussed. Chapter 5 provides a summary and discussion of the implications of the findings to practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

A key aspect of crime prevention is eliminating the cycle of recidivism (Valera et al., 2017). Despite decades of evidence-based reintegration research, between 2005 and 2010, 67.8% to 76.6% of released prisoners were rearrested within five years (Cooper et al., 2014; The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2011). This failure of existing criminal justice programs to adequately impact national recidivism rates is partially due to social-control-based program design and delivery.

Traditional rehabilitation programs rely on social-control-focused interventions and result in demands with which newly released individuals are ill-equipped to comply. If the parolee or probationer fails to meet these rigid standards, the resulting status violations often constitute grounds for reincarceration (Agnew, 2015; Farrington & Murray, 2017; Gangas, 2011; Jang & Rhodes, 2012; Thompson, 2014). A consequence is that these social-control-based programs have not adequately reduced, but exacerbate, recidivism. Despite this reality, some of these program participants do not recidivate, and others achieve varying levels of reintegration success. Human agency and self-determination may hold the answer to why those who succeed prevail and why those who do not, fail.

This action research study explored, from the perspectives of formerly incarcerated individuals, turning points that led to their decisions to desist from criminal activity. This review of literature examines existing restorative justice paradigms based in social control theories and

contrasts them with theoretical frameworks that address the implications of human agency on reintegration (Carlsson, 2012; Jang & Rhodes, 2012; van Gelder, 2013).

Theoretical Orientation for the Study

What follows is a discussion of the theoretical orientation for the study. It presents the framework on which the methodological approach was based.

Action Research

Action research was the primary research model for this study. Action research improves the quality of life through the acquisition of knowledge that facilitates practice and service delivery outcomes (Herr & Anderson, 2014). In contrast to other behavior or social research methods, theory building is a primary focus. Because action research occurs in specific, unique settings, finds are not generalized to a specific population. Unlike traditional researcher, action research is usually an ongoing process, during which each stage informs the next (Beaulieu, 2013).

This action research followed Stringer's (2013) look, think, act structure. The look stage involved data collection, including semi-structured interviews and surveys. The think stage entailed data analysis, and the act stage will involve the presentation of the findings to community service organizations. Action research was well-suited to the study because it was a contextually focused inquiry with a view toward improving the quality of reintegration service delivery.

Stringer (2013) also described the AR process as 1) phenomenological; 2) interpretive, and hermeneutic. This study was phenomenological in that it was designed to understand the experiential realities of the study participants. It was interpretive because it focused on participant perceptions and interpretations of their criminal justice and reintegration experiences.

Because results and findings incorporated the meaning participants placed on life-events, it was also hermeneutic.

Appreciative Inquiry

The research protocol reflected appreciative inquiry (AI) principles. An encouraging development in criminal justice research is the increased use of AI methodologies. AI was initially developed to address organizational-change. Increasingly, it has been used in social justice settings. In criminal justice research, AI is interchangeably used with the term, appreciative action research (AAR).

The advantages of AI include (a) it results in energetic motivation; (b) participants find the process engaging and empowering; (c) its transformative focus is opportunity-centric, rather problem-centric; (d) it has been successfully used in education, business, and social contexts (Clouder & King, 2015). Critics of the method say that its positive focus takes a minimalistic and counterproductive approach to effective decision-making because it represents an unbalanced understanding of issues it seeks to address. Additionally, AI requires a commitment to the entire 4-D cycle. Critics do not find this approach beneficial for evidence-gathering or evaluation (Bushe, 2011).

The England and Wales National Offender Management Service study, conducted by Robinson, Priede, Farrall, Shapland, & McNeill (2014), was administered in a criminal justice setting. To determine the quality of probation services, the researchers interviewed or conducted focus groups with 116 participants in three English Probation Trusts. Three focus groups were conducted with current or former probation officer staffers in each Trust.

The researchers stating that one benefit of the method was that it, “Rendered visible aspects of contemporary probation culture which, we believe, would have remained hidden had

we not chosen to explore quality through an 'appreciative' lens" (p. 3). They also reported that, from an ethical perspective, the process several participants stated that AI, "enabled them to reframe their frustrations and grumbles about the organization, and aspects of everyday practice, as aspirations' for the service" (p, 15). Some of the study participants described the process as empowering.

A seminal example of the use of AI in criminal justice research was the Fischer, Geiger, and Hughes (2007) Northern California Drug-Court Program study that included a sample of 11 women between the ages of 23 and 47 years. These women had received felony convictions for drug-related offenses. Study participants discussed what people and processes they considered as conducive to their desistence from drug use. Participants in the study were designated as co-researchers and change agents, and they were empowered in those roles as they realized new potentials and possibilities for the future of drug courts.

The researchers reported that the participants found the AI process conducive to their recovery as they were empowered as co-researchers and change agents. The supportive theme of personal affirmation evolved throughout the research process, beginning with participants' relating that, for the first time in their history of criminal justice involvement, they were treated with dignity. Participants related that the judge spoke *to* them, as opposed to speaking *past* them to someone else. The participants stated that from the judge to the treatment staff, they felt heard. Their voices were heard and they're perceived that their voices mattered.

Cooperrider and Srivastva, the originators of appreciative inquiry, related the four stages of AI as discover, dream, design, and destiny (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011).

1. Discovery–The discovery phase of the model involves a strength-based discussion about what works within a given system, organization, or population.

2. Dreaming–The dream stage involves a focus on the ideal within a system, organization or population.
3. Designing–The design phase of the process entails planning, prioritizing, and setting goals that would work well for the system, organization or population.
4. Destiny–The destiny phase of the process is where the ideals are realized through implementation.

As in the Fischer et al. (2007) and Robinson et al. (2014) studies, the protocol employed the discovery and dream stages of the Four-D AI process. Because all stakeholders were not participants in the study, and program design is beyond the scope of the research, the design and destiny phases will not occur until after the findings are presented to community service providers. The findings facilitate new perspectives that will drive innovative approaches to reintegration service delivery (Rowe et al., 2012).

Another aspect of this study that was reflective of AI is that it took a strength-based perspective that focused on the best in people and engaged a systematic inquiry toward the end of understanding reintegration from the perspectives of formerly incarcerated individuals. Cooperrider posited a strengths-based perspective of change (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011); Kessler, 2013).

The study was designed from an opportunity-centric perspective, as opposed to a problem-centric perspective, of overcoming challenges that are common to reintegrating individuals. There are different dynamics at play when people and communities are oriented toward discovery versus being focused on problem-solving (Robinson et al., 2012, 2014).

The problem-centric orientation of traditional criminological research is resistant to the innovation that is germane to elevating and strengthening a system. The risk-need-responsivity

(RNR) model that is pervasive in criminal justice research is more focused on environmental influences, as opposed to human agency-related strengths. The resultant interventions were derived from an environmentally-focused risk analysis based on perceived deficits and problems attributed to the individual (Robinson et al., 2012, 2014).

Social Cognitive Theory of Emergent Interactive Agency

The theoretical foundation of the study is social cognitive theory, which emerged from autonomous agency (AA), mechanical agency (MA), and emergent interactive agency (EIA) models (Bandura, 2018; Yong et al., 2015).

Autonomous and mechanical agency. The autonomous agency (AA) model posits that behavioral control is dependent upon individual will. Human agency is self-determined and self-regulated to achieve the desired outcomes. The theory fails to recognize environmental influences. Conversely, mechanical agency (MA) holds that behavior is influenced by external mechanisms. External factors directly influence individuals and behave only as environmental factors intervene. The individual, from this perspective, is devoid of any internally causal forces. Mechanical agency, therefore, views self-deterministic processes as secondary and involuntarily conditioned responses. Self-determinant agency does not exist, and individuals embody no motivational capacity (Yong et al., 2015).

AA and MA are mutually exclusive of one another. Moreover, both theories appear to repudiate the realities of self-influence as causal in an interactive dynamic between humans and the environment (Bandura, 2014, 2018).

Emergent interactive agency. EIA differs from autonomous or mechanical agency models in that it holds that humans interact dynamically with their environments. EIA posits that

"causation, action, cognitive, affective, and other personal factors, *and* environmental events all operate as interacting determinants" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175).

EIA's model acknowledges that, despite a given set of circumstances, individuals can direct and alter behavior. According to the theory, agentic competencies allow individuals to reconstruct distorted cognitions to redirect their outcomes. Self-determination is an emergent dynamic involving a combination of mechanical and autonomous theories that contribute to an individual's motivation to perform or avoid specific tasks (Bandura, 2011). Given that formerly incarcerated individuals encounter the same cumulative disadvantages, EIA may explain why outcomes differ among this population. Bandura's (1989) seminal study succinctly advised that determinants of human agency must consider agentic cognitive influences as contributing factors. "Self-generated activities lie at the very heart of causal processes. They not only contribute to the meaning and valence of most external influences, but they also function as critical proximal determinants of motivation and action" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175). Therefore, individuals possess an ability to influence outcomes despite circumstance.

Social cognitive theory and triarchic reciprocal causation. Social cognitive theory (SCT) coincides with EIA because it acknowledges an interpretational dynamic between environmental and autonomous forces. SCT evolved in the late 1970s when a seminal study by Bandura, Adams, and Beyer (1977) determined that learning was strictly related to operant conditioning and observation. By the late 1980s, Bandura (1989) revised this theory to reflect the cognitive processes involved in the learning process. At that time, the researcher established the existence of cognitive mediation between stimuli and human response. In other words, rather than ascribing to a strictly stimuli-response learning model, Bandura acknowledged that,

between the stimuli and the response, cognition occurred that could redirect, determine, or alter an individual's response. What followed was the theory of Triarchic Reciprocal Causation (TRC)

Bandura's (2018) theory of TRC posits a triadic interaction between the individual, environment, and human behavior. TRC is a conceptual model of the causal and interactional function of human agency. MA and AA ignore the central role of cognitive processes. Bandura determined that an individual's behavior motivates, and is motivated by, the social environment. The researcher presented three core components of human agency: (a) personal traits, (b) individual behavior, and (c) environmental factors. The three dynamically and progressively interact and are influenced by psychodynamic processes through which human agency occurs as the hierarchy of self-regulation, the eschewed dichotomous aspect of self-perception and the relationship of agentic causality to functional freed and self-determination (Bandura, 2011; Benedict, Schonder, & McGee, 2013). TRC consists of three categories: personal, behavioral, and environmental.

1. Personal includes goals, outcome expectations, self-efficacy, self-perception, self-esteem, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, self-evaluation, and self-regulatory progress.
2. Behavioral includes goal progress, motivation, and learning.
3. Environmental includes modeling, resources, other people, physical settings, instruction, and feedback.

A central concept of the TRC is an agentic influence on personal outcomes. Referred to as reciprocal determinism, the process positions individuals as causal contributors to their motivations and behaviors. It involves a confluence of behavioral, cognitive, affective, and personal factors that dynamically interact with environmental events.

Agentic determination contributes to an individual's motivation to perform or avoid, goal achievement (Bandura, 2013; Akers & Jennings, 2015). Self-efficacy is central to the

effectiveness of human agency and determines the positive or negative impact of environmental influences on an individual's ability to cope (Bandura, 2014).

Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by one's actions (p. 169).

Whether an individual believes in their ability to change impacts motivation and, at its core, determines an optimistic or pessimistic view of environmental challenges, goal setting, and goal achievement. It, therefore, impacts personal outcomes (Bandura, 2013; Johnson-Lawrence, Galea, & Kaplan Moffitt, 2015).

Human Agency

Agentic properties are paramount to SCT. Its agentic views are evident in three central areas of psychosocial functioning, including forethought, reaction, and reflection. Forethought addresses the agentic ability to self-motivate, self-guide, visualize, and proactively address likely outcomes of determinate actions. Reaction involves the agentic ability to regulate and evaluate behaviors against self-determined standards. Finally, self-reflection is the "most distinctly human core property of agency" (Bandura, 2018, p. 131). It involves the agentic ability to employ higher levels of self-reflection that include thought, actions, personal values, and moral meaning of goal-achievement. At this higher level of reasoning, includes the ability to consider alternative courses of action.

This competency, sometimes, referred to as self-determination, requires behavioral changes that may be rooted in mindset. It is necessary to address the root from which behavior

emerges to achieve sustainable behavioral change. This may be achieved by reconstructing distorted cognitions, a theme that emerged during data analysis (Bandura, 2012, 2014).

The cognitions that lead to criminal involvement cannot be ignored in rehabilitative service delivery (Johnson-Lawrence et al., 2015). The root of the cognition that resulted in criminal activity may adequately be addressed under this theory. As opposed to the carrot-and-stick philosophy with its heightened focus surveillance, Maruna and LeBel (2015) supported a strengths-perspective for former offenders reentering society. They argued that a strength-based perspective holds considerable promise as an alternative, or addition, to traditional reentry methods. The researchers also suggested that it is the individual's view of himself or herself that is at the crux of a person's decision to desist. They indicated that success in reentry depends on providing rehabilitative opportunities that reinforce this aspect of the individual's self-perception. Understanding how an individual perceives and constructs their situation is essential to understanding why there are different degrees of re-offending in otherwise similar circumstances.

This study will culminate in a presentation of a human-agency based perspective of reintegration and suggest guidance for incorporating that perspective into existing community reentry programs (Rowe et al., 2012). These results will be presented to community partners as an augmentation to existing reentry programs. Anticipated attendees include community reentry service providers and a state organization representing a partnership of social services, the police force, the church community, public officials, and citizens.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature Specific to the Topic or Research Question

Considerable research has centered on precursors to crime or the ecological factors contributing to criminal behavior. Less research has focused on how human agency and turning

points facilitate desistance from criminal activity (Listwan, Sullivan, Agnew, Cullen, & Colvin, 2013). The few studies that have sought to understand individual agency have been limited by the length of time the subjects had been out of prison. For example, Liem and Richardson (2014) conducted a study aimed at assessing "the role of transformation narratives in the desistance process" (p. 694). The study included in-depth narrative interviews with 67 racially diverse individuals who had served a life sentence (p. 632). Sixty-two were male, and five were female. Thirty-three of the study participants were re-incarcerated in maximum- to medium-security prisons. Thirty-four were in free society and under court supervision.

The study included narrative interviews designed to identify how participants evaluated their pre-incarceration, incarceration, and post-incarceration lives. Life events were noted chronological, including context as events occurred, allowing for analysis of objective and subjective factors related to narrative formation. The researchers noted that individuals who engaged in "negative phrasing" tended to have a self-perception of powerlessness as they viewed themselves having no control over their lives.

Listwan et al. (2013) stated that a sense of a core self, generative motivations, and a sense of agency are three elements that are central to what they refer to as "the redemption script" (p. 693). Redemptive narratives occurred when individuals expressed a sense of fulfillment that resulted from a self-perception of meaningfulness in their lives. These individuals realized a personal capability for self-determination. The results determined that human agency, or the lack thereof, was the determining factor in successful, or unsuccessful, desistence. The researchers advised that programs should address agentic restoration to support previously incarcerated individuals in achieving successful re-entry.

Walker et al. (2015) also described as a multilevel transformative process that must go beyond the presence of a triggering consequence to include a resolve to change. It takes, therefore, more than a realization of negative consequences or negative emotions to trigger the resolve to change. It requires an individual to acknowledge personal responsibility for their actions and acknowledge the need to change those actions. While the study participants evidenced transformative narratives, those who were re-incarcerated failed to take ownership of their actions. Their narratives included blaming circumstance and others or failure to admit their part in the crime.

Exploring desistance among serious offenders, Stevens (2012) conducted a semi-ethnographic qualitative study with residents of three English prison-based therapeutic communities. The study included semi-structured interviews with 60 residents and 20 staff members. The purpose of the study was to contrast evaluative studies conducted from a practitioner perspective with information from the often-excluded perspectives of those they served.

Stevens (2012) concluded that offender rehabilitation "involves a process of purposive and agentic reconstruction of identity and narrative reframing so that a new individual emerges whose attitudes and behaviors are coherent with long-term desistance from crime" (p. 207). Stevens' study reaffirmed desistance theories that emphasize the importance of pro-social changes to the offender's identity and self-narrative. Stevens advised that exploring the narrative identities of criminal justice-involved individuals could reveal explanatory variables these individuals view as antecedents to desistence decisions.

Presser (2016) agreed with Stevens (2012), suggesting that criminologists not solely view offenders' stories from a criminal-causality perspective. Presser advised that unravel the

complexities of desistence decisions; criminologists should re-conceptualize these narratives from an explanatory perspective. According to Stevens, empirical research suggests that people who desist from criminal involvement make identifiable changes in self-identification, and in their narratives, as they no longer cognitively or emotionally identify with their offending-selves.

In a study examining the desistence of male perpetrators of domestic violence, Walker et al. (2015) performed a thematic analysis of the narratives of 22 male offenders, including 13 desisters and nine non-desisters. The researchers concluded that cognitive shifts in self-identification occurred as a progression marked by turning points that led to desistence decisions. The results of the Walker study revealed that an overemphasis on environmental factors neglects the importance of human agency in the desistence process. The participants in the Walker study stated that they gradually, over time, arrived at a resolve at which they made an autonomous decision to change. The autonomous process involved taking responsibility for their behaviors and admitted the need to change.

Primary Versus Secondary Desistance

Maruna and LeBel (2015) recognized desistence as occurring in primary and secondary stages. Primary desistence involves a brief cessation of criminal behavior. Secondary desistence refers to movement from primary behavioral change to a cognitive internalization that results in desistence throughout the life course. Therefore desistence, according to these researchers, is not an unexpected occurrence. There are many initial attempts before an individual experiences subsequent stages leading to termination of criminal activity. The Maruna and LeBel (2015) study agreed with findings by Giordano (2014) that suggested that the desistance trajectory includes identity changes from offender to non-offender. As a result of these cognitive changes, they no longer perceive the criminal activity as compatible with the individuals they have

become. Because lulls in criminal behavior occur throughout the desistence progression, primary desistance only beneficial as it relates to the long-term processes of desistence from criminal activity.

The idea of primary and secondary desistence is an indication of why current criminal justice paradigms are making little impact on national recidivism rates. While in-prison or post-release programs may address structural or environmental factors such as employment, substance abuse support systems or prosocial alliances, they appear to have a negligible impact on successful reintegration of individuals who are in the primary desistence phase of the desistence trajectory. Because desistence occurs through a progression of turning points along the life course, the success or failure of a program participant is unlikely to be due to the program itself.

