

“I’m not trying to go back”:

Young Women’s Strengths Navigating their Return From Incarceration

By

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ABSTRACT

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This is a qualitative, grounded-theory study of thirteen young women between the ages of 18 and 26 who were returning back to their lives in New York City after prison or an extended jail incarceration. The women spent anywhere from 8 months to 8 years incarcerated and were home between three months and three years from the time of their release. The study includes findings based on analysis and interpretations of the interviews, implications for future research and practice that center around the women’s use of time while incarcerated, their connectedness to family, friends and staff, both while in prison and upon release, and the impact of both of those on their ability to stay free. The study includes implications for social work and correctional research and practice, and is grounded in women’s relational theory and developmental frameworks.

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DEDICATION

For Ruth Schonholz Aledort

This dissertation is dedicated in memory and honor of my mother Ruth Aledort, March 5, 1937- November 2, 2012, who taught me from an early age to speak up in the face of injustice and to never stop asking questions, even when it makes everyone else uncomfortable. She was a woman who showed me how to speak truth to power. She will be dearly missed.

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND/OVERVIEW

Incarceration rates for women, particularly young women of color, have exploded in the last 20 years. Prisoner reentry and effective reintegration are an emerging crisis across many localities in the United States. Millions of people have flowed in and out of prisons in the last 20 years, and while many states were prepared for the increase in the incarcerated population, little thought was put into how to integrate these same people back into society (Travis, 2005). Even less thought has been put into how to reintegrate young women who have spent a portion of their late adolescence or young adulthood while incarcerated

For 50 years, from 1920-1970, the rate of incarceration in the United States remained at a steady 10 per 100,000 residents (Travis, 2005, p. 21). By 2008, this ratio shifted significantly to approximately 509 incarcerated people per 100,000 residents, an increase of 342%. (Bureau of Justice Statistics {BJS}, 2008; West & Sabol, 2009). Increases in incarceration rates necessarily mean increases in reentry rates. The rate of reentry in 2003 was 600,000 people a year, or 1,600 adults per day, released from federal and state prisons¹, a rise of over 300% from the 1970s (Petersilia, 2003, Travis, 2005) and of those coming home, over 100,000 are young adults between the ages of 18-25 (Travis & Visher, 2005.)

Younger women are increasingly facing the difficult passage of reentry and reintegration from adult prisons, and are often facing it with little guidance as there are few programs that attend to

¹ This figure does not include the thousands of adults released from county jails each year, or children or youth returning from juvenile justice facilities.

their age- and gender-specific needs (Gaarder & Belknap, 2002; 2004). Recent longitudinal studies of women's recidivism indicates that younger women tend to fail on parole at higher rates than their older counterparts, indicating a need for better solutions for younger women (Deschenes, Owens & Crow 2007; Heubner, DeJong & Cobbina, 2010). Young women who have been incarcerated in adult settings are reentering society without the benefit of programs and approaches that have been specifically geared towards their needs, as their needs have remained virtually unexplored. This research project sought to elicit and describe young women's experience of reentry, including age and gender-informed experiences and challenges. This study describes the reentry experiences of young women ages 18-25 that returned home from state prison or an extended period of incarceration in jail in New York. Utilizing a grounded-theory approach, it describes the strengths and survival strategies evidenced by the participants while incarcerated and in the community that speak to their ability to move towards long-term reintegration. It also offers direction for future research and program and policy recommendations for transition age young adult women.

CHAPTER 2: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

On any given day, a very small portion of the population returning home from prison is comprised of young women between the ages of 18 and 25, yet in the course of a year it represents a significant number-in New York State is approximately 100 in any given year. However, understanding what younger women face in the struggle to successfully reenter and reintegrate may impact on breaking the cycle of incarceration. The majority of women in prison are in their 30s and 40s, and have had one or more previous incarcerations (Geenfield & Snell, 1999; Langan & Levin, 2002) making appropriate and targeted interventions for younger women critical if we are to end the cycle of incarceration and failed reentry. The lack of understanding and careful consideration of younger women's needs during the reentry process may be contributing to failed opportunities for these younger women to change the course of their lives. This project seeks to contribute to the knowledge base in this area, in an effort to formulate better policies and programs for this group of young women.

INCARCERATION AND THE RETURN OF YOUNG WOMEN

As a result of skyrocketing rates of incarceration in the United States over the past 20 years, scholars have looked at the problem of reentry and reintegration, with a primary focus on policy implications (Clear, Rose & Ryder, 2001; Covington, 2001; Freudenberg et al., 2005; Jacobs, 2004; Mears & Travis 2004a, 2004b; Michalsen, 2007; O'Brien, 2001a, 2001b; Petersilia, 2003; Richie, 2001; Travis, 2005, 2002; Travis & Petersilia, 2001; Tonry & Petersilia, 1999; Visher & Travis, 2003). Their work defines national and local struggles to address the complex needs of formerly incarcerated people returning to their communities. While there is a growing body of

literature on women's reentry and desistance from crime (Covington, 2001; Deschenes, Owen, Crow, 2007; Heubner, DeJong & Cobbina, 2010; Jacobs, 2004; Michalsen, 2007; O'Brien 2001a, 2001b; Rumgay, 2004; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998), there has been no differential analysis about the particular challenges that face younger women, and the intersection of their age and gender in their attempts to come home and stay home.