Recidivism and Social Control Paradigms

A key aspect of crime prevention is effectively interrupting the recidivism cycle (Valera et al., 2017). A challenge to that reality is that archaic paradigms, and their social control underpinnings, form the basis of traditional reintegration programs. Rational choice is a prominent social control theory in criminal justice discourse. It fails, however, to address core causes of criminality and relies on retributive interventions to force compliance (Cochran, Mears, Bales, & Stewart, 2014; McCarthy & Chaudhary, 2014; Van Aaken, 2012).

For many formerly incarcerated individuals, reentry challenges are exacerbated by the "behavioral deep freeze" (Zamble & Porporino, 1990, p. 62) of the prison environment. Absent effective intervention, poor pre-incarceration coping competencies continue to plague the individual after release. Research supports the effectiveness of cognitive therapies in establishing sustainable outcomes for reintegrating individuals. These studies advocated for a multidisciplinary, integrated, approach beginning with pre-release, continuing through post-

release, and augmented by a continuum of post-release care that requires leveraging already strained community resources (Latessa & Reitler, 2015; Wright, Pratt, Lowenkamp, & Latessa, 2012). These studies and their theoretical basis, are based on a problem-centric focus on what causes criminal activity and external controls that are intended to alter that behavior.

Because of a punitive focus, many post-release programs exacerbate recidivism because offenders are ill-equipped to meet stringent parole or probation requirements. Such social control-based programs perpetuate, rather than mitigate, cumulative social disadvantages throughout the reintegration life course. The result is a chain reaction that creates multiple socioecological barriers to effective and sustainable reentry outcomes.

Lopes et al. (2012) suggest that the trajectory of an individual's life is impacted by cumulative socioeconomic disadvantages perpetuated by imprisonment. For many inmates, reentry challenges are exacerbated by the "behavioral deep freeze" (Zamble & Porporino, 1990, p. 62) of a prison environment in which pre-incarceration mindsets remain unaddressed, lying dormant until after release. Lopes advised that this has implications for various turning points in post-incarceration. However, some individuals manage to sustain positive outcomes, regardless of these cumulative disadvantages (Bandura, 2011; Carlsson, 2012).

In addressing why some individuals succeed despite such cumulative disadvantage, Jang and Rhodes (2012) noted failure to consider conditioning factors is a weakness in social control research such as that of Listwan et al. (2013). While Jang and Rhodes (2012) focused on emotion as a conditioning factor, the Lopes addresses the mindsets that drive that emotion.

Because they are based on rational choice and anomie strain theories, post-release interventions are enforcement- and supervision-focused, as opposed to supportive and empowering to the clients (Agnew, 2015; Thompson, 2014; van Gelder, Elffers, Reynald, &

Nagin, 2013). Social control methods are rigid, and their "utilitarian perspectives" (van Gelder et al., 2013, p. 3) fail to acknowledge human agency or decision-making dynamics, thus leaving no room for acknowledging ecological dynamics of human interaction with the environment (Farrington & Murray, 2017; van Gelder et al., 2013; Jang & Rhodes, 2012). Increased surveillance and supervision are not the answer to an ex-offender's failure to adhere to stringent post-release probation or parole standards, including mandatorily reporting to a given community reintegration program (Lopes et al., 2012). Such methods of attempted control exacerbate recidivism.

While prison can temporarily break inmates' wills and force compliance with rules, it makes it difficult for the inmate to make the transition from enforced discipline to self-discipline. It diminishes the necessity and permissibility of making decisions about almost everything. For example, inmates are told what and when to eat, when and where to sleep, when to work and when to engage in recreation. Cochran et al. (2014) suggested that any therapy with prisoners should promote valuing and utilizing choices. The findings supported Zamble and Porporino's (1990) observations supporting that, absent effective intervention; poor coping skills continue to plague the inmate in post-release (Cochran et al., 2014). The inevitable fallout is re-imprisonment due to parole or probationary status offenses or new criminal activity (Lopes et al., 2012).

Rational choice-based reintegration methods fail to consider the intricacies of human behavior or recognize that individual reactions are not consistent with the top-down approach to controlling a group of individuals. According to some researchers, rational choice consists of unfocused and unscientific arguments about the actual ways in which people think. In other words, critics of this theory say that this is not how people think. A further criticism is that

rational choice theorists have been content to use close-enough approximations of human behavior for research purposes (Cornish & Clarke, 2014; McCarthy & Chaudhary, 2014; Van Aaken, 2012; van Gelder et al., 2013).

These theories focus on macro-level intervention policies designed to force human behavior. Strategies relevant to this perspective include (a) target hardening, (b) general and specific legal deterrents, and (c) incapacitation. Incarceration and retribution do not alter future behavior. However, rational choice theorists consistently taunt it as a means by which to reduce recidivism, claiming that it reduces the chances of engaging in additional criminal activity. Examples of this punitive mentality include Truth in Sentencing which prescribes mandatorily serving 85% of a sentence, eliminating parole for certain crimes, and, determinant sentencing legislation (Paternoster, Bachman, Bushway, Kerrison, & O'Connell, 2015).

Rational choice-based methods also fail to address the core causes of criminality. Their retributive leanings are designed to force compliance with social and prison rules (McCarthy & Chaudhary, 2014; Van Aaken, 2012). Failure to address etiological implications ignores the body of research on a given population. Traditional intervention methods have failed to achieve significant reductions in recidivism. Absent effective intervention, poor coping skills continue to plague reintegrating individuals. The inevitable fallout is re-imprisonment due to status offenses or new criminal activity (Listwan et al., 2013). From a reintegration perspective, communities are negatively impacted by the chain reaction perpetuated in the interest of eradicating societal evil (Burke, 2013; Coyle, 2013).

Maruna and LeBel (2015) supported a strengths-perspective for reintegrating individuals, as opposed to the carrot-and-stick philosophy that focuses on heightened surveillance. They suggested that it is the individual's view of himself or herself that facilitates an individual's

decision to desist from criminal activity. “Knowledge of offenders’ construction of their situation is essential to a fuller understanding of why there are different incidences of re-offending in apparently similar circumstances” (p. 33).

The theoretical foundation of the current study used social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2011; Yong et al., 2015). The research facilitated an understanding of how human agency and self-determination inform alteration of an individual’s view of their past, including implications for an individual’s decision to desist from criminal activity. The research question asked what turning points lead to the participants’ decision to desist from criminal activity.

Social cognitive theory postulates that humans are innately equipped with a capacity to learn and that learning occurs as an individual is exposed to internal and environmental (social) stimuli (Akers & Jennings, 2015). Just as individuals learn maladaptive behaviors and social habits, they can learn positive behaviors. In support of this position, a study of inmate coping skills supported the hypothesis that the lack of coping skills is pivotal to, or the cause of, sustained criminal behavior (Picken, 2012). An inspection of the way in which the subjects dealt with problems rarely included any consistent attempts at developing a deliberate, persistent, or systematic approach to a situation. Rarely was a conscious strategy of self-control or other cognitive technique discovered, and rarely was any type of planning and organization evident. It was further noted that 70% of the subjects behaved in a manner that would likely exacerbate at least one of the situations that inmates identified as their most pressing problems.

Bandura’s (2018) theories of human behavior and personality development focused on the individual as related to the psychosocial, developmental, and cognitive aspects of an individual (La Voy, Brand, & McFadden, 2014). Simply stated, we cannot change our past, and sometimes we cannot change the environment in which we may exist. However, we can change

our perceptions, behaviors, and goals to address life demands on more productive and positive levels. This model acknowledges the progressive dynamic of human development within the environment through the life course (Ndrecka et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2012).

Grimm, Grove, Pickett, and Redman, (2008) presented an exceptional and seminal example of this when they advocated for a more realistic view of human interaction. The research was a significant paradigm shift in the because it incorporated a micro to a macro systemic perspective on the environment and established a holistic context for studying human behavior. While this bioecological perspective captured the cyclical nature of human interaction, it did not focus on the cognitions that drive that interaction (Wright et al., 2012).

Existing criminological perspectives could be beneficial to understanding the importance of partnering in client or participant empowerment. For example, directly engaging clients in case management allows for agentic development (Wright et al., 2012). However, these paradigms are typically used to understand *predictors* of recidivism related to cumulative disadvantages in reintegration (Wright et al., 2012).

Social cognitive methods incorporate an environmental perspective while also addressing the implications of cognition in influencing or overcoming environmental or structural challenges (Blokland & van der Geest, 2015). Moreover, it acknowledges the progressive and dynamic of human-within-environment (Bandura, 2011; Yong et al., 2015). The importance of understanding how an individual's cognitions determine how well they cope with environmental factors has important implications for understanding turning-points in the desistence process. The succession of cognitive shifts that lead to desistence from criminal activity involves (a) developing a new sense of self-worth, (b) self-efficacy, and (c) personal responsibility. These factors empower long-term desistence that result in termination of criminal activity. Sampson &

Laub (2016) concluded that crime is an emergent process that is not exclusively attributable to the individual nor the environment. Criminal justice or restorative justice paradigms should consider it is the cognitive processes that drive how humans perceive and interact with the environment that should be considered in supporting reintegration individuals.

Synthesis of the Research Findings

While various traditional reintegration perspectives may be, to some extent, beneficial none alone, nor in the collective, are a panacea. Each one attempts to address external criminological aspects of a systemically entrenched dilemma. Its progeny, recidivism, is one aspect of the issues facing those who are navigating reentry waters. The root of the cognition that resulted in that behavior may be adequately addressed under this theory. An existing community reintegration program could include components that teach individuals to recognize, challenge, and to replace self-defeating mindsets with healthier thoughts that promote emotional well-being and goal achievement.

Attacking this matter from an external vantage point is not having the desired impact on reducing recidivism. The focus should be the sustainable change that is rarely achieved through control strategies. Any external means of forging change in this population will continue to be less effective unless and until focus shifts from managing social control, to influencing human beings. Influence emerges from within the individual in interaction with the environment. It follows, therefore, that social models should shift from a "deficiency paradigm" (Damian & Sandu, 2012, p. 37) to an action research view of the population's perspectives.

A considerable body of research has focused on the importance of the interaction of human agency within an ecological context. Recidivism-related contextual considerations include cumulative disadvantage and structural inefficiencies related to reintegration (Wright et

al., 2012). These are factors affecting all reintegrating individuals. However, some prevail in living productive post-incarceration lives despite these challenges. King (2013) determined that individual values, morals, and beliefs facilitate an individual's ability to desist from criminal activity, despite the disadvantageous environmental factors. Maschi et al. (2013) attribute this to human agency and self-determinant choice. Such decisions have a life course impact with a retrospective and prospective impact. For example, decisions made at any point during the life course will have immediate, as well as future, repercussions.

Contemporary criminological paradigms are rooted in a rational choice perspective of criminal justice (Paternoster et al., 2015). The theory views individuals as rational actors that can be influenced through inducements and external social controls (Cornish & Clarke, 2014; van Gelder, 2013). Rational choice is described as rigid overgeneralizations of cognitive processes involved in criminality. They stated that it ignores the implications of how an individual internalizes and responds to, life events. This theory, which originated in the field of economics, has been described as unfocused and unscientific in its basic human cognition assumptions. Conversely, the constructs of human agency, self-determination, personal choice, individual control over decision-making, and the degree to which they influence successful or unsuccessful reintegration is the research gap addressed in this study (Kroneberg, & Kalter, 2012; McCarthy & Chaudhary, 2014; Nivette, 2011; Van Aaken, 2012; van Gelder, 2013).

Sverdlik and Oreg (2015) found a connection between the perceived degree of personal choice and a more positive view of events. How an individual views post-release challenges might have a direct effect on successful reintegration. Therefore, social cognitive theory and emergent interactive agency form the theoretical foundation of the subject research project. The cure is in the cause. Criminal justice discourse must necessarily consider human agency and self-

determination in ongoing discourse, gain insight from this aspect of the desistance dynamic, and incorporate that knowledge into service delivery (Walker et al., 2015).

Critique of the Previous Research

Studies conducted with incarcerated individuals are not contextually reflective of the reintegration experience. Depending on the environment, the accuracy of the data could be compromised, as Fine et al. (2012) reported regarding their four-year in-prison participatory action research study. The Fine et al. study involved deep emersion of the researches into the environment in which they conducted the research. The project involved participants in a maximum-security college program for women.

The project was in constant peril from the start. It was a challenge for the researchers to overcome systemic barriers to gain access to the target population. Considerable preliminary research had to be conducted by the institution, and there was a palpable and pervasive concern that the project could be halted. “We were, of course, always watched. Moreover, we knew that the futures of the program and our collaboration were always in jeopardy. Too many tears, or bringing in too much food could provoke an officer to shut us down” (Fine & Torre, 2006, p. 261).

Despite the researchers’ commitment to reporting the truth, they described the environment as sadistic and restrictive as it stifled any free expression of the participants. Those conditions may have compromised the outsider positions of the researchers. The researchers reported the need for close collaboration with participants due to the danger of free expression regarding participant experiences within the prison environment. The closeness and trust-building in which the researchers engaged could have rendered the project vulnerable to the

Roethlisberger and Dickson's (1939) Hawthorne Effect, as well as transference issues that could have adulterated validity of the data.

The Brigham Young University research team of Davis, Bahr, and Ward (2012) conducted one of a limited number of qualitative studies majoring on ex-offender perspectives. The sampling included 14 male and two female ex-offenders between the ages of 25 to 48. There was no distinction between probationers or parolees, and all participants were white. Sampling was intended to "capture a range of voices and relevant experiences among the participants" (pp. 453-454). Offenses ranged from assault, theft, driving under the influence, drug possession, and drug sales (p. 453).

The subjects were interviewed regarding pre-prison and post-incarceration, as well as post-release experiences. The pre-prison interviews included questions regarding (a) childhood and family, (b) how they got involved in crime, and (c) the nature of their crimes. The post-incarceration questions regarded how the subject's experiences in prison affected them. Questions regarding life after prison or jail included (a) major turning points, (b) drug use, (c) family, and (d) employment. The interview process focused on what helped participants to desist from crime, as well as any problem areas to include questions about drug use, drug use attitudes, drug treatment, and how drug use impacted them. All participants were compensated for their participation.

The interviews were triangulated with quantitative data and the study was supplemented with a secondary source consisting of interviews conducted with 51 parolees from a prior study. The secondary data was collected beginning a week after participant release from prison and continuing through three years following release. This sample was racially diverse, included participants between the ages of 22 to 56, and was similar to the U. S. parole population on

several demographic characteristics except for sex and race. It included a higher proportion of women, fewer minorities.

One could argue that the listed exceptions rendered the sample *dissimilar* to the parole population. Additionally, the Brigham Young report excluded a significant cross-section of the prison population when it failed to included participants of color. The subsequent comparison of the sample to past quantitative research results would not provide appropriate triangulation of the data (Craig, 2009). Moreover, the study is limited by its one week to three-year post-release focus. Remarkably, however, one participant in the study captured the focus of the subject research study with this statement (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013),

> Um, it's honestly just how bad you want it. I mean if you really want a better life, there's no class you can take, there's no program, there's nothing your PO or judges can say that's going to make you stay clean. It's just how bad you want it. (p. 460)

The statement relates an intangible aspect evident in the human-agency dynamic. It could be at the root of why existing evidence-based reintegration support programs have failed to significantly reduce high rates of recidivism (Cooper et al., 2014; Ndrecka et al., 2017).

Participant Success Versus Program Outcomes

There appear to be few, if any, evidence-based studies related involving successfully reintegrated individuals who have achieved permanent desistence. Such studies should utilize a sample of offenders with similar mental health, substance abuse, trauma, and criminal histories to determine what factors exist for the successful group, which did not exist for the recidivist group. From a life-course perspective, Sampson and Laub (2016) analyzed developmental criminology paradigms. The researchers argued that trajectories of crime could be meaningfully understood through a revised age graded theory of informal social control (Laub, Rowan, & Sampson, 2018). They identified three major issues as follows: (a) data analytics that ignore

offender group developmental distinctions, (b) data analytics that ignore dynamic turning points related to significant life course events, and (c) data analytics that overlook the importance of human agency in the development of criminal behaviors. The authors' life-course theory espouses an ongoing interaction between individuals and environmental factors that employs purposeful human agency. In keeping with this, Le Blanc (2012) supported that the course of deviant behavior is cyclical throughout the life course. Le Blanc goes on to suggest the identification of influences on quantitative and qualitative changes in the life course trajectory (Carlsson, 2012).

Some take issue with the author's conclusion that criminality is an emergent process that is not solely attributable to the individual nor specific to the environment. It can, however, be argued that the dynamic to which Le Blanc (2012), along with Sampson and Laub (2016), referred relates not to a mutual exclusivity between the two; but to the interaction of the individual within the environment (Byrne, & Hummer, 2016). While acknowledging variables such as employment stability and prosocial relationships are significant factors, they are environmental variables faced by virtually all formerly incarcerated individuals. Understanding the cognitions of that supported successfully reintegrated individuals in overcoming these disadvantages is essential in facilitating success for others.

Latessa and Reitler (2015) and Wright et al. (2012) identified three principals of successful reentry programs: (a) service delivery risk assessment, (b) targeting highly correlated criminogenic variables, and (c) responsivity in delivering an appropriate intervention that is in keeping with abilities and styles of the participants. Criminogenic variables noted in the study included antisocial attitudes, emotions, values, skills-deficiencies in problem-solving, self-efficacy, impulsivity, and irresponsibility. The criminogenic aspect of service delivery can be

augmented by understanding cognitions related to turning points in the desistence trajectory. That includes a forward focus from the individual's perspective (Walker et al., 2015). Several studies have found that the characteristics of the client may have an impact on, or be a barrier to, treatment. It is important to include human agency and self-determination dynamics as a dimensional aspect of understanding of the desistence. How potential program participants experienced and coped with life events is essential to understanding the target population (Kao et al., 2014).

Rehabilitation programs founded on rational choice theory are social control-focused and result in demands with which newly released individuals are ill-equipped to comply (Ndrecka et al., 2017; Jang & Rhodes, 2012). The resulting status violations often constitute grounds for reincarceration. Increased surveillance and supervision are not the answer to an ex-offender's failure to adhere to stringent post-release probation or parole standards (Lopes et al., 2012; Valera et al., 2017). Rational choice-based methods of attempted control exacerbate recidivism. Cloaking rational choice in an active-participant model fails to address the internal cognition dynamic; Byrne et al. (2015) supported an active participant model where the offender is part of the decision-making. While the suggestion appears beneficial, it focuses on the external dynamics of recidivating as opposed to addressing internal cognitions.

Summary

By acknowledging and advocating for realistic ecological perspectives in human behavior, Grimm et al., (2008) presented an exceptional example of how ecological system theories may augment research. The researchers acknowledged the importance of human influence on the environment. Note the reference to human influence on the environment as opposed to environmental influence on the human. It represents a good start in understanding

how reintegrating individuals prevail against environmental challenges to their desistence process.

Because existing research appears to exclude consideration of human-agency in understanding reintegration outcomes, this study will provide a new perspective on how formerly incarcerated individuals have achieved sustainable outcomes as they mitigated cumulative and systemic disadvantages perpetuated by institutionalization (Sampson & Laub, 2016). Acknowledging that programs, policies, and practices are created from the perspectives of the service providers (Stringer, 2013), it is time for new perspectives in program development and delivery.

Criminological causations are representative of the dynamic interplay between the individual and their environment. According to the Developmental Course Model of Human Behavior, criminal behavior is secondary to other underlying problems that cannot exclude human complexity (Blokland & van der Geest, 2015).

The principles of social cognitive theory dictate that human beings are innately biologically equipped with the capacity to learn, which occurs as one is exposed to biological (internal) and environmental (social) stimuli (Akers & Jennings, 2015). Just as an individual learns maladaptive behaviors and social habits, they can learn behaviors that are more positive. In response to the question of turning points in his reintegration experience, a participant in a seminal Urban Institute Justice Policy Center study addressed the importance of the agentic dynamic in the reintegration process,

> My contribution was simply this, if the program does not exist within inside you, what happens when a fire burns down the building where that program exists, does that mean you stop treating yourself? Too many people rely on the treatment that comes from the morgue and not the one that comes from internally where it has to be. If you don't develop a sense of who you are then no program in the world is going to help. (Solomon, Gouvis, & Waul, 2001, p. 7)

That statement captures the need to examine the implications of human agency and self-determination in facilitating desistence decisions of formerly incarcerated individuals. To the extent that perception and perspective influence behavior, it makes sense to examine the cognitions that drive desist from criminal activity.

In order to address recidivism, reintegration intervention must include strategies that leverage human agency to foster sustained positive outcomes. Reentry should consider the fact that offenders who do not recidivate share a highly developed sense of purpose despite social labeling (Robinson et al., 2012). The dissertation project is designed to determine to what extent self-determination and human agency represent missing links in providing effective reintegration programs that significantly mitigate the tendency toward reoffending.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research study was to add to the body of criminological knowledge, specifically an understanding of the implications of human-agency (Cooper et al., 2014; Sampson & Laub, 2016) on reintegration outcomes. A second purpose of the study was to understand, from the perspective of the formerly incarcerated, what turning points led to their decisions to desist from criminal activity.

The findings will be introduced to community partners by way of a presentation a partnership of social services, the police force, the church community, public officials, and citizens. Other dissemination of the results will be to the participants if requested. Additional dissemination will be through in-service training for community service providers.

The sample size was 10 participants, including four formerly incarcerated individuals and six parole and probation officers. Given the limited scope of the subject research, the initial sample size of 15 participants required to reach saturation in the qualitative data was reduced due to ongoing recruitment challenges. This smaller sample size appeared to have a negligible effect on achieving an acceptable level of saturation. Data analysis revealed redundancy in themes in the former inmate data as well as in the probation and parole officer data (Stringer, 2013). All necessary IRB approvals were obtained. Sampling challenges are discussed further under the Limitations section in Chapter Five.

Quantitative Data–Formerly Incarcerated Participants

Quantitative data collection included basic demographic data collected through online surveys. Formerly Incarcerated Participants were drawn from a non-randomized convenience sample of formerly incarcerated males and females between the ages of 35 and 74, who had served time in state or federal prisons or jails in the United States (Bernard, 2012). The most-recent-release date had to be on or before January 1, 2009, without subsequent offenses (Craig, 2009).

Qualitative Data–Formerly Incarcerated Participants

Qualitative data collection for formerly incarcerated participants included interview notes and transcribed audio recordings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with formerly incarcerated participants. Qualitative data collection also included the open-ended survey questions answered by parole and probation officers. The field journal provided additional qualitative data.

Quantitative Data–Current or Former Parole and Probation Officers

Quantitative data collection included basic demographic data collected through online surveys. The data included current or former job title, how many years the participant served in the position, division or department in which the participant worked, and work address.

Qualitative Data–Current or Former Parole and Probation Officers

Qualitative data collection for parole and probation officer participants included the open-ended survey questions answered by parole and probation officers. The field journal provided additional qualitative data.

Subjects were voluntary participants. All participants were fully advised of their rights and protections in accordance with the approved IRB Human Subjects protection guidelines. A screening tool was used to exclude people who did not meet the criteria to participate in the study.

Findings from the study will provide new perspectives to facilitate increased long-term outcomes for individuals serviced by community reintegration organizations and drive innovative approaches to community reintegration service delivery (Rowe et al., 2012). This information will be presented to community reintegration service providers.

Research Design

Action research was used in this study because it focuses on the best in individuals and involves systematic discovery that seeks to strengthen a system's capacity to achieve heightened potential. The theory's strengths-based underpinning facilitates the study design and coincides with an appreciation and understanding of reintegration from the perspectives of formerly incarcerated individuals (Creswell, 2014; Stringer, 2013).

Individual interviews were conducted with formerly criminal justice-involved individuals currently living in the United States (Stringer, 2013). All necessary IRB approvals were obtained.

The researcher sent recruitment flyers to six local metropolitan area organizations providing services to the target population. Prospective volunteers took the survey, which assigned unique participant codes. The participant code is the only identifier used in evaluating interview responses. To further ensure anonymity, the survey system was programmed to block the internet protocol (IP) addresses of respondents.

Current and former United States parole and probation officers were invited to take an online survey containing seven open-ended interview questions along with basic demographic information related to their criminal justice position. Each survey participant was offered the opportunity to participate in a telephone interview. These data were collected to facilitate context for the study. The data were triangulated with interview notes, transcribed audio recordings, the researcher's field journal and peer-reviewed literature regarding multiple theoretical models.

Target Population and Participant Selection

The study consisted of a non-randomized convenience sample of two populations: (a) formerly incarcerated individuals who have served time in a United States jail or prison, and (b) current or former parole or probation officers who worked in a United States institution. Subjects were voluntary participants. All potential participants were fully advised of their rights and protections under applicable Human Subject Guidelines. Formerly incarcerated individuals participated in a survey and semi-structured interviews. The current or former parole or probation officers participated in an open-ended survey. The surveys included a screening tool to exclude individuals who were not appropriate for the study.

After a few months of receiving no volunteers, IRB-approved changes were made to the recruitment strategy. First, the geographic recruitment area was expanded from the local metropolitan area to the entire state. Too few individuals responded to this expansion, and the area was then expanded to the entire United States. While this expansion of the geographic recruitment area resulted in more respondents, it did not result in the initial sample size of 15 formerly incarcerated participants and 15 current or former probation and parole officers.

Because recruitment had gone on for over a year, the sample size was reduced to the number of qualified participants recruited to date (four ex-offenders, six parole officers). The

change had a negligible impact on the sample, as analysis revealed that significant saturation had occurred in data from both the formerly incarcerated participants, as well as the current or former parole and probation officer responses. Following are detailed the specific challenges in recruiting each population group.

Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

The initial recruitment area was limited to the local metropolitan area. Before expanding the recruitment area, at least three potential participants expressed frustration with residing outside of the designated recruitment area. After expansion of the recruitment area, individuals as far as the west coast took the survey. No all of these were qualified, some failed to complete the survey, some opted out of informed consent, and several failed to follow through with an interview.

Current or Former Parole and Probation Officers

Early in the recruitment process, the researcher realized that requiring parole and probation officers first to take a survey and then commit to telephone interviews appeared to be a barrier to data collection. At that point, the recruitment strategy was changed to an open-ended online survey, which increased the number of volunteers. Additionally, the researcher was contacted by some potential participants who either took issue with the exclusion criteria or were outside of the recruitment area. This aspect of the study is discussed, in detail, in the Limitations section of this document.

Inclusive Criteria

Included in the research study are residents of the United States between the ages of 35 and 75 years, with a most-recent prison release date on or before January 1, 2009. Each participant must not have incurred any offenses, convictions or incarcerations after their most

recent release date and must not be under court supervision, including probation, parole or monitoring as a condition of parole.

Exclusion Criteria

Excluded from the research study were individuals who had a most recent release date after January 1, 2009, and any individual who was currently under court supervision including probation, parole, or monitoring as a condition of parole. Additional exclusions included having a recent incarceration for a juvenile offense; mandatory residency in a treatment center on condition of parole; court-ordered sentencing to residential substance abuse treatment; individuals aged 34 years old or under; individuals aged 76 years and older; individuals currently under the care of a mental health professional including a therapist, psychiatrist, or psychologist; incarcerated individuals; individuals experiencing diminished capacity; individuals who are mentally or physically challenged; individuals required to report under Megan's Law requirements; and individuals residing outside the United States.

Procedures

Participants in the study were directed to an online survey that automatically assigned a unique participant code to each respondent. The first set of questions related to the exclusionary variables. To protect non-qualified respondents from providing any survey information, those who did not meet the inclusionary criteria were immediately forwarded to a Thank You Page indicating that they did not qualify for the study. Those that met the self-reported requirements were allowed access to the survey questions.

Informed Consent-Former Prisoner Surveys

The IRB approved -informed consent form was administered online at the start of the survey. This document included information regarding the recorded interviews. It required that

the potential participant agree to, or disagree with, the consent terms by clicking the appropriate radio button. If the respondent clicked the button that reads, "I have read, understand, and agree to the terms of the informed consent form," they advanced to the first survey field. If the respondent disagreed by clicking the button stating, "I DO NOT Agree to the terms of the informed consent form," they were taken to the Thank-You page, thus barring their response to any of the survey questions. No data were collected from that respondent and the participant code assigned to that individual was never re-used. An additional option for those who did not agree to the terms of the Consent Agreement was to click the EXIT button at the top of the survey before any data were collected. At the end of the survey, contact information was requested of survey respondents, who were advised that the information would be used to schedule a telephone interview.

Informed Consent–Former Prisoner Telephone Interviews

Before each interview, the researcher emailed a copy of the consent form the respondent signed before taking the survey. This document included information regarding the recorded interviews. At the beginning of the interviews, the researcher confirmed the participant's receipt of a copy of the consent form and answered any questions. Thereafter, the interview proceeded.

Informed Consent–Current or Former Parole or Probation Officer Survey

The informed consent form required that the potential participant agree or disagree to the terms by clicking the corresponding radio button. If the respondent clicked the button that read, "I have read, understand, and agree to the terms of the informed consent form," they advanced to the first survey field. If the respondent disagreed by clicking the button stating, "I DO NOT Agree to the terms of the informed consent form," they were taken to the Thank-You page, thus barring their response to any of the survey questions. No data were collected from that

respondent. An additional option for those who did not agree to the terms of the Consent Agreement was to click the EXIT button at the top of the survey before any data were collected.

Exclusionary variables were presented at the beginning of the survey. Those respondents who did not meet the inclusionary criteria were taken to a Thank You page indicating that they do qualify for the study. No data were collected for non-qualifying participants. Parole and probation officers could choose to participate in a telephone interview. No respondents opted into participating in a phone interview.

Instruments

Three data collection instruments were used in the study. These included a field journal, semi-structured interviews, and an electronic survey. Interview and survey questions were researcher-designed. A field test with three experts in the field was conducted to solicit feedback regarding the interview questions and survey forms. As appropriate, contributed expert feedback was incorporated as revisions and resubmitted for IRB review and approval before use with study participants.

Surveys

An online survey of formerly incarcerated individuals was used to collect demographic data including age, country, place of incarceration, latest release date, court supervision status, whether the respondent was under mental health treatment, Megan's Law status, last release type, drug treatment status, sex, residential zip code, educational level, relationship status, household income, number of incarcerations, juvenile offenses, juvenile detentions, email address and phone number. The online survey questions were researcher-designed. The data were used as a point of triangulation to determine if age, sex, and criminal history had implications for emergent themes.

The probation or parole officer survey included seven open-ended questions related to their views regarding what is necessary for post-release success. Surveys of parole and probation officers include basic demographic data including name, title, years as a parole or probation officer, division or department, and location. The survey questions were researcher-designed. The data were used to add context and to facilitate an understanding of contextual implications to the findings

Telephone Interviews

All formerly incarcerated individuals telephone interviews were recorded to capture participant responses to the semi-structured interview questions and subquestions. Interviews lasted between 45- to 90-minutes and included questions designed to understand turning points in the desistance decisions of formerly incarcerated participants. The following interview questions were asked of formerly incarcerated participants: (a) life prior to and after incarceration; (b) positive aspects of their current lives compared to before incarceration; (c) advice they have for others who are coming out of prison; (d) their perspectives regarding mistakes made by the prison system; (e) skills, talents, or abilities acquired during reintegration; and, (f) their long-term goals. Interview questions were researcher-designed.

Field Journal

Descriptive data were generated from the field journal, which consisted of contemporaneous reflections, details and notations of the study and research process, and observations during participant interviews, and other aspects of the research process as appropriate to analysis. Descriptive notations included the date of interviews, the physical setting of the interviews, and observations of emotional cues that emerged during the interviews. The field journal also documented researcher thoughts, ideas, or concerns regarding the interview

experience or participant interactions. The field journal aided in describing the interview environment and the way in which participants interacted within the setting. Contemporaneous notations of the discussion were also noted. In some cases, exact quotes of the interviewees were noted.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The overarching research question is, what are the factors that assisted successfully reintegrated formerly incarcerated individuals to desist from criminal activity?

There are three subquestions:

1. What themes exist in the personal stories of formerly incarcerated individuals who have successfully reintegrated into society after engagement in the criminal justice system?
2. What turning points do individuals formerly involved in the criminal justice system identify as facilitating their decisions to desist from criminal activity?
3. How can what is learned from the data be used to educate community providers and to augment existing community reintegration programs?

Question 1 was designed to learn if there are any recurring themes among the participants. For instance, did all participants experience the same type of life events before, or in the process of, desisting from criminal activity? Question 2 was designed to determine if participants identify specific life event that may represent turning points in their decisions to desist from criminal activity. Question 3 was designed to determine if any of the data may add to existing knowledge regarding how formerly criminal justice-involved individuals determine to desist from criminal activity. These results may assist existing community reentry stakeholders in augmenting programs that restructure cognition, empower participants to reframe their past, master effective coping strategies, eliminate self-defeating decision-making, foster a sense of

positive self-perception; and develop efficacy toward increased quality of life throughout the post-release life-course.

Data Analysis

The following tasks and systems were employed during data collection and analysis. The interview data derived from the transcribed interviews were reviewed using the framework method to identify prominent themes, repetitive concepts or terminology, and belief patterns associated with individuals and settings (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013; Heath et al., 2012). Ideas and concepts were identified, coded and sorted into categories and subcategories. Quantitative survey data were entered in an Excel data sheet according to participant codes. Qualitative data derived from interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses were coded using a coding guide. Data were then organized into categories, sub-categories, and overarching themes.

Management and Processing of Data

Survey data were collected through Survey Monkey, downloaded to a password-protected computer, and loaded into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Quantitative methods were employed to gather and analyze participant demographics, types of offenses, the age at first incarceration, number of times incarcerated, types of offenses, juvenile histories and trauma histories (Creswell, 2014; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014). The data were used in conjunction with qualitative interview data to identify emergent themes, as a method of understanding contextual implications in the findings, and as a point of triangulation to determine if age, sex, length of criminal history had implications to identified themes. It was also used to facilitate validity, accuracy, and consistency in drawing conclusions and identifying inferences in data analysis.

Demographic data collected from the surveys required descriptive analysis by tabulating the data using frequency distribution of the variables, percent distribution of respondents, and number of incarcerations (Creswell, 2014). The protocol included a history of juvenile incarcerations. However, none of the formerly incarcerated participants reported having juvenile detentions. Each nominal data element such as sex, and educational level, were assigned an arbitrary value (for example male = 0, female = 1).

Data collected via audio recordings were transcribed and coded. The data was stripped of personally identifiable information to protect participant identity. Using an Excel spreadsheet, data was organized and coded using a coding guide. All survey data were downloaded to an encrypted file on a password-protected computer and entered into an Excel data sheet before analysis.

Coding Data

First-level coding was used to identify contextual notations, observations, concepts and categories to form basic units of analysis. The first-level concepts were identified as master headings, second-level categories, and subheadings. Color-coded highlights were used to distinguish concepts and categories (Creswell, 2014; Punch, 2013; Stringer, 2013).

Axial coding was used to review previously identified concepts and categories and to confirm that identified concepts, and categories accurately represented interview responses, and to explore relationships between concepts and categories. Concepts and categories were transferred into a data table and listed by categories (Stringer, 2013).

Prominent themes, repetitive concepts or terminology, and belief patterns associated with individuals and settings were coded to identify over-arching themes in the data. Reliability and validity of the data and findings was an ongoing process throughout the research to ensure

consistency in interviewing, transcribing and analyzing the findings; testing emergent findings and ethically handling outlying themes (Creswell, 2014; Punch, 2013; Stringer, 2013). Further, the ongoing analysis included checking for researcher bias.

Theoretical triangulation of various restorative justice paradigms included interview notes, audio recordings, and transcripts thereof, the field Journal, surveys, and then post analysis follow-up meeting with study participants who volunteered to review the findings.

Data Protection

During the research project, personally identifiable information was kept separate from the data analysis, and data were stored in an encrypted format on a password-protected computer to which the researcher has sole access. Periodic data backups were stored on a password-protected external hard drive to which only the researcher has access.