While some experiences of young women may be similar to men or older women, there is no specific knowledge about how they cope with new-found freedom and unstructured time, what their expectations are concerning reentry, how they interact with organizations and structures involved in reentry (parole in particular), and what strengths and supports they have that help in successful reintegration. The gap in the literature is partially explained by the fact that reentry is a recent area of focus in criminology, social work and sociology, and that young women represent a relatively small group within the world of prison reentry and reintegration. These young women are working with programs and structures designed for other populations, and if they do not experience success, practitioners may continue to believe that young women are too difficult to work with, or not serious about changing their lives. It becomes a case of "if the shoe doesn't fit, blame the foot" (Aledort, 2004). Understanding this population will assist practitioners and policy makers in creating programs based on their needs, rather than using adult and/or male models that are a poor fit to the needs of the population.

Adult men still represent the vast majority of people who return from prison. However, women's rates of incarceration continue to grow faster than men's and the number of young women who have been incarcerated in adult prisons has increased dramatically (Puzzanchera, 2000). In the

10 year period from 1994 to 2003, the number of young women age 25 or younger leaving federal prison increased by 48% (Federal Justice Statistics Program, 2005). One of every 1,262 adult women in the United States was on parole in 1998, compared to the much lower rate of 1 in 4,762 in 1985 (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999), an increase of over 270% in just 13 years. Over 39% of women return to prison within three years of release, with younger releasees evidencing a high rate of return to prison (Langan & Levin, 2002). Higher numbers of prior arrests and convictions are a key indicator of future recidivism (Deschenes, Owen, & Bloom, 2007; Langan & Levin; Latessa, Cullen & Gendreau, 2002; Zamble & Quinsey, 1997). Research into what helps and hinders on the road to reentry and true reintegration for younger women can help to shape programs and policies that address the needs of younger women, with the intention of interrupting the current system of ‘capture, release and recapture.’

YOUNG WOMEN EMERGING FROM ADULT INCARCERATION

There is now a substantial population of youth who have completed adolescence while in adult prisons. The criminal justice system is one of the few settings that hold young people accountable to standards above their chronological age, both developmentally and morally (Glick & Sturgeon, 1998). Literature relating to the needs of older adults reentering from prisons, and the aftercare needs and experiences of youth (predominantly male) returning from juvenile facilities is plentiful (Archwamety & Katsiyannis, 2000; Althshuler & Armstrong, 1998; Althshuler & Brash, 2004; Clear, Rose & Ryder, 2001; Hammett, Roberts & Kennedy, 2001; Hughes & Wilson, 2003; Mears & Travis, 2004; O’Brien, 2001a&b; Richie, 2001; Petersilia 2003). There is no agreed upon national standard for when a young person is considered an adult,

either by offense category or age. In some states, youth stay in the juvenile justice system through age 21 unless a certain type of offense has been committed. In others, they are automatically tried in adult court at age 16 and above. The variability on when and how a youth is adjudicated as a minor or adult, and the structural differences in types of facilities young people are held contribute significantly to a lack of coherent scholarship on the needs of younger releasees (Mears & Travis, 2004b). Even less literature has examined the process and experience of youth returning from adult facilities (Glick & Sturgeon, 1998)

The confluence of increased female incarceration and increased ‘adultification’ of young offenders (Lederman, 1999) creates a cohort of young women who have spent a portion of their youth growing up in adult prisons, and who will return to society. What little information we do have about these young women focuses nearly exclusively on the experiences in the prison, or on the factors leading to incarceration, not on how they navigate the transition home, or what unique developmental and gendered issues they face upon return to society. This study sought to contribute to that body of literature.

Nearly 29% of people released from any juvenile or criminal justice facility are under the age of 24 (Mears & Travis, 2004b). The intersection of youth and gender creates specific challenges for policy makers, practitioners, communities and individuals for reentry and reintegration of young women. Formerly incarcerated women generally have a higher burden of health and mental health problems than the general population (Dixon, Howie & Starling, 2004; Hammett, Roberts & Kennedy, 2001); they are less likely to have had employment experience and more likely to have school failure or difficulties (Sampson & Laub, 2003), economic difficulty and few social

supports (Heilbrun, et al., 2008; Reisig, Holtfreter & Morash, 2006); be parenting or pregnant (Covington, 2001; O'Brien, 2001a); and be less likely to have stable, supportive home environments. They return to communities whose resources are stressed (Travis, 2005). In general, the problems that the young women enter prison with—substance abuse, trauma, mental and physical illnesses—are the same problems with and to which they return home. They have the added burdens of the stigma, 'lost' time, consequences of a felony record and of being young women in a service world focused on adults and males.