Data will be permanently and irreversibly destroyed or "sanitized" after the required seven-year retention period. Paper records were transferred to electronic format and stored on compact disks, after which the hard copies were cross-shredded before disposal. All records stored on the password-protected computer were deleted from the hard drive. All records that were transferred to an external hard drive were erased using commercial software applications designed to remove all data from the storage device. Data stored on USB drives, recorded data on audio tapes, CDs, or DVDs are physically destroyed. A record of the date and method of destruction was maintained (Creswell, 2014; Punch, 2013; Stringer, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations associated with the study included literacy, internet privacy, potential researcher positionality bias, as well as the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

Literacy

Because 75% of the target population may not have completed high school or may experience literacy challenges, the researcher wrote interview and research questions (Davis et al., 2013). Where reading and understanding the language of the informed consent form was a concern, a provided phone number was provided, and the document was read and explained to them before their signing. Where literacy challenges arose, the researcher was available to administer the survey orally to the participant.

Survey Monkey Online Surveys

Although high-level encryption technology was in place at the survey site, the researcher and the participants had no control over the online technology (Yellowlees, Holloway, & Parish, 2012). Research participants were advised of the dangers of using unsecured networks during Skype interviews or in taking the online survey. The survey participants were directed to review the Survey Monkey Security Statement and Privacy Policy, both of which were available at the Survey Monkey website. As an additional measure, the online survey was programmed to block collecting the Internet Protocol (IP) addresses of survey participants.

Researcher Positionality

Researcher positionality as outsider studies insiders required challenging every observation and conclusion to ensure no self-interjection into the process (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Vigilance regarding researcher bias and researcher effect in conducting and analyzing the data was germane to reducing the possibility of biasing the analysis and results (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Critical reflection was employed at every stage of the research (Creswell, 2014; Punch, 2013; Stringer, 2013). This process included ongoing validation, throughout the

research, to ensure consistency in interviewing, transcribing and analyzing the findings; testing emergent findings and ethically handling outlying themes rather than dismissing them.

Further, the ongoing analysis included checking for researcher bias such as differences in age, sex, education, background, and language. Findings required validation via triangulation, and any noted differences were addressed by making necessary adjustments to the research process, changing question(s) or conducting more research as required by inconsistent or conflicting findings. Additionally, triangulation ensured that participant perspectives are appropriately reflected in the results (Stringer, 2013).

Privacy and Confidentiality

The researcher had control over potential privacy breaches due to participants' accessing the online survey via non-secured public networks or participating in interviews while in environments that were not conducive to privacy. Participants were advised of the importance of privacy and secure access when taking the survey and again before beginning the phone interviews. Heightened precaution was necessary regarding the disclosure of any client information that was subject to Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) regulation (Reamer, 2013). The protocol requires participant self-report in the surveys Yet this information was not attached to any names or other personally identifiable information downloaded for analysis.

Data Storage

During the research project, personally identifying information was kept separate from the data, and data was stored in encrypted format on a password-protected computer to which the researcher was the sole user. Periodic data backups were stored on a password-protected external

hard drive to which only the researcher has access (Creswell, 2014; Punch, 2013; Stringer, 2013).

Data Destruction

Data will be permanently and irreversibly destroyed or "sanitized" after the required 7-year retention period. Paper records will be transferred to electronic format and stored on compact disks, after which the hard copies will be cross-shredded before disposal. All records stored on the password-protected computer will be deleted from the hard drive. All records that were transferred to an external hard drive will be erased using commercial software applications designed to remove all data from the storage device. Data stored on USB drives, recorded data on audio tapes, CDs, or DVDs will be physically destroyed. A record of the date and method of destruction will be maintained, indefinitely, by the researcher.

Data Management and Processing

All survey data was downloaded to an encrypted file on a computer and entered into an Excel data sheet. The data was included in a spreadsheet in which the interview data was analyzed and used in the triangulation process.

Expected Findings

Analysis of the data was expected to support research showing that turning points are not static but occur through a progression of interrelated events that progress an individual toward a decision to desist from criminal activity. An aspect of that progression was anticipated to include reconstruction of identity as individuals reframe their pre- and post-criminological views of self and life events (Carlsson, 2012; Sampson & Laub, 2016; Walker et al., 2015).

Emergent Interactive Agency (EIA) was expected to become evident in the participant narratives, which may reveal numerous transformative turning points perpetuated by changes in

mindsets triggered by external events. The theory suggests that self-determination is emergent as a person dynamically interacts within an environment. That interaction may contribute to an individual's motivation to perform to change (Bandura, 2011).

Because the sample in the subject study consisted of individuals between the ages of 35 and 75, it was likely that age may have influenced desistance decisions of participants (Gale et al., 2013).

Additionally, results are expected to reveal the influence of social cognitive theory in the desistance histories of the participants. Specifically anticipated was the emergence of Bandura's (2014) Triarchic Reciprocal Causality model of social cognitive theory in informing the desistance turning points in the lives of the participants.

CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction: The Study and the Researcher

This action research study was designed to achieve an understanding of criminal justice desistance from the perspectives of previously incarcerated men and woman (Creswell, 2014; Sandu & Damian, 2012; Stringer, 2013). While this research methodology has been used in organization change, it is increasingly being used in criminal justice research, as well (Robinson et al., 2012). The exploration included surveys and semi-structured interviews with individuals formerly involved in the criminal justice system. In the interest of additional context, current and former parole and probation officers were also surveyed. Both participant groups provided their perspectives on what is required for successful reintegration. The primary goal of the study was to understand what led to criminological desistance and what supporting factors exist for formerly criminal justice-involved individuals who have not returned to prison.

Data were obtained from participants to capture perceptions regarding what led to criminal desistance among successfully reintegrated former inmates. The researcher was positioned as an outsider. Parole and probation officers represented insiders with experience and understanding in direct relation to reintegrating individuals, who were also insiders and the primary contributors to the research.

The recruitment plan required no permissions from outside agencies. Following IRB approved protocol, recruitment flyers were mailed to a local metropolitan community organization that serve the target population. These organizations were chosen at random. Press releases were issued to national television, radio, as well as electronic and print publications. Social media recruitment included posts through LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Surveys were administered online through Survey Monkey and interviews were conducted through audio Skype. Data were collected over a two-month period.

Researcher positionality was that of outsider studies insiders. However, the researcher conferred with study participants throughout the research protocol. The researcher role was that of the interviewer in individual interviews. Participants are Subject Matter Experts (SME) concerning their experiences. (Creswell, 2014; Stringer, 2013).

Description of the Participants

Former Inmates

A total of nine surveys were collected. Of those, two were disqualified, one provided insufficient contact information and failed to respond to researcher contacts by email, and two others failed to follow through with interviews. Four survey respondents followed through with interviews and are included in the study analysis.

Table 1 provides a summary of participant demographics. The sample consisted of participants between the ages of 35 and 75. Three participants were males. One participant was female. With respect to marital status, two participants were married; two were single. Incomes ranged from $10,000 to $75,000 per year. Education levels of participants included one participant with no high school diploma, one with a GED, one participant had some college but had not yet earned a college degree, and one had earned a doctorate.

Table 1. *Formerly Incarcerated Participants—Demographics*

Participant	Age Range	Sex	Marital Status	Income Range	Education
A	65-75	Female	Single	$10,000 - $24,999	No High School Diploma
C	35-44	Male	Married	$50,000 - $74,999	Diploma/GED
B	55-64	Male	Married	$25,000 - $49,999	Some College/No Degree
D	55-64	Male	Single	$50,000 - $74,999	Graduate Degrees

Table 2 provides reported criminal histories of participants ranged from two to four adult incarcerations. None reported having a juvenile justice history.

Table 2. Formerly Incarcerated Participants–Criminal Justice Histories

Participant	Number of Incarcerations	Juvenile Offense	Juvenile Detentions
A	4	0	0
C	3	0	0
B	2	0	0
D	2	0	0

The qualitative interviews were conducted using open-ended questions that focused on participant experiences related to possible turning points that led to their determinations to desist from criminal activity. To address the overarching question of what factors led to their decisions to desist from criminal activity, participants were asked seven open-ended questions about (a) life before incarceration; (b) life in prison; (c) life after release; (d) current life; (e) short- and long-term goals; (f) what, in their experience, the prison does correctly; and g) what, in their

experience, the prison system should change. In most cases, traumatic life experiences before and during incarceration were significant aspects of their stories.

Although the survey did not ask the specific length of time since the participants' release, they mentioned it during the interviews (Table 3). The participants' time since the last incarceration ranged from 15 to 23 years.

Table 3. *Formerly Inmate Participants–Time Since Most Recent Release*

Participant ID	Years Since Most Recent Release
A	23
B	23
C	15
D	20

All participants were voluntary, and each accepted the terms of the informed consent Agreement. The participants were forthcoming in relating their experiences. Once they began to trust the researcher, they relaxed and became highly engaged in the interviews (Stringer, 2013). In all cases, participants expressed concern for former inmates and were actively involved in projects or activities to provide reentry support to individuals.

Parole and Probation Officers

Fourteen surveys were collected from current or former parole and probation officers (Table 4). Of the collected surveys, two of the surveys were disqualified, and six were incomplete. Six surveys were analyzed for this study. All the respondents reported as probation officers. However, one participant reported having been both a parole and a probation officer. These respondents reported tenures from six to over 16 years. These participants reported from

four states. All participants were voluntary, and each accepted the terms of the informed consent form.

Table 4. *Parole and Probation Officers*

Participant	Parole Officer	Probation Officer	Years in Service
A		1	16 or More
B		1	11-15
C	1	1	6-10
D		1	6-10
E		1	16-More
F		1	16-More

The surveys consisted of open-ended questions related to their perspectives on the needs of individuals returning to the community. Questions included (a) what advice the officers had for reintegrating individuals, (b) what reintegrating individuals should watch out for during reentry, (c) what else they need to look out for with respect to reintegration, (d) what the prison system does wrong, (e) what the prison system does right, g) whether education is vital to successful reintegration, (f) the importance of setting long-term goals to reentry success.

These questions were designed to gain an understanding of the reintegration-related perspectives of this segment of community service providers and to add context related to the overarching question of what factors lead to individual desistance from criminal activity. Responses from these participants reflected frustrations with non-compliance of the parolees and probationers. The participants provided concrete suggestions such as rule compliance, obtaining employment, and substance abuse counseling.

Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

This action research was designed to understand, from the perspectives of the participants, the implications of human-agency and self-determination on the desistance decisions of formerly criminal justice-involved individuals. Participants' most recent release dates were January 1, 2009, or earlier. The analysis included qualitative and demographic quantitative data from former inmates and probation or parole officers. Semi-structured interviews consisting of seven open-ended questions were administered to the formerly incarcerated participants. Parole and probation officers responded to an online survey containing open-ended questions.

Former offender interviews were transcribed from audio recordings. Probation and parole officer survey responses and the former offender interview transcripts were coded using the framework method. Transcripts and narratives were divided into four columns: (a) theme, (b) interview question, (c) conversation detail, and (d) notations (Gale et al., 2013). Prominent themes, repetitive concepts or terminology, and belief patterns associated with individuals and settings were noted. Data were then organized into a cohesive framework using a spreadsheet to categorize notations into columns under common themes and related trends emerging from respondent narratives.

Ideas and concepts were identified, coded and then categorized into over-arching themes emerging from the data. Qualitative data were then categorized under themes correlated to Bandura's (2018) Triarchic Reciprocal Causality Model (Figure 1), which emphasizes the dynamic and cyclical interaction of individuals within an environment.

These categories are (a) personal, (b) behavioral, and (c) environmental. The personal category included goals, outcome expectations, self-efficacy, self-perception, self-esteem, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, self-evaluation, and self-regulatory progress. The behavioral

category included goal progress, motivation, and learning. The environmental category included modeling, resources, other people, physical settings, instruction, and feedback. Former offender surveys included demographic data such as age, marital status, number of incarcerations, sex, education level, zip code, household income, and juvenile histories. Each nominal data variable was assigned an arbitrary value on which a frequency analysis was performed (Creswell, 2014).

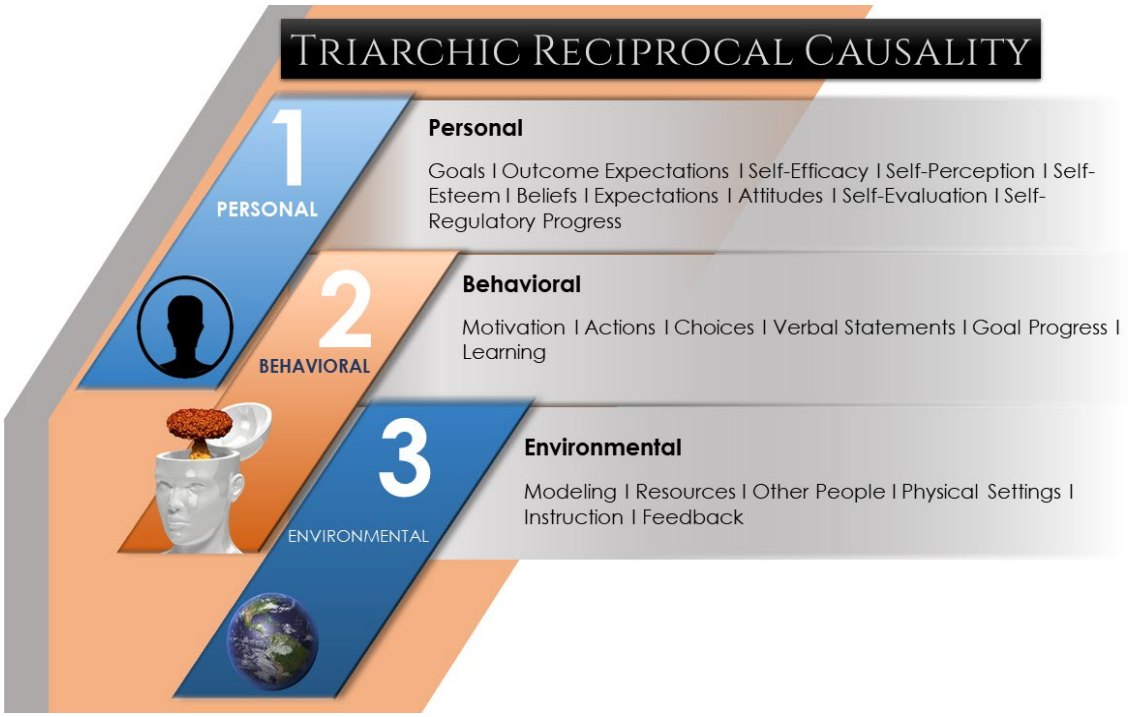

Figure 1. Conceptualization of Bandura's triarchic reciprocal causality model. *Note*: Figure created by Linda F. Williams using Bandura's "Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory," American Psychologist, 44(9), 1-60

Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis

Data is presented in two sections. First will be reported the data for the formerly incarcerated participants. Following will be presented the data for the current and former parole and probation officers.

Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

Formerly incarcerated participant interviews and survey questions related to the overarching question of, what are the factors that assisted successfully reintegrated individuals to desist from criminal activity? Twenty-five percent of formerly incarcerated participants were between ages 55 and 64. Twenty-five percent of participants were between the ages of 35 and 44. Fifty percent of the participants were between the ages of 55 and 34.

Males represented 75% of the participants, and 25% were female. Fifty percent of participants were single. Fifty percent were married. Twenty-five percent reported household income between $10,000 and $24,999; 25% reported income between $25,000 and $49,999 and 50% reported income ranging from $75,000 to $99,999. Educational levels reported by participants are as follows. Twenty-five percent reported having no high school diploma or GED; 25% had acquired a high school diploma or GED; 25% had some college but no degree, and 25% had achieved a graduate degree.

Data from participant interviews were recorded during Skype audio interviews, noted a field journal, transcribed, and coded into themes. The data was saved to a password-protected computer. Participants did not appear comfortable until well into the interview, at which point they appeared to relax and become more forthcoming. What follows is a discussion the data, categorized by interview question.

Interview question 1. What was happening in your life at the time you went to prison?

Some degree of trauma emerged in the narratives of two participants. One participant described being forced to marry at age 16 because she was pregnant. She related that the marriage was abusive at the hands of an alcoholic spouse.

> I didn't know this man really from a can of paint. All I know is that he excited me and I found myself, uh, not being able to finish high school. Being pregnant. A wife. all, by the age of 17 years old. (Formerly Incarcerated Participant A)

One participant described being one of 13 children in a family of divorced parents and having been raised in the streets. This participant stated that he was caught in a drug sting while at a remolding contractor's office.

Another participant was what he described as a highly educated stock and securities professional when he was taken up on charges of security fraud. Finally, one participant stated that he was suspended from college. He stated that he rejected several scholarships and offers to return to college to play football, in favor of selling drugs.

Interview question 2. Now that you are out of prison, what has your life been like since you have been out of prison?

Participant responses included appreciating not having to look over their shoulders. Two are business owners, and two participants are licensed ministers. One participant goes into prisons as a minister, is a motivational speaker, and owner of a non-profit organization.

> It's in the making I've been writing it for years. I know. I, I, I just. Basically, I just gave this story to hundreds of women on Friday night at a women's conference in Indiana. Powerful. Powerful. You don't know where I have been. I've been from prison to pull pit. And that is going to be the name of my book. (Formerly Incarcerated Participant A)

Two are currently opening transitional housing for juveniles and adult returning citizens. One participant is the founder of an international broadcast company and was recently conferred a doctorate. All participants expressed a desire to give back by speaking to inmates.

> If I can help anybody or give any type of encouraging word to anyone towards doing the right thing, stay positive, love your family, treat people like you want to be treated. You know what I'm saying? And then go from there. That's my mission. You know. I'm not perfect. But no one is but God, but at the same time any encouraging word could help. (Formerly Incarcerated Participant C)

Interview question 3. What do you see as some of the positive things in your life now, compared to before when you went to prison?

Two participants related that they no longer must look over their shoulders and all participants expressed a desire to give back to their communities by reaching out to other reintegrating individuals and inmates.

> I don't have to look over my shoulder. That's positive enough. I can walk down the street. When they're here. I'm not leery about anything. I'm not skeptical about where I step. I don't have to be cautious about what premises I enter. Because, like I said, down here you pretty much know where you're going. It's no mystery. (Formerly Incarcerated Participant B)

Three participants stated that spending time with their families and having a family support system were positive aspects of their post-incarceration lives. One participant stated that freedom was what he enjoys.

Interview question 4. What advice do you have for others who are coming out of prison?

All participants warned about returning to old associations and acquaintances. They all advised that reintegrating citizens prepare for reentry by setting realistic goals, and devising a plan for when things do not go as expected. One participant stated that such preparation should begin the minute they are incarcerated.

> The moment that you getting ready to get on that bus and ride up, up, up, up the way here, you need to start preparing. You need to get a pencil paper and start putting this parole thing together. Your plan.
>
> Where are you going to stay, what jobs are you going to interview for? Who is going to be your support system? Who is going to do this? You can't go back to those old things. (Formerly Incarcerated Participant A)

All participants advised that individuals establish a support system to address reintegration challenges such as substance abuse and employment. All participants further stated that inmates should avail themselves of any educational or vocational programs offered within

the prison system. All participants related that inmates and reintegrating individuals should take responsibility for addressing these issues.

Interview question 5. What kind of mistakes do you think the prison system makes that leads people back into prison?

One participant related that one mistake made by the prison system was that it is a microcosm of the streets. She related that contraband was provided to inmates by some corrections officers with whom the inmates were having sex. “The penitentiary, the only thing it does is to feed you and to house you and make money off you. To make money off you and press them License plates” (Participant A). Three participants related similar perspectives, calling the institutions big business and a revolving door and designed as a set up for failure. Three participants related that it was a mistake to eliminate or reduce the availability of vocational and educational programs. All participants related that institutions fail to provide enough reintegration preparation.

Corrections officers were described by the participants as having no regard for inmates, having a military mentality, and having attitudes. One participated stated that she witnessed correctional officers watching inmate beatings and deaths without taking action. Institutional counselors were viewed by two inmates as being part of the system and having no relatable understanding of the inmates. Two participants stated that the first rule of prison life was to protect oneself.

Interview question 6. Have you acquired any skills, talents or abilities since getting out?

Two participants acquired ministry licenses while inmates. One participant took advantage of vocational and business classes while in prison. The participant stated that he has continued developing those skills in his business. Two participants had college degrees when

they were incarcerated. One recently received a doctorate. One participant expressed the desire to obtain a GED.

Interview Question 7. What are your current long-term goals?

Long-term goals for all participants included outreach and services to other inmates or reintegrating individuals. One inmate and a business partner are opening a juvenile halfway house in October 2018.

> I really want that halfway house. That's my long-term goal is right now we're banking on that and it looks really good and it looks really good right now. I'm thinking October, it'll be off and running. It'd be, it'd be off and running October. (Formerly Incarcerated Participant B)

One is a motivational speaker who recently performed next to an award-winning actress. She also plans to, through her nonprofit, open several transitional houses for reintegrating women. She also plans to finish her GED. One has plans to expand his business by acquiring more houses to remodel and sell. Another participant plans to start motivational speaking, and one is expanding his broadcast network.

Parole and Probation Officers

The following survey questions were asked of probation and parole officer participants, in order to establish context for the study. Open-ended survey questions related to the overarching question of, what are factors that assisted successfully reintegrated individuals to desist from criminal activity?

Five participants report as parole officers. One reported as both parole and probation officer. Fifty percent of these participants reported having 16 or more years in their professions. Thirty-three percent report having six to 10 years in their professions, and 17% reported having 11 to 15 years in their professions. Female participants constituted 66.67%, and male participants comprised 33.33% of parole and probation officer participants.

Survey question 1. What advice do you have for individuals who are coming out of prison?

Five of six participants stated the importance of support systems and prosocial relationships to include family, friends, mentors, spiritual guides, physical and mental health providers, social service agencies, and employers. One participant advised that. “Returning citizens should be clear about parole requirements. Refrain from going back to self-defeating behaviors and seek as many prosocial opportunities to address their basic needs, for food, shelter, reunification with offspring and employment.” (Parole and Probation Officer Participant F)

All participants advised that returning citizens address substance abuse, avoid returning to pre-incarceration behaviors, employment, and education. One participant emphasized compliance with rules. One participant mentioned the importance of family reunification.

Survey question 2. What do they need to watch out for after getting out?

Mindset, coping competencies, time management, prosocial relationships, self-determination, personal responsibility were mentioned by five of these participants. Additionally, goal planning , setting realistic goals, and backup plans was mentioned by five of the participants.

> Prisoners get out of jail and think that they can refrain from the use of illicit drugs, they believe that all the dreams and goals set while in prison will just happen. They forget that these dreams need time to mature and funding to get them off the ground.
>
> Meanwhile life happens....rent, child support, food the reality is that one of the simple and most logical part of our day is poorly managed by the prisoner and that is time management. for some reason the planning process is bypassed when they get out of prison. (Parole and Probation Officer Participant D)

Substance abuse and rule compliance were important according to all parole and probation officer participants. According to one participant, “Obey all laws, stay away from

criminal activity, and always report in when scheduled to do so." (Parole and Probation Officer Participant C)

Survey question 3. What else do they need to do?

Two participants repeated the importance of support systems including spirituality and God. One participant related that reintegrating individuals are not adequately prepared, by the institutions, for goal planning.

> When they are released we expect the [redacted] program to elevate their status by providing employment and sensible housing. But these guys are coming out with marginalized sense of understanding to what is right and what is wrong. The criminogenic behavior has not been put to rest. It's still at the forefront. Most getting out call it survival. (Parole and Probation Officer Participant D)

Additionally, one participant reiterated the importance of substance abuse and mental health resources and rule compliance. Five participants reiterated the importance of education and employment.

Survey question 4. What kind of mistakes do you think the prison system makes that leads people back into prison?

Five participants reported that inadequate rehabilitation programming was stated to be a mistake made by the prison system.

> The prison is a great place to give an individual a time out; but programming has to be in place and we need to focus on education as the primary essence for survival. We 'give them what they have coming' and nothing else. I hate that term but that's the language you will hear around any prison.
>
> 'You get what you have coming and nothing else.' What does that mean? I'm still trying to figure that one out; but if I had to translate it I would say that you get three square meals a day, a shower and place to lay your head. You see, nowhere in that tag line did you hear anything about making the prisoners better so that when they are released they become fully functioning citizens of society.

One stated that prisons fail to teach inmates time management competencies. One participant mentioned the inhumane treatment of inmates. Moreover, survival mentality was mentioned by another participant. One participant stated that the institutions make no mistakes

and that it is up to the individual. Another individual stated that there are insufficient resources available to deal with the whole individual. This participant also mentioned that unrealistic expectations could be discouraging for returning citizens with multiple challenges to overcome. The participant added that mental and physical health problems are not consistently addressed. Another participant indicated that there are too few resources available to deal with the whole individual and that setting unrealistic expectations can be discouraging to returning citizens.

Survey question 5. What is something about the prison system that you think helps? Is there anything the prisons do right?

Innovative programming was reported by one participant who described a Department of Corrections program providing innovative living conditions and programming for 18 to 25-year-old inmates at selected institutions for men and women. The program is based on neuro- and criminal justice science.

> While there appear to be some changes taking hold, at this time it appears to be more piecemeal than the kind of systemic change that would make a real difference in the lives of inmates, and subsequently society as a whole. (Parole and Probation Officer Participant A)

Job training and substance abuse meetings are mention as positive by one participant while another participant stated that there are inadequate programs for inmates. Another participant indicated that the only thing institutions do right is processing inmates. Finally, a participant stated that prison is ultimately responsible for protecting the public from dangerous individuals with the goal of making amends.

Survey question 6. Do you think having a college degree, a specialized certification in a trade or a high school diploma makes a difference?

Education was essential according to all participants. One participant stated that “While some individuals could and will be successful without higher levels of education, for the clear

majority education is a driver of occupational and social success . . . It is imperative" (Parole and Probation Officer Participant A). One of the participants stated "Have a skilled trade, or other professional degrees enhances the employability of returning citizens while increasing their self-efficacy" (Parole and Probation Officer Participant F).

Survey question 7. How important are long-term goals to helping a former prisoner not to recidivate; and where do we go from here?

All participants stated that long-term goals are essential for reintegrating individuals. Two participants stated that short-term goals are more important than long-term goals. One of these participants advised that goals should be written and made a part of a reentry plan supported by probation officers and the community. The other participant stated that, while short-term goals are more important long-term goals can be motivational. Another participant stated that having a backup plan is essential. This participant added that individuals are "what one must remember you will be dealing with individuals that have been taken out of society and release back to function as if nothing has happened" (Parole and Probation Officer Participant C). Finally, one participant advised that goal planning is integral to avoiding reengagement with old acquaintances and resisting repeating criminal behaviors. "Until we teach our young men and women who are being released how to think logically, we will continue to spin our wheels in an effort to reduce recidivism" (Parole and Probation Officer Participant D).

Emerging Themes

This section discusses themes that emerged from the analysis. The discussion is presented in two parts. First is presented the formerly incarcerated participant themes, followed by themes that emerged from the open-ended current or former parole or probation officer surveys. The following themes emerged from the analysis of formerly incarcerated participant interviews.

These are categorized under the headings of personal factors, behavioral factors, and environmental factors.

Formerly Incarcerated Participant A. Participant A is a female between the ages of 65 and 75 who has been out of prison for 23 years. She reported having been incarcerated four times with no juvenile justice history. Her reported income is between $10,000 and $24,999 annually. She reported never having finished high school due to domestic violence at the hands of an alcoholic spouse. She was the daughter of a prominent local preacher when, at age 16, she conceived a child. She said, “I didn’t know this man from a can of paint” (Participant A). Religious rules required that she marry and after ten years of abuse, she never returned to complete high school. Her criminal history began while in this marriage.

Participant A reported that she did not have a drug addiction, but an addiction to money, material possessions, and the opposite sex.

> I had an addiction [to] money. I didn't have an addiction [to] drugs or alcoholism or anything like that. I had an addiction for the fast life, the fine men, the finer things of life. That is the main reason that I became a professional, and I mean [I was] labeled by the Department of Corrections, a professional criminal, while in prison. It took me about two and a half years to get that label off me because that's something they don't take that lightly. (Participant A)

The participant stated that she had several convictions for fraud because she had developed a national check-kiting scheme. The participant described one of her first sentencing hearings at which the judge addressed her and her father before issuing a sentence that went beyond the norm.

At the time of my sentencing, the judge told me, he says, Mrs. [name redacted], he says, and Reverend [name redacted], he says. I respect Mrs. [name redacted] because she robbed a bank with an ink pen instead of a gun. And I respect that.

> But, Reverend [name redacted] and Mrs. [name redacted], I'm going to have to take some of the wind out of your sails. I went away for two to 14. But that was just a slap on the wrist to me because back then you only did maybe 40 days on something like that. Nonviolent. But I came out. I got back on top of my game again and again and again. (Participant A)

There were five identified turning points (Table 5) that led to this participant's desistance from criminal activity.

Table 5. *Participant A–Turning Points*

Turning Points	Precipitating Event	Subcategory	Thematic Category
1	Missed son's wedding. The procession went by the jail and blew their horns for her to hear.	Self-Evaluation Motivation Choices Physical Setting	Personal Behavioral Environmental
2	Missing birth of grandchildren	Self-Evaluation Motivation Choices Physical Setting	Personal Behavioral Environmental
3	Lifetime consequences of another conviction	Outcome Expectations Choices	Personal Behavioral
4	Spirituality/God	Beliefs Self-Regulatory Progress	Personal
5	Epiphany about what drove her to criminality	Self-Evaluation	Personal

A review of the field journal supported that the participant emotionally spoke, with great emphasis, about lamenting to her son about having to miss his wedding. The participant was

incarcerated at a local jail. Her son tried to comfort her by saying that he would drive by the jail honking the horn so that she could hear them. Further, the participant indicated that missing the birth of her first grandchild opened her eyes to the fact that she was missing life-time memories. Moreover, some years later, she experienced an epiphany about where and why her criminal behavior began. After tracing it back to some childhood memories, she realized how her abusive marriage triggered her criminality. She realized that she was addicted to money and material possession. How she got them resulted in a total of four incarcerations.

This participant described life after prison as peaceful because she no longer must look over her shoulder for police. She obtained a ministry license while incarcerated and is now allowed into the prisons to minister to inmates. She is a motivational speaker and plans to open transitional housing for women. What the participant reported as what keeps her crime-free were her belief in God and having no contact with former acquaintances. She also reported that she had to change from within for the outside to change. “Oh, I never stopped keeping myself up in this and that. I've always done that. But, I mean another kind of change, like a heart transplant. I had to not depend on that checkbook” (Participant A). Table 6 shows a summary of Participant A advice to other reintegrating individuals.

Table 6. *Participant A–Advice to Others Coming Out of Prison*

Participant	Advice	Subcategory	Thematic Category
A	Avoid old acquaintances	Choices Physical Settings	Behavioral Environmental
	Obtain an accountability partner, sponsor or mentor	Modeling Resources Other People Instruction Feedback	Environmental

Table 6. *Participant A–Advice to Others Coming Out of Prison (continued)*

Participant	Advice	Subcategory	Thematic Category
	Get an education	Learning Goal Progress	Behavioral
	Take advantage of in-prison programs	Goal Goal Progress	Personal Behavioral
	Plan for release	Goal	Personal Behavioral
	Develop a Plan B	Goal Progress	Behavioral

Concerning what prisons do wrong, Participant A stated that prison is a revolving door, big business, and does little to prepare inmates for release. She indicated that prison is a microcosm of the streets because it is full of contraband, inmates having sex with correctional officers who also bring contraband to prisoners.

> I had a relationship with the captain. I persuaded this officer, this captain, you know, back then you could smoke in the prison, in the penitentiary, but I wanted my name brand. He brought them in for me. He bought them, but there was something that I gave him, too. I persuaded this captain. I didn't say just an overpaid babysitter, which we call the correction officers, right? I persuaded this Captain to bring me in cocaine to sell inside the prison. (Participant A)

Participant A suggested that correctional staff reflect the sex of the inmates stating that men to men and women to women officer assignments should be observed. She further suggested better security to end the influx of contraband. Finally, she suggested that prisons offer better education programs. The participant also reported watching a woman die of an asthma attack while officers looked on without attempting to help the inmate. She also reported witnessing an inmate's being beat to death. Other inmates were afraid to help for fear of being

stabbed. The things this participant reported as being done correctly in the prisons system were church services and work-release.

Formerly Incarcerated Participant B. Participant B is a married man between the ages of 55-64 who has been out of prison for 23 years. He reported having been incarcerated three times. His reported income is between $25,000 and $49,999 annually. He reported having some college courses, but no degree. This participant reported a total of two incarcerations with no juvenile justice history. He indicated that he and his wife were doing some remodeling in preparation for the birth of their child. He was in a meeting with the painting contractor when he got caught up in a sweep in which the authorities found drugs and weapons. After receiving a 21-count indictment, he was convicted under the Rockefeller Drug Law and served 18-years in prison, including three years on parole.

There were three identified turning points (Table 7) that led to this participant's desistance from criminal activity: (a) watching his children grow up from within prison walls; (b) looking up to the clouds while standing in the prison yard and feeling as though he was standing in a "hell hole" (Participant B); and (c) seeing that the streets had not changed he decided not to stay in that environment.

Table 7. *Participant B–Turning Points*

Turning Points	Precipitating Event	Subcategory	Thematic Category
1	Watching his children grow up from within prison walls	Self-Evaluation Motivation Choices Physical Setting	Personal Behavioral Environmental

Table 7. *Participant B–Turning Points (continued)*

Turning Points	Precipitating Event	Subcategory	Thematic Category
2	Looking up to the clouds while standing in the prison yard and feeling as though he was standing in a "hell hole."	Self-Evaluation Motivation Choices Physical Setting	Personal Behavioral Environmental
3	Seeing that the streets had not changed and he decided not to stay in that environment.	Motivation Actions Choices Goal Progress Physical Settings	Personal Behavioral Environmental

This participant was born in New York. He reported that he and his 12 siblings were separated from both parents after his parents' divorce. This participant indicated that he grew up in the streets and did what he had to do to survive.

During the interview, Participant B made numerous references to his children indicating his regretting having watched them grow up from behind prison walls. Field journal notations indicated that the participant exhibited emotion when discussing his children.

A field journal notation indicated that the participant described, with considerable emotion, the following.

> I was out on the yard, one time, and I looked up, and all I could see was the clouds and partially blue skies, but I could see nothing around me—it was like looking up outta hell, and I knew at that moment when I saw that, that was the only thing that I could see was the sky and my feet. I knew that I would never ever step foot back in another penitentiary. I knew that when I get to stay outta there, it would be the most easiest thing in my life. (Participant B)

Once he completed his probation requirements, the participant decided that he no longer wanted to live in New York and moved out of state. He stated that he was careful not to move

into an area that was reflective of the streets of Harlem. He left behind several of his adult children. He expressed having no regret about the decision.

Participant B described his post-prison life as stable. He stated that he now has direction. He is enjoying family, including his grandchildren. He and a business partner have plans to open a halfway house for juveniles by October 2018. What the participant stated as reasons they have remained crime-free are have no contact with former acquaintances and having moved away from the toxic environment in which he lived all his life. He also credited his use of time in prison to prepare for his release.

> If you're not strong enough to turn your own life around. If you didn't take advantage of the programs that they offer in there . . . you're pretty much going to come back. That rehabilitation stuff is a ghost. It's a ghost. It's all up to the individual that's in there that's doing the time. I took whatever programs they offered. So, it's all up to you and your inner strength and your determination. If you don't want to educate yourself, if you don't want to better yourself before you meet that parole board, you're coming back. I buckled down. (Participant B)

During his incarceration, this participant spent eight years in the law library preparing appeals for himself and others. He learned a trade and prepared for release.

> I knew, the day that I get out, I will not come back to this. I meant that. Changing my life was easy. I'm very good with my hands, so once I attach myself to something, I pretty much go ahead and knock it down. Probably within a couple of hours I can get the hang of it. (Participant B)

After being released from prison, old acquaintances approached this participant with invitations to return to crime.

> Because, trust me, I was pestered. when I came home. People were offering me all kinds of stuff. Come on man, I got this, you wanna …. No, man, that's not where I'm going. That's not where I'm headed. I left that. When I left the streets and went and did that time, I knew, the day that I get out, I will not come back to this. I meant that. (Participant B)

Participant B described a turning point at which he left his home state, even though it required that he quit a job he said he loved, working with people with developmental disabilities.

> Yeah, I changed because I wanted no more parts of the street. I wanted no more parts of that scene. I just didn't want to live around it no more because that pretty much ended . . . I'm not gonna say [it ended] my life, but it ended my dream. That right there. Because it's pretty much, it's almost like you're being sucked in. You know, and if I stayed in that environment. It's possible that I could have been sucked in, again. (Participant B)

Table 8 summarizes advice offered by this participant to individuals upon being released from prison: (a) beware of your surrounds, (b) get a job, (c) get an education, (d) set the example, (e) beware of Hustle Pimps–folks that want to draw you back into the life, (f) it's all up to you.

Table 8. *Participant B–Advice to Others Coming Out of Prison*

Participant	Advice	Subcategory	Thematic Category
B	Beware of your surrounds	Physical Settings	Environmental
	Get a job	Resources	Environmental
	Get an education	Learning	Behavioral
	Set the example	Actions	Personal Behavioral
	Beware of Hustle Pimps–folks that want to draw you back into the life.	Physical Settings Actions	Personal Behavioral Environmental
	It's up to you.	Self-Regulatory Process Actions Goal Process	Personal Behavioral

Concerning what prisons do wrong, this participant stated that there was no rehabilitation, calling the system a revolving door and big business.

> I'm saying, what are you going to offer an inmate? When you talk about rehabilitation. . . what responsibility does the state take when it comes to rehabilitating the inmates and you not wanting this person to go back out here and get back into the same things that got them here in first place? What is the state offering? See, that's where you come in.

> Because you have to want it from yourself. You can't wait to for the state to do anything. You have to want it for yourself. (Participant D)

He further indicated that there are no longer programs for the inmates and that the college courses had been discontinued and that inmates are required to pay for GED tests. Further, he stated that inmates were working for slave wages. The system was described as not being designed to help inmates.

> You think they want you to go home? No. They gotta keep those numbers. That's Absolutely ridiculous. There's no rehabilitation as far as the system is concerned. It's all up to you. It's not up to them 'cause they don't want you to leave in the first place. It's up to you. During the time that I've been down, I saw many a man go home and come back up. (Participant B)

Additional problems related by this participant included having no rehabilitation programs and that corrections officers do not care about the inmates. As for what the prison system does right, the participant stated that it showed him that prison was not the place to be. It also showed him the truth about what it is like to be in prison.

Formerly Incarcerated Participant C. Participant C is a married man between the ages of 35-44 who has been out of prison for 15 years. He reported having been incarcerated three times with no juvenile justice history. His reported income is between $50,000 to $74,999 annually. He reported having a high school or GED. This participant reported a total of three incarcerations. He reported having been kicked out of college at which time he returned home and began associating with the wrong crowd. Although he had scholarships, he chose not to return to college. This participant stated that he began selling drugs, ignored advice to the contrary, and rejected opportunities to continue his chosen lifestyle. He stated that he was addicted to money, material things and women.

There were two identified turning points (Table 9) that led to this participant's desistance from criminal activity: (a) watching his children grow up from within prison walls, and (b) he realized how his incarceration was impacting his family.

Table 9. *Participant C–Turning Points*

Turning Points	Precipitating Event	Subcategory	Thematic Category
1	Watching his children grow up from within prison walls	Self-Evaluation Motivation Choices Physical Setting	Personal Behavioral Environmental
2	Seeing how his incarceration was affecting his family	Self-Perception Actions Choices Other people Physical Settings	Personal Behavioral Environmental

Participant C said that he took his family and children through so much while he was incarcerated. His daughters were two and three years old when he was imprisoned. They were nine and 10 when he was released. Based on field journal notations, the participant exuded joy and emotion when mentioning his children and grandchildren, often referring to them as his "little ones" (Participant C). Throughout the interview, the participant placed significant emphasis on his family as a primary motivation for his desistance decision.

> Watching your kids grow up from the institution . . .that really took a toll on my life, you know. I had promised to God that regardless of who or what, I'll need to make bad decisions and hang around the wrong things and take my family and little ones, people that care about you through something. So that's what gave me the motivation to, you know, to do what I supposed to do. (Participant C)

Regarding life after release, Participant C said "Ain't no retirement in the drug business. There's two places, that graveyard and the institution and that ain't what I wanna retire from"

(Participant C). The participant added that life is good. He owns a business and says he gives credit to God, his family, a support system, and getting older as the reasons he has remained out of prison. The participant also stated,

> Life is full of choices, you know. Bad decisions; you get bad results. Good decisions; you always get positive and good results. And even though I knew right from wrong . . . I just was caught up in the money and cars and clothes and jewelry and women and stuff like that and . . . it's an addiction. But it's all about choices and decisions and doing the right thing. God, loved ones, helped, but it was still up to me. You've got to change. It's up to you. (Participant C)

Participant C stated that he wants to be a motivational speaker to children and in the prisons. As to how the participant remains crime-free, he related that he stays away from old acquaintances and he is highly aware of his surrounds. He stated that he is even skeptical of some family members. The participant offered the following advice (Table 10) to those coming out of prison. Maintain focus and do what you are supposed to do. If you are behaving positively you get positive results; (c) be around the right people; (d) It's going to be a struggle with employment challenges.

Table 10. *Participant C–Advice to Others Coming Out of Prison*

Participant	Advice	Subcategory	Thematic Category
C	Maintain focus	Motivation, Goal Progress	Personal Behavioral
	Do what you are supposed to	Goals, Goal Progress, Actions, Choices, Instruction	Personal Behavioral
	Beware of your surrounds	Physical Settings	Environmental
	Develop positive associations	Actions, Choices, Others	Behavioral Environmental
	Employment	Goals/Goal Process, Self-Regulation, Actions	Personal Behavioral

Concerning what the prison system does wrong, Participant C says that the prisons are a revolving door, including probation and parole because one slip up, one false move results in

reincarceration. He stated that probation and parole officers could be nice guys, but they have a job to do. According to this participant, counselors who do not relate to the inmates and are viewed as part of the system, which he described as big business. What the prison system does right, according to the participant, is offering classes, offering opportunities to achieve a GED, and teaching trades.

Formerly Incarcerated Participant D. Participant D is a single man between the ages of 55 and 64 who has been out of prison for 20 years. His reported income is between $50,000 and $74,999 annually. He has a bachelor's degree, a masters of business administration and a doctorate. This participant reported two incarcerations with no juvenile justice history.

Before incarceration, Participant D described himself as very well educated, successful, well-respected, having a great deal of money, and a business owner. He pled guilty to charges because he was tired. After an almost two-and-a-half-year investigation by state, federal, and local agents, he says that he just wanted to be finished with it. The legal issues and investigation resulted in a legal separation from his wife and separation from daughter He stated that he had also lost the respect of friends and family.

Participant D's description of life after prison focused on an internal shift. Before incarceration, he described himself as having an all-about-me mentality. In post-prison life, he said, "It's not about me anymore. I've learned that my actions now have an impact on far greater than just me." Further, this participant stated that he had to overcome fear and distrust.

> I've been burned way too many times. I didn't trust anybody to do anything. And so, you know, as well as the fact that they had to get to know me. I also had to get to know myself all over again and be willing to trust people again.
>
> I had to be the person to change, you know, in gradual amounts. I began to change, and as I began to change, I think people began to see that and realize that perhaps I was worth investigating. (Participant D)

The participant is a broadcaster with an international reachE. He is a motivational speaker who also speaks at correctional conferences. The participant related that his spirituality and belief in God has kept him crime-free. He said that he must believe in something or someone that is greater than himself, that he belonged to something that is greater than himself. Moreover, he said that he had disappointed many people and is determined never again to do so.

Table 11 shows the three identified turning points that led to this participant's desistance from criminal activity: (a) realized that many people in his life had abandoned him, (b) recognized that he had an all-about-me attitude, and (c) realized how his mistakes and incarceration affected others.

Table 11. *Participant D–Turning Points*

Turning Points	Precipitating Event	Subcategory	Thematic Category
1	Realized that many people in his life had abandoned him.	Other People	Environmental
2	Recognized that he had an all-about-me attitude.	Self-Perception Expectations Attitudes Self-Evaluation	Personal
3	Realizing how his mistakes and incarceration affected others.	Actions Choices Other People	Personal Behavioral Environmental

Participant D related that he overcame trust issues to function after release. He recognized that to function in society he had to begin to trust the advice of, and the importance of valuing, others.

> My outlook on things is a whole lot broader and it involves more people. And that's. And that's a good thing. Because now what's happening is that, you know, when, when you

> focused on yourself and nothing else, and then that falls apart, something goes wrong. You've got nothing to fall back on. (Participant D)

The participant stated that as he began to trust others, they began to trust him. The participant emphasized this change of mindset multiple timed during the interview.

> It's on me. I had nothing. I had to change. Don't expect anybody else to understand any part of what you're doing until you, yourself, can own up to what happened. I said never again, never again will I do anything willfully to let people down like that again. And it's been that determination, that desire and that belief that has kept me moving. (Participant D)

Concerning what the prison system does wrong, Participant D stated that the first rule an inmate learns is self-protection and distrust. He stated that there is a systemic mentality that everybody is coming back. The participant saw himself as unique due to his education level and indicated that he had higher education than the correctional officers and inmates. Additional issues related by this participant included that the guards were former military personnel with military mentalities. He stated that they had attitudes.

The participant stated that what the prison system does correctly was a case manager whom he said believed in what she was doing. There was also mention of a Sargent who went out of his way to help the inmates to reestablish self-respect. The participant also stated that the highly structured environment was good for some inmates who laced structure in their lives. He saw the prison GED program as positive. Another positive observation of the participant was that prison slowed him down so that he could get a handle on who he was.

This participant had the following advice for individuals coming out of prison. Table 12 displays a summary of the participant's advice.

> Be patient. Don't expect miracles overnight because if you get impatient and you get upset because something went wrong or something's not going right, you have the likelihood of jumping right back into the fire again. Be understanding of the fact that people will not believe or trust you until they begin to see who you really are. There's no reason for people to make an investment in you. Make the investment in yourself.

With respect to family, don't expect them to just fall all over you just because you just walked out the gates because they've been hurt too. They've had to make sacrifices. It's going to be time before they're going to bring you back into the family. Start having respect for yourself and others will begin to show respect. The first person you need to make sure understands the situation is you. Don't expect anybody else to understand any part of what you're doing until you, yourself, can own up to what happened. You made a mistake. Own it. Get over it. Don't focus on what was lost. (Participant D)

Table 12. *Participant D–Advice to Others Coming Out of Prison*

Participant	Advice	Subcategory	Thematic Category
D	Be patient when things go wrong.	Self-Regulatory Process Expectations Actions Goal Progress Other People	Personal Behavioral Environmental
	Be understanding of the fact that people will not believe or trust.	Expectations Self-Regulatory Process Other People	Personal Environmental
	Make the investment in yourself.	Goals Learning Resources Instruction	Personal Behavioral Environmental
	Family—don't expect them to just fall all over you just because you just walked out the gates because they've been hurt too.	Others Expectations	Personal Environmental
	Start having respect for yourself and others will begin to show respect.	Self-Perception Self-Esteem Other People	Personal Environmental
	The first person you need to make sure understands the situation is you.	Self-Evaluation	Personal
	Don't focus on what was lost.	Outcome Expectations Self-Regulatory Progress Choices	Personal

Current or Former Parole and Probation Officers

Current or former parole and probation officers participated in an online survey containing open-ended questions designed to understand their perspectives on successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals.

Parole and probation officer participant A. This participant is a male probation officer with 16 or more years in the criminal justice system. The participant offered the following advice to newly released inmates, “Establish a strong network of support to include family, friends, mentors, spiritual guides, physical and mental health providers, social service agencies, employers, coworkers; and ensconce yourself in pro-social relationships.” (Parole and Probation Officer Participant A)

The participant advised that reintegrating individuals beware of old patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to people, places and things that trigger self-defeating behaviors. He also warned against allowing too much idle time and suggested that returning individuals put forth the effort and persistence to structure leisure time with pro-social activities.

As to other things that previous inmates should consider is a compassionate community that accepts them and supports them in establishing or re-establishing a pro-social life; first and foremost, it requires a safe, reliable residence; then job and educational opportunities, as well as, access to pro-social leisure activities, people and appropriate health services.

The Parole and Probation Officer Participant stated that the prison system allows too much idle time and limited, non-existent or ineffective programming. Further, he stated that the system treats inmates “as less than" merely because they are inmates. The system, pre the participant, fails to provide consistently humane and motivating conditions of internment. He stated,

> Personally, I would like to see a complete overhaul of the U.S. prison system to be fashioned more like facilities in many European countries. Realizing that rapid, wholesale changes like that are unlikely, I see 2 broad areas for reform within the existing system: instituting evidence-based programming for inmates in all spheres of human development and creating a more humane culture where inmates (and staff) are seen as worthy of dignity, respect, and opportunities for personal growth. (Parole and Probation Officer Participant A)

The participant spoke of innovations he viewed as something positive the prison system is doing. These include recent initiatives providing innovative living conditions and programming for 18- to 25-year-old. He reported that this initiative is evidence-based taking account of criminal justice and neuroscience. He also mentioned progressive programs a specific prison system, adding that, "While there appear to be some changes taking hold, at this time it appears to be more piecemeal than the kind of systemic change that would make a real difference in the lives of inmates, and subsequently society as a whole" (Parole and Probation Officer Participant A).

According to this participant, education is vital to successful reintegration. He acknowledged that some individuals could and will be successful without higher levels of education, but that for the majority, education is a driver of occupational and social success. He noted that it is imperative that it should be educationally relevant and provide vocational opportunities.

The participant stated that setting long-term goals in reintegration is somewhat essential advising that short-term and intermediate-term goals are more important. He added that such goals should be outlined in a written SMART Goals re-entry plan that is supported by parole officers, community-based caseworkers, from the point of release throughout a two-year period.

Parole and probation officer participant B. This participant is a female probation officer with 11 to 15 years in the criminal justice system. The participant offered the following

advice to newly released inmates: (a) deal with substance abuse issues, (b) get a job, (c) address substances abuse issues, (d) beware of old friends who are still involved with criminal activity, (e) seek help in any area of need. This participant stated that she is unfamiliar with the prison system and offered no opinion of what the system does incorrectly. The participant did state an opinion on what the prison system does correctly, stating that job training and meetings for substance abuse are beneficial offerings. The participant stated that education is essential to reintegration success. She indicated that short-term goals are more important than long-term goals, adding that long-term goals can be a motivation.

Parole and probation officer participant C. This participant is a female who reported as both parole and probation officer. She stated that she has six to 10 years' experience with the criminal justice system. It is important to note that most of this participant's responses were quite short, including, sometimes incomplete, sentences. There is a field journal notation that there appeared to be a tone of irritation or bitterness conveyed through the writing. Advice this participant offered regarded the importance of following through with the first parole meeting the day after being released. Additionally, she advised that individuals obey all laws, stay away from criminal activity, and always report to the parole officer as required. She also stated the importance of paying fines, fees, or restitution, self-help classes, substance abuse assistance, and addressing mental illness.

Concerning what the prison system does wrong, the only concern stated by this participant was that there is "absolutely no rehab" (Parole and Probation Officer Participant C) and that the prisons are not doing what they could to help individuals return to society. As to what the prison system does correctly, the participant stated that the only thing they do correctly is processing the inmates.

The inmate stated that education makes a difference after release from prison and that long-term goals are important.

> What one must remember you will be dealing with individuals that have been taken out of society and release back to function as if nothing has happened. So, goals need to be set and achieved. The ultimate goal is helping the individuals that are returning citizens, find employment, housing, and continuing education. (Parole and Probation Officer Participant C)

Parole and probation officer participant D. This participant is a former probation officer. He has served as an officer for 6 to 10 years. He advised that until former inmates have a steady income and a place to live, they should learn a trade instead of attempting a four-year college degree. He advised that newly released inmates should be aware of complacency.

> Prisoners get out of jail and think that they can refrain from the use of illicit drugs, they believe that all the dreams and goals set while in prison will just happen. They forget that these dreams need time to mature and funding to get them off the ground. Meanwhile, life happens. Rent, child support, food. (Parole and Probation Officer Participant D)

Time management and planning were also advised by this participant, who included that reintegrating individuals should capitalize on time and educate themselves on the proper planning process. They cannot come out of prison believing that they will be able to start up a business without understanding all the elements.

As to what the prison system does incorrectly, the participant indicated that the system fails to teach inmates about society and the challenges they will face upon release. He further stated that prisons are set up for failure because there is an insufficient number of corrections officers to run the prison efficiently. Officers are stressed by mandated double shifts. The participant stated that this results in programs being canceled, which leaves inmates in their cells for about 20 hours a day and upon release they are unprepared.

> When they are released, we expect the program to elevate their status by providing employment and sensible housing. But these guys are coming out with marginalized

> sense of understanding as to what is right and what is wrong. The criminogenic behavior has not been put to rest; it's still at the forefront. (Parole Officer D)

He added that educational programming should be implemented in order that released individuals can survive reentry challenges.

As to what the prison system does correctly, the participant stated that prison is a great place to give an individual a timeout. It punishes only.

> I hate [it] but [what] you will hear around any prison [is] 'you get what you have coming and nothing else.' What does that mean? I'm still trying to figure that one out, but if I had to translate it, I would say that you get three square meals a day, a shower and place to lay your head. You see, nowhere in that tagline did you hear anything about making the prisoners better so that when they are released, they become fully functioning citizens of society. (Parole Officer D)

This participant stated that education is essential in reintegration. He mentioned how proud his probationers were about their employment.

> When I was working as probation agent my probationers would show up after work in their fluorescent smocks and still wearing their yellow hard hats.... why, because it reflected that they were employed. It was a status, a way to show that they beat the stereotype. Imagine if we gave them a trade in prison and when released they were immediately employed, wow what a concept. (Parole Officer D)

Regarding the importance of long-term goals, the participant emphasized the importance of having a backup plan.

> Goals are great, but we forget that life happens. Most prisoners come from an environment where the basic concepts [sic] learning how to plan your day is missed, the ability to say no when your friends say come on let's go rob somebody so we can get a blunt, a double deuce of beer and chill on the porch because the basic understanding that a job is a reflection of your determination and responsibility is just gone.
> So not until we teach our young men and women who are being released how to think logically, we will continue to spin our wheels in an effort to reduce recidivism. (Parole and Probation Officer Participant D)

Parole and probation officer participant E. This participant is a probation officer with 16 or more years' experience. She advises that mentorship programs are important to successful reintegration. She advised newly reintegrating individuals to avoid associations they had before imprisonment. She suggested that finding an accountability partner and connecting with a church community with ex-offender programs.

She said that the prison system makes no mistakes and that it is "up to the individual to have that burning desire to want to make the change to become a productive member of society" (Parole and Probation Officer Participant E).

As to what the prison system does correctly, she stated that the college classes that were once offered made a considerable impact on the inmates' self-esteem and preparation for reintegration. She also stated that education is important to reintegration success. As to the importance of long-term goals, programs, programs and more programs to steer that population in the right direction, a trade something that will help them compete and feel confident and well prepared for the unknown.

Parole and probation officer participant F. This participant is a probation officer with 16 or more years' experience. She advised that returning citizens should be clear about parole requirements, avoid returning to self-defeating behaviors as well as to seek as many prosocial opportunities to address their basic needs for food, shelter, reunification with offspring and employment. The participant suggested that individuals should avoid illicit substance usage, alcohol abuse, toxic relationships, and avoid negative influences.

Additional advice provided by the participant included the importance of building a strong foundation and seeking wise counsel. She also advised that individuals establish new associations and obtain a mentor that models consistent positive behavior. She emphasized the

importance of an education, finding felon-friendly companies, employability skills, and trade programs that offer certifications. “Have a skilled trade or other professional degrees enhances the employability of returning citizens while increasing their self-efficacy” (Parole and Probation Officer Participant F).

The participant addressed what the prison system does incorrectly, stating that they fail to deal with the whole individual. She also stated that unrealistic expectations could be discouraging for returning citizens who have multiple challenges to overcome. Also, unaddressed mental and physical health may lead some individuals to self-medicate. Addressing what the prison system does correctly, the participant said that, “Prison is ultimately responsible for protecting the public from dangerous individuals in a society convicted as such. Prisons also provide a time for ‘penance,’ with the goal of making amends” (Parole and Probation Officer Participant F). This participant said, concerning the importance of long-term goals, that without a plan, one plans to fail. She recommended coaching and mentoring support of returning citizens, their families, and the communities.

Table 13 displays a summary of all parole and probation participant responses for questions one through four. There are seven categories, according to each survey question.

Table 13. *Parole and Probation Officer Responses–Questions 1 through 4*

Participant	Advice for Ex-offenders	Watch Out For	What Else Do They Need to Do?	Prison System-Mistakes
A	Support System Prosocial Relationships	Mindset/Coping Time Management Relationships Self-Determination Personal Responsibility Acquaintances	Support System	Time Management Limited-nonexistent Programming Mistreatment

Table 13. *Parole and Probation Officer Responses–Questions 1 through 4 (continued)*

Participant	Advice for Ex-offenders	Watch Out For	What Else Do They Need to Do?	Prison System-Mistakes
B	Substance Abuse Employment	Substance Abuse Acquaintances	Support System	Not Familiar with Prison System.
C	Personal Responsibility	Follow Rules Desist Obey All Laws Report in When Scheduled	Substance Abuse Mental Health Follow Rules Restitution	Inadequate Prison Programs No Rehab
D	Education Vocation	Complacency Planning Realistic Goals Action Plan Plan B	Prepared for Society Education Goals	Set Up for Failure Staffing Morale Survival Mentality Programs
E	Support System Mentorship Programs	Acquaintances Associations	Support System Spirituality God	Personal Responsibilities
F	Personal Responsibility Family Reunification Employment Self-Defeating Behaviors	Mindset Self-Defeating Behaviors Substance Abuse Toxic Relationships	Support System Education Employment	Programs Unrealistic Expectations Mental/Physical Health

Table 14 below displays a summary of all parole and probation participant responses for questions five through seven.

Table 14. *Probation and Probation Officer Responses–Questions 5 through 7*

Participant	Prison System Does Right	Education	Long-Term Goals
A	Innovative Programming	Important	Somewhat Important
B	Education Vocation	Important	Short-Term Goals More Important
C	No Answer	Important	Very Important
D	Education/Vocation Gives Them What They Have Coming Fail to Prepare Inmates	Important	Plan B Time Management Self-Determination Critical Thinking
E	Inadequate Programming Self-Esteem Need Better Reentry Preparation Education	Important	Programs Education Vocation
F	Protect Society Penance	Important	Goals Support System Family

The parole and probation officer responses were categorized and assigned a thematic category. Sixty-seven percent of probation and parole officer participants reported that support systems and pro-social relationships and associations are germane to successful reintegration. Sixty-seven percent placed importance on mindset, coping competencies, and personal responsibility. Closely related to this are self-determination, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, competencies that 50% of the participants found to be important during reintegration. Time management, planning, and goal setting were significant according to all these participants.

Table 15 lists thematic categories of all parole and probation officer participants. Sixty-seven percent of these participants mentioned substance abuse, mental health or physical health as challenges for reintegrating individuals. Programs and community resources were considered important by 67% of participants. Fifty percent stated that employment is an important factor and rule or legal compliance was important to 17% of the participants. Education, per 100% of participants, was important to successful reentry.

Table 15. *Probation and Probation Officer Themes*

Number of Participants	Subcategory	Thematic Category	Percent of Respondents
6	Education	Behavioral	100%
4	Support System/Prosocial Relationships/Mentor	Environmental	67%
4	Acquaintances/Associations	Behavioral Environmental	67%
4	Mindset/Coping Competencies/Personal Responsibility	Personal	67%
6	Time Management/Planning/Goals	Personal	100%
3	Self-Determination/Self-Efficacy/Self-Esteem	Personal	50%
4	Substance Abuse/Mental Health/Physical Health	Personal Behavioral Environmental	67%
4	Programs/Resources	Environmental	67%
3	Employment	Environmental	50%
1	Prison Mistreatment	Environmental	17%
1	Rule/Legal Compliance	Behavioral	17%

Table 16 shows a parole and probation officer responses by thematic category. The analysis indicated that there were six occurrences in the environmental category, and four occurrences each under the behavioral and personal categories.

Table 16. *Category Summary of Parole and Probation Officer Responses*

Thematic Category	Times Occurred in Participant Responses
Environmental	6
Behavioral	4
Personal	4

Following is a summarization of the findings as related to the overarching question of, what are the factors that assisted successfully reintegrated formerly incarcerated individuals to desist from criminal activity?

Summary

The purpose of this action research study was understanding the implications of human-agency on reintegration outcomes, as well as understanding what turning points that led to participant decisions to desist from criminal activity (Creswell, 2014; Sandu & Damian, 2012; Stringer, 2013). The study was theoretically founded on social cognitive theory and emergent interactive agency (EIA) models of social cognition (Bandura, 2011, 2014; Yong et al., 2015). Qualitative data was then categorized under themes correlated to Bandura's (2018) Triarchic Reciprocal Causality model, which emphasizes the dynamic and cyclical interaction of individuals within an environment.

The data analysis revealed parallel perspectives of formerly incarcerated individuals and probation and parole officers. These responses fell under personal, behavioral, or environmental thematic categories (Bandura, 2011).

- *Personal:* Self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-regulation, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, knowledge
- *Behavioral*: Human agency, self-determination, self-reflection, forethought, motivation, actions, choices, verbal statement
- *Environmental*: Modeling, resources, other people, physical settings

Analysis of formerly incarcerated participant data indicated that desistence decisions of the participants were heavily weighted toward personal and behavioral factors. According to these participants, individual determination drives success or failure of environmental interventions. This supports Bandura's (2011, 2014) previous findings because responses indicated that individuals possess an ability to influence outcomes despite circumstances. That process occurs as an individual reconstructs distorted cognitions, a theme that emerged during data analysis. This is reflective of as it supports that self-determination facilitates behavioral changes that are rooted in mindset.

Parole and probation participants also related environmental, personal and behavioral factors as critical to successful reintegration. These participants placed slightly higher importance on environmental factors. This may be due to their positions being compliance-related with respect to parole and probation guidelines and prescribed actions required when those guidelines are violated. The field journal notes indicated an air of frustration in some of these responses.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand, from the perspectives of successfully reintegrated individuals, the turning points that informed their decisions to desist from criminal activity. The analysis identified themes underlying human agency and self-determination in the desistance experiences of these participants. These results were reflective of research establishing that social control-based criminal justice interventions fail to consider implications of self-determination and human agency in criminological desistance.

The overarching research question for the study was, "What are turning points that assisted successfully reintegrated formerly incarcerated individuals to desist from criminal activity?" From the data analysis emerged themes in support of self-determination as a core construct in criminal desistance decisions. Subquestions related to understanding what themes existed in the personal stories of successfully reintegrated individuals; what turning points formerly incarcerated individuals identify as facilitating their decisions to desist from criminal activity; and how what was learned from the data may be used to educate community. The answers to these questions may provide significant insight into improving outcomes for community reintegration service providers as well as facilitate long-term sustainable outcomes for program participants.

Summary of the Results

What follows is a discussion of the results and conclusions drawn from the analysis, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research and conclusions.

Formerly Incarcerated Participants

All formerly incarcerated participants reported pre- and post-release challenges that could be categorized as environmental. These included old acquaintances, institutional failure to prepare them for reintegration, and parole and probation challenges. In keeping with Wright et al. (2012), these factors affected formerly incarcerated participants. All responses of these participants reflected points at which these challenges were mitigated by self-determinant choices that had a retrospective and prospective impact on the trajectory of their lives or the lives of their families. Results are also reflective of Sverdlik and Oreg (2015) in that they showed a connection between the participants' perceived degree of personal choice and a changed perspective of pre-incarceration and post-incarceration events. How these participants viewed these challenges appears to have had a direct effect on successful reintegration.

In all cases, turning points involved a change of perspective including changes in self-perception either solely, or in relation to, others. Each turning point resulted in a goal-oriented resolve that resulted in commensurate choices. This finding aligns with Liem and Richardson (2014), demonstrating the role of transformation narratives in the desistance process. All the formerly incarcerated participants related transformative narratives.

All formerly incarcerated participants discussed the importance of giving back to their communities. How they chose to do so was related to keeping others out of the institutions. This is in keeping with research by Robinson et al., 2012. supporting that reentry should consider the fact that offenders who do not recidivate share a highly developed sense of purpose despite social labeling.

In keeping with Liem and Richardson (2014), it is important to note that desistance narratives may exist at any point in the post-release life-course. As evidenced in the formerly incarcerated participants of this study, turning-point narratives occurred at multiple stages of the desistence journey. While such narratives may reveal cognitive shifts that facilitated desistance, the existence of such narratives is not, itself, a predictor of reintegration success.

The formerly incarcerated participants in this study did acknowledge personal responsibility for pre-desistence behaviors and decisions. At any point along their desistence journeys, these participants may have related similar transformative narratives without having desisted from criminal activity. This is because, as the results of this study reveal, transformation occurred over time through a series of turning points.

This supports Walker et al. (2015) evidencing the fact that, absent matters of self-determination and personal responsibility, desistance may not follow the narrative. In keeping with Davis et al. (2012), formerly incarcerated participants in this study demonstrating a multilevel transformative process triggered by various consequences that resulted in the participant's resolve to change. The results from these participants further supported that it takes more than a realization of adverse consequences to trigger transformation. It takes personal responsibility for behavior, acknowledging the need to change, and taking responsibility to implement that change. These changes resulted in long-term success in the study participants, regardless of environmental conditions; and they invariably included an awareness of how the participant's actions affected others.

Parole and Probation Officer Participants

Parole and probation officer data, collected in the interest of adding context to the study, reflected a bent toward environmental considerations. As noted in the field journal, underlying

these responses was frustration with non-compliance. This is reflective of the Davis et al. (2013) as all these participants mentioned the need for probationers and parolees to take responsibility for rule compliance. As evidenced by a high percentage of recidivism due to parole or probation violations, the participants acknowledged that there is nothing correctional officials or the judiciary can say to an individual that can force compliance.

In keeping with Cooper, et al. (2014) and Ndrecka et al. (2017) noncompliance could occur at any point during the progression of multiple turning points in the life course of formerly incarcerated individuals. In the case of 100% of formerly incarcerated participants, individual transformations occurred over the course of multiple incarcerations.

Discussion of the Results

What follows is a discussion on the results as related to the overarching research question. That is followed by individually addressing the results as applied to the subquestions.

Overarching Research Question

What are turning points that facilitated successfully reintegrated individuals to desist from criminal activity?

As expected, the study supported the fact that turning points are not static but occur through a progression of interrelated events that progress an individual toward a decision to desist from criminal activity. In all cases, formerly incarcerated participants experienced a series of turning points involving a succession of shifts in perspective. An aspect of that progression included reconstruction of identity as these individuals reframed their pre- and post-criminological views of life events. This resulted in a change in how they viewed themselves and others.

Emergent themes in the analysis also revealed that a realization of the consequences of criminal involvement on others facilitated turning points for the formerly incarcerated individuals. Being separated from children had a considerable impact. The results also evidenced that formerly incarcerated participants took responsibility for both their criminal involvement and for their post-release decisions (Kao et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2015). In most cases, these participants were determined to avoid any situation that might potentially jeopardize their desistence decisions.

Subquestion 1

What themes exist in the personal stories of formerly incarcerated individuals, who have successfully reintegrated into society after engagement in the criminal justice system?

Recurrent themes of personal-responsibility, spirituality, giving back to their communities, support systems, goals, and prosocial relationships occurred in the narratives of formerly incarcerated participants.

*Personal responsibility***.** Participants took responsibility for events leading up to their incarcerations. None of them placed that blame on others. At some point in their desistence journeys, they all deliberately sought a deeper understanding of their pre-incarceration selves. Their transformations included acknowledging their responsibility in criminal involvement, achieving an understanding of the core causes of poor decision-making, the effect of their decision on others, and a determination to maintain their desistence decisions.

When relating their personal reintegration experiences and in their advice to other reintegrating individuals, formerly incarcerated participants emphasized that success depends on the individual.

> There's no rehabilitation as far as the system is concerned. It's all up to you. It's not up to them 'cause they don't want you to leave in the first place. It's up to you. During the time

> that I've been down, I saw many a man go home and come back. (Formerly Incarcerated Participant B)

A focus on personal choice, personal responsibility, goal-setting, and reasonable expectations of reintegration was consistent in these participant responses.

Spirituality. All formerly incarcerated participants expressed a belief in God and credited Him with helping them maintain desistence decisions. They all incorporated spirituality into their post-release lives to the extent that half of them became licensed or ordained ministers providing spiritual guidance to others.

Giving back. All participants placed importance on giving back to their communities. Three of these individuals expressed a specific desire to keep others from involvement in the criminal justice system. Most participants expressed a desire to help other youth and adults avoid the criminal justice system.

One participant is opening a halfway house for juveniles. One is working on opening transitional housing for reintegrating adults. Another is working on a group of transitional homes for women recovering from substance abuse or reintegrating. One participant is the founder of an international broadcast company and a motivational speaker. Two respondents are motivational speakers.

There are two licensed ministers in the group, one of which is an ordained Bishop. The other goes into prisons to minister to female inmates. This is remarkable given that the state had once labeled her as a Class D career criminal. Most state prison systems prohibit former inmates from doing so.

Support systems. Having robust support systems during post-release was a consistent theme that emerged in the narratives of all participants. The importance of support systems was also reflected in participant advice to others. While emotional support and encouragement were

include, needs-based support such as shelter, employment, and church community were also recurrent in participant narratives.

Long-term goals. Goal setting and achievement was a theme in the narratives of all the participants. These participants began setting post-release goals during their incarcerations. All participant advice to other reintegrating individuals reflected the importance of focusing on goal achievement during and after incarceration. It is important to note that short-term and long-term goal setting was a theme in the responses of parole and probation officer participants, as well. One of them noted that short-term goals were more important than long-term goals.

Formerly incarcerated participants indirectly echoed the importance of short-term goals. In their advice to others, they emphasize the importance of not getting discouraged when reintegration plans do not go as expected. In that regard, these participants advised that reintegrating individuals should have a backup plan rather than to allow discouragement to cause them to re-offend.

Pro-social relationships. Three-quarters of the participants reach a point at which they deliberately decided not to associate with past acquaintances. These participants said that they realized their reintegration best interest was neither a priority for, nor facilitated by, pre-incarceration associations. This was also reflected in participants' advice to other reintegrating individuals.

Subquestion 2

What turning points do individuals formerly involved in the criminal justice system identify as facilitating their decisions to desist from criminal activity?

Participant desistance resulted from identifiable changes in the self-perceptions of the formerly incarcerated participants. The narratives of the formerly incarcerated participants

related a transformative journey through which they achieved a self-identification in which they no longer cognitively nor emotionally identified with who they were prior to desistance from criminal activity. This thematic emergence supports Stevens (2012) in that, the narratives of these participants indicated that desistance resulted from identifiable turning points that facilitated changes in self-cognition. These improved self-perceptions no longer cognitively nor emotionally fit with their pre-incarceration selves.

Each formerly incarcerated participant related defining moments in their progression toward desistance decisions. Each of these turning points resulted in a change in mindset regarding themselves, others, and their environments. The events identified by participants as defining moments in their desistence journeys involved a recognition that their families were strained by their incarcerations. These participants stated that their families were doing time along with them and they acknowledged the financial strain their incarcerations placed on their families. Watching children grow up from prison was also a recurrent theme among three-quarters of the participants. The remaining participant stated that the strain of the trial resulted in divorce and separation from his daughter.

None of the participants mentioned parole or probation officers or services as a support system. Additionally, spirituality involving a belief in God was unanimously related by all participants of the study. They credited successful reintegration to this spiritual component of their lives.

Subquestion 3

How can what is learned from the data be used to educate community providers and to augment existing community reintegration programs?

Contemporary reintegration programs were developed with a focus on the correlates of offending and recidivism. While this may be beneficial to producing predictive tools, it fails to address questions regarding *how* these correlates interact across time, or their interplay with an offender's motivations, rationalizations, and responses to opportunities to re-offend. This paradigm is rooted in the theoretic belief that individuals are rational actors that can be influenced through inducements and external social controls (Cornish & Clarke, 2014; van Gelder, 2013). It ignores the implications of how an individual internalizes and responds to life events.

Conversely, the constructs of human agency, self-determination, personal choice, individual control over decision-making, and the degree to which those factors influence successful or unsuccessful reintegration, represent a new focus in understanding how reintegrating individuals may overcome environmental challenges common to all formerly incarcerated individuals.

Additionally, community stakeholders should consider that desistence from criminal activity occurs over time and involves a series of turning points that are influenced by numerous cognitive shifts in an individual's self-perception. Desistence is also affected by developmental considerations, including chronological age. Service providers should consider service delivery models that are designed in consideration of an individual's specific stage of desistence. These considerations may assist existing community reentry programs in maximizing resources while increasing the long-term reintegration success for formerly incarcerated individuals.

As evidenced by Parole and Probation Officer Participant responses, there is also a need to educate community corrections providers regarding the cross-purposes of existing retributive paradigms with the purposes of community reintegration providers. For example, one probation

officer participant responded with a strict emphasis on compliance, indicating that the prison system did nothing wrong. That participant also stated that retribution was the purpose of the prison system.

While most of the Parole and Probation Officer Participants emphasized personal, behavioral *and* environmental factors. Even these responses showed a slightly greater emphasis on rule compliance. Community corrections providers must consider that a prescriptive and retributive response to parole and probation violations is non-conducive to, and indeed exacerbates, recidivism (Butts & Schiraldi, 2018) and can cut short any progress a reintegrating individual may achieve during the reintegration transition.

Discussion of the Conclusions

A pervasive criticism of traditional reintegration research is that it uses recidivism as the primary measurement of program outcomes. Butts and Schiraldi (2018) determined that recidivism is not an appropriate measure of program effectiveness and it should not be a sole measure of program outcomes. The researchers reported that to use recidivism as a primary measurement of effectiveness is misleading because it makes,

> Inappropriate comparisons of dissimilar populations, and focuses policy on negative rather than positive outcomes. Relying on recidivism defines the mission of community corrections in law enforcement terms, relieving agencies of their responsibility for other outcomes such as employment, education, and housing. (p. 1)

The researchers warned that considering recidivism as evidence of criminal justice effectiveness confuses bureaucratic indicators with individual behavior and rehabilitation. They recommended a more flexible and responsive model of service delivery.

While recidivism should not represent a critical measurement of criminal justice success, a key aspect of crime prevention is interrupting the recidivism cycle. Unfortunately, traditional criminal justice paradigms and their rational choice underpinnings ignore human agency and

self-determination (Paternoster et al., 2015). Because these interventions are social control-based, many post-release programs exacerbate recidivism by perpetuating, rather than mitigating, cumulative social disadvantages faced by reintegration individuals.

According to Kao et al. (2014), as well as Bellis et al. (2014), formerly incarcerated participants who had developed cognitive competencies made healthier choices as they developed a new sense of self-worth, self-efficacy, and personal responsibility. This cognitive restructuring empowered sustainable reintegration outcomes, as participants learned from past mistakes, to move forward despite environmental disadvantages.

Results indicate that there was a dynamic and consistent interaction between reintegrated individuals and the typical environmental disadvantages that were persistent during their reintegration journeys. Therefore, desistence can be more meaningfully understood by addressing the following factors identified by Sampson & Laub (2016) as commonly missing from reintegration program research: (a) data analytics that ignores developmentally distinct offender groups, (b) the concept of turning points related to a dynamic view of significant life course events, and (c) overlooked importance of human agency in the development of crime.

Moreover, as supported by Le Blanc (2012), a reintegration intervention must recognize desistence as a continuous interaction between the individual and the environment to facilitate identification of cognitive implications on quantitative and qualitative changes that occur in the desistence trajectory.

This life-course perspective, inclusive of a developmental view of progressive turning points in the desistence trajectory, will give community service providers a deeper understanding of where participants are in their desistence progression. Understanding this will allow

community providers to augment their programs with developmental delivery models to meet the needs of reintegrating individuals at various stages of the dissidence life course.

As established by Blokland and van der Geest (2015), such characteristics of the individual can present a positive impact on, or become a barrier to, effective treatment. How program participants experienced and coped with life events is vital to understanding successful reintegration. By incorporating a Developmental Course Model of Human Behavior, with a view of the cognitive complexities of human agency and self-determination, service providers may alter program delivery to address desistence trajectory-specific issues more effectively. Accepting that the cure is in the cause of recidivism, one must consider criminal behavior a symptom of such cognitive challenges as opposed to being the cause of them.

Facilitating human agency and self-determination may mitigate environmental barriers for reintegrating individuals. This is preferable to the slow progression of prison reforms that one parole and probation participant described as, “more piecemeal than the kind of systemic change that would make a real difference in the lives of inmates, and subsequently society as a whole” (Parole and Probation Officer Participant A).

The results of this study are not intended to argue for replacement of existing reintervention modalities. The results, however, can enhance the experiences and successes of individuals who participate in those programs. Understanding the desistence progression can enhance the individualization of those services by considering and addressing the cognitive dynamics of where the participants are in along their desistence life course.

Limitations

Recruitment

Recruitment was a challenge in this study, which was initially based on a convenience sample of 15 formerly incarcerated participants and 15 current or former parole and probation officer participants. Recruitment was geographically limited to the local metropolitan area. After a few months of receiving no volunteers, the geographic recruitment area was expanded to the entire state. Too few individuals responded to this expansion, and the area was then expanded to the United States. After that, more participants volunteered for the study.

After a year of multiple adjustments to the geographic area, there were still fewer than the initially stated number of participants to move forward with analysis. At that point, the research supervisor obtained permission to move forward with the existing number of participants. While the initial goal of 15 formerly incarcerated participants and 15 current or former probation and parole officers was reduced to a total of 15 overall, saturation had been reached for both recruitment populations. While the reduced sample size had a negligible effect on the data from a saturation perspective, the limited pool of participants may have limited the richness of the data collection.

Formerly incarcerated recruitment challenges**.** A few individuals who participated in the formerly incarcerated participant surveys failed to follow through with the interview. Attempts to schedule interviews with these individuals continued until data collection was complete.

The richness of the qualitative data could have been enhanced by adding a focus group of formerly incarcerated individuals. One participant express reluctance to participate based on lack of trust. It is unclear whether trust may have been a part of the recruitment challenge. However, it may be a consideration for this population. Establishing a rapport with participants may be

beneficial. Offering an incentive to participate and holding face-to-face interviews might have resulted in better recruitment outcomes.

Parole and probation officer recruitment challenges**.** Early in the recruitment process, the researcher realized that requiring parole and probation officers first to take a survey and then commit to telephone interviews appeared to be a barrier to data collection. At that point, the recruitment strategy was changed, with IRB approval, to an open-ended online survey, which increased the number of volunteers.

Sampling

The study was based on a convenience sample of participants across the United States. The study may have generated richer results had sampling been stratified to include diversity in ages, races, criminal justice histories, and other demographics for the formerly incarcerated participants. Although the surveys did not request information on the racial identification of the participants, the interviews revealed that all formerly incarcerated participants were of African-American descent. This aspect was not discussed in the analysis because race was not a variable in the data collection instruments.

All participants reported no juvenile justice histories. However, a purposive sampling strategy would have included such individuals, which would have allowed for examining possible developmental implications in the desistence life course of these individuals.

Inclusive criteria in the sampling process posed another limitation of this study. The January 1, 2009, most recent release date may have favored older, rather than younger, participants. This reduced the depth of the data. As previously discussed, stratification would produce a more diverse sample, which would facilitate a deeper understanding of the desistence dynamic.

Instruments

Some formerly incarcerated participants mention their current ages during the interviews. It became evident during the analysis, however, that categorizing ages brackets (For example Age 25 to 34), and failure to request participant ages at each incarceration, prohibited even general analysis of the implications of age at in the desistence progression.

Additionally, the ability to cross-reference specific quantitative variables to qualitative data was hindered by categorizing survey options. Consequently, the researcher was unable to correlate demographics to the coded text adequately.

Recommendations for Future Research or Interventions

The results of the study led to the following recommendations for future research, interventions, program design, and advocacy. Also discussed are recommendations and considerations for criminal justice policy.

Future Research

A stratified sample could facilitate a greater understanding of developmental influences on the desistence decisions, cognitive implications at each stage of the desistence process, and the triarchic influences at play at each stage of criminal involvement.

Research should take a developmental criminological view of reintegration that measures participant outcomes from a holistic framework that includes personal, behavioral and environmental aspects of the reentry experience (Berghuis, 2018; Wright & Cesar, 2013). Future research should include the voices of formerly imprisoned individuals who have demonstrated long-term successful reintegration outcomes.

Future research should longitudinally study former inmates with similar mental health, substance abuse, trauma, and criminal histories to determine what psychological factors exist for

the successfully reintegrated group, which did not exist for the recidivist group. Such research should include evaluation of (a) developmentally distinct aspects of the participants, (b) turning points related to desistance from criminal activity, and (c) the implications of human agency in desistance decisions across the life-course (Sampson & Laub, 2016). Future research should include a sample of formerly incarcerated individuals with criminal histories inclusive of juvenile involvement and the ages of participants at each detention or incarceration. It will be beneficial to understanding the life-course criminological and desistance dynamic in participant narratives regarding their lives prior, and subsequent, to each reincarceration event.

A mixed methodological approach to future research may provide a deeper understanding of contextual and developmental dynamics along the transformational journey to desistance. However, as advised by Gadd, Karstedt, and Messner (2012), the research design should include consistent consideration of participant-specific qualitative data at each stage of quantitative analysis. Analyzing self-determinate psychodynamic shifts that emerge from participant narratives is not likely to lend itself to aggregation, yet the quantitative aspects should augment the analysis.

Future Interventions

Two appreciative inquiry stages of this study will occur after the findings are presented to the community. It is expected that, at that point, the design and destiny phases will begin. From that perspective, service provider stakeholders should decide how to implement what was learned from this research (Whitney & Cooperrider, 2011). Therefore, the following considerations are presented in the interest of what was learned from the research.

Recidivism as a measurement of reintegration program success. The compliance-focused basis of community corrections appears to be in direct opposition to the goal of

reintegration and rehabilitation. The punitive basis of the prescriptive consequences of non-compliance, coupled with systemic and cumulative environmental disadvantages, are non-conducive to, and indeed exacerbate recidivism. Per Butts and Schiraldi (2018), that harm also perpetuates racial and class biases that underly the criminal justice system.

As service providers consider improving programming and service delivery, it is vital to change historical views of recidivism as a measurement of program outcomes. Such paradigmatic predilections preclude developmental and agentic considerations related to cognition and resulting behaviors. Recidivism is a macro-dynamic. What this study revealed was that a person-centric approach to service delivery might result in successful outcomes for program participants, thereby indirectly lowering recidivism rates. The focus, however, should be the core of criminal desistance and successful social reintegration of reintegrating individuals.

Developmental and life course considerations. Desistence from criminal activity occurs as a progression. Any reintegrating individual could be at any point in the desistence journey. The findings from this study evidenced multiple turning points leading to desistence decisions of the participants. Psychosocial maturity, implications of trauma on arrested development, age, and life course experience all inform positionality in the desistence progression (Rocque, 2017; Sampson & Laub, 2016).

Future service providers, therefore, should consider these factors in developing treatment plans, reintegration programming, and service delivery methodologies. The focus should be moving the program participants from the current level of cognitive competency to a subsequent level. In other words, developmental relevance is vital to individual success. Life-course criminology has continued to show the relevance of interventions in changing individual trajectories and in inducing turning points (Carlsson, 2012). An asset-based view of reintegration

versus a problem-focused approach to facilitating desistence should include a developmental approach to facilitating turning points for program participants.

Community advocacy and criminal justice policy. Criminal justice policy is detached from actual practice. The practitioner versus policymaker dichotomy ensures that the voices of reintegrating individuals are excluded. Policymakers should be encouraged not to focus on recidivism rates as a bureaucratic basis for decision-making nor as a measure of human behavior (Rocque, 2017). It will be beneficial to base policy on a life-course desistence consideration.

Conclusion

The effectiveness of reentry programs is significantly and profoundly affected by an individual's degree of self-determination to desist from criminal activity and transform their lives. Bandura (1999) made this profound observation,

> In its brief history, psychology has undergone wrenching paradigm shifts. In these transformations, the theorists and their followers think, argue and act agentically, but their theories about how other people function grant them little if any, agentic capabilities.
>
> It is ironic that a science of human functioning should strip people of the very capabilities that make them unique in their power to shape their environment and their own destiny. (p. 21)

Increased surveillance and supervision are not the answer to a reintegrating individual's failure to adhere to stringent post-release probation or parole standards, nor to facilitating sustainable desistance decisions. Recidivism is exacerbated by rational choice-based methods of external control. Even cloaking rational choice in an active-participant intervention model fails to address the implications of internal cognition and human agency.

The cognitions that lead to criminal involvement or desistance cannot be ignored in rehabilitative service delivery. Attacking recidivism from a strictly external vantage point is ineffective in many instances and unattainable in others. The focus should now become

sustainable positive outcomes, which are rarely achieved through external control strategies. Any external means of forging change in this population will continue to be less effective unless and until the rehabilitative focus shifts from managing through social control to influencing internal change.

Influence emerges from within an individual. Cognitive shifts in self-perception may result in new perceptions of the environment, inclusive of the cumulative disadvantages faced by most reintegrating individuals. It follows, therefore, that rational choice-based restorative justice models should shift from a deficiency and control paradigm to an appreciative opportunistic view related to the perspectives of reintegrating individuals.

Results of this study support the Maruna and LeBel's (2015) strength-based perspective, indicated that success in reentry depends on reinforcing an agentic view of the individual's self-perception. This perspective facilitates increased long-term outcomes for individuals serviced by community reintegration providers and provides new perspectives to drive innovative approaches to community service delivery. Gadd et al. (2012) advised of the importance of understanding the human meaning of criminal behavior.

Bandura (2018) expended his agentic theories to include individual, proxy, and collective modes of human agency. Individual agency is conceptualized as spheres, some of which an individual has no direct control. Where direct control over social conditions or institution practices affects an individual, they can employ proxy through others with appropriate resources to effect systemic change. Finally, the collective involves concerted group effort toward a common goal. It is through a "multigenetic model" (Bandura, 2018, p. 131) of collective agency that the findings from this study will move forward, through a united effort and a common purpose.

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APPENDIX A. RESEARCHER-DESIGNED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS–FORMERLY INCARCERATED

1. What was happening in your life at the time you went to prison?

2. Now that you are out of prison, what has your life been like since you have been out of prison?

3. What do you see as some of the positive things in your life now, compared to before when you went to prison?

4. What advice do you have for others who are coming out of prison?

5. What kind of mistakes do you think the prison system makes that leads people back into prison?

6. Have you acquired any skills, talents or abilities d since getting out?

7. What are your current long-term goals?

APPENDIX B. RESEARCHER-DESIGNED SURVEY QUESTIONS–PAROLE AND PROBATION OFFICER

1. What advice do you have for individuals who are coming out of prison?
2. What do they need to watch out for after getting out?
3. What else do they need to do?
4. What kind of mistakes do you think the prison system makes that leads people back into prison?
5. What is something about the prison system that you think helps? Is there anything the prisons do right?
6. Do you think having a college degree, a specialized certification in a trade or a high school diploma makes a difference?
7. How important are long-term goals to helping a former prisoner not to recidivate.

APPENDIX C. RESEARCHER-DESIGNED SURVEY FORMERLY INCARCERATED PARTICIPANTS

1. What is your age?

   18 to 24
   25 to 34
   35 to 44
   45 to 54
   55 to 64
   65 or Older

2. Do you live in the United States?

   Yes
   No

3. Were you incarcerated in a United States jail or prison?

   Yes
   No

4. When is last time you were released from jail or prison?

5. Are you currently under court supervision (parole, probation, tether, etc.)?

6. Are you currently under the care of a mental health professional?

7. Do you have to report to a sex offender registry?

   Yes
   No

8. Was your last release for a juvenile detention?

   Yes
   No

9. Are you living in a drug treatment center?

   Yes
   No

10. Are you male or female?

    Male
    Female

11. What is your zip code (enter 5-digit zip code; for example, 00544 or 94305)?

12. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

    Less than high school degree
    High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
    Some college but no degree
    Associate degree
    Bachelor degree
    Graduate degree

13. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

    Married
    Widowed
    Divorced
    Separated
    Single

14. What is your household income?

    $0 to $9,999
    $10,000 to $24,999
    $25,000 to $49,999
    $50,000 to $74,999
    $75,000 to $99,999
    $100,000 or more

15. How many times have you served time in jail or prison?

16. Did you ever have a juvenile offense?

17. How many times were you sentenced and served time as a juvenile?

18. After the all research data is analyzed, we would like to meet with the participants we have interviewed. The meeting will occur via telephone to discuss the results with those who are interviewed. Participant points of view are important to the research project. We want to ensure that your voice is precisely heard in the report results.

19. Please complete the following information. Providing this information is strictly voluntary. By providing this information you give Emergent Voices Research Project permission to contact you to schedule an interview. You will be contacted with further instructions within 1 to 2 weeks.

20. What is the best phone number to reach you?

APPENDIX D. RESEARCHER-DESIGNED SURVEY
PAROLE AND PROBATION OFFICERS

1. Enter your first and last names.

2. Enter the title of your current or former position with a United States Department of Corrections.

   Parole Officer
   Probation Officer
   Other (please specify)

3. How many years were you a parole or probation officer?

4. Enter the name of the Division or Department in which you currently or formerly worked as a probation or parole officer.
   4.

5. Enter the Address of the Division or Department in which you formerly or currently worked.

6. What advice do you have for individuals who are coming out of prison?

7. What do they need to watch out for after getting out?

8. What else do they need to do?

9. What kind of mistakes do you think the prison system makes that leads people back into prison?

10. What is something about the prison system that you think helps? Is there anything the prisons do right?

11. Do you think having a college degree, a specialized certification in a trade or a high school diploma makes a difference?

12. How important are long-term goals to helping a former prisoner not to recidivate; and where do we go from here?

13. What is the best email address and phone number to reach you?

14. Please complete the following information. Providing this information is strictly voluntary. By providing this information you give Emergent Voices Research Project permission to contact you to schedule an interview. You will be contacted with further instructions within 1 to 2 weeks.