Characteristics of Young Women Returning From New York State Prisons

While a nation-wide study of the phenomenon of younger women returning from prison is necessary, it is not feasible for the resources available to the author. New York State has one of the larger census' of women prisoners in the Northeast, and treats all youth who committed their crime at or above age 16 as adults; therefore, the study will focus on young women returning primarily from New York State prisons, but is inclusive of young women who were detained or incarcerated in jail for at least eight months². The state of New York Department of Correctional Services (NYSDOCS) has a relatively small number of young women younger than 26 years old who enter or leave the system. Between 2003-2007, the total number of young women between the ages of 16-25 admitted to NYSDOCS throughout the state was 1,436, 34% (n=501) of whom were young women from the five boroughs of New York City. From 2003-2007, a total of 492

² Jail is a more porous and transitional environment—women are brought to court, are more likely to have visits due to proximity to family and friends and legal needs—but it is also often a more chaotic environment due to the churning of the population. However, a few young women who did significant jail time were included as their experiences navigating coming home did not differ so significantly from the women returning from prison.

young women between the ages of 16-25 were released back to the community from New York City, representing 38% of the 1,285 women statewide. While the percentages of young women has decreased over the last 10 years, the actual numbers of young women incarcerated in adult settings has increased. The total number of women incarcerated in NY State increased over that time period from 1,484 to 3,133 (New York State Department of Corrections, 2008). The largest decline in percentage of young women occurred at the age group of 21-24 year olds, while the youngest groups (16-18 and 19-20) held steady at approximately 1% and 3% respectively.

No national descriptive data are available regarding the population that will be studied. However, as many young people who are in adult prison had experiences in the juvenile justice system, the literature on young women in juvenile justice placements will be used as a proxy for their slightly older counterparts. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) conducts an annual census of youth held in residential placements nationally which does not generally include youth held in adult facilities. According to Hockenberry, Sickmund & Sladky (2011) the number of youth in residential placement dropped by 12% from 2006 after reaching a peak in the 1990s. Approximately 15.3% of youth held in 2010 nationally are female, an increase of 1% from 2005, 39% non-Hispanic white, 36.4% Black, and 18% Hispanic (Sickmund, Sladky, Kang & Puzanchera, 2011). According to Sickmund (2005), census data notes that the majority (62%) reported at least one prior placement, with girls more likely to have a decrease in the severity of their offenses from their priors to the offense on which they are placed. Forty three percent of girls in residential placement reported five or more prior offenses. Girls in juvenile residential placements are significantly more likely to be parents than their non-delinquent peers, with six percent of girls in custody parenting upon placement, and four percent

pregnant at the time of placement. The rates of reported suicide attempts for girls in placement are twice as high as placed males, and four times as high as their non-placed peers (Sickmund, 2005). Both males and females in the system have high rates of school problems and low rates of academic achievement (Altshuler & Brash, 2004; Bloom, Owen, Rosenbaum & Deschenes, 2003).

This research uncovers themes and experiences faced by young women attempting to reintegrate into their communities after a period of incarceration in adult correctional environments. The inquiry is grounded in the history and current practice of women and girls' imprisonment, the social context of the increase in youth incarcerated in adult prisons and the simultaneous increase in women's incarceration. The research recognizes the context of the unique developmental experiences and challenges faced by young women transitioning to adulthood while incarcerated, and seeks to add to the Social Work body of knowledge for future research, practice and policy. This nexus of unique experiences—being young, female and incapacitated in the adult criminal justice system—make these young women an important population to research, and the gaps in the theory, literature and programs further indicate the need for investigation.

CHAPTER 3: RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIAL WORK

Social workers in the United States come into contact with people whose lives have been impacted by the expansion of the correctional population, whether they are working directly in the field of corrections or elsewhere (Young & Lomanaco, 2001). Thus, the issue of reentry and reintegration is one that should be very much on the radar screen of the profession. However, Social Work has had a long and difficult relationship with the field of corrections (Fox, 1983). The spectrum of correctional work, from arrest and incarceration through release from prison and community supervision includes coercion, and involuntary clients—situations that have been perceived as antithetical to many social work ethics and the tenet of self-determination. However, many of the programs that seek to assist people coming home from prison exist in the private sector, one step removed from the authoritarian orientation of the state. Thus, Social Work and social workers have an opportunity to have great impact on the field. Social Work has a longstanding commitment to social justice and to assisting under-served and often vilified populations. Young women returning from prison represent a group that embodies many hatreds and stigmas.

HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Social Work as a profession and social workers as professionals have had a strained relationship with criminal justice involved populations, and with law-enforcement institutions. Although there is a long history of social work's connection to early correctional work and reform, particularly in regards to children and youth, there has been a countervailing view that due to the coercive and authoritative nature of correctional work, and the lack of self-determination available to prisoners, probationers and parolees, that social work ethics were incompatible with

this setting (Fox, 1983). Early social workers worked in police precincts until the Great Depression, and have been prominent in work with juvenile delinquency, both in direct service and in policy reform (Roberts & Brownwell, 1999) but the profession shied away from work within correctional and supervisory structures. In 1945, Dr. Kenneth Pray, then the Dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania, challenged the incompatibility, suggesting that professional social workers had the ability and the responsibility to work within correctional settings. This spurred changes in Social Work education, and in a renewed interest in professional presence in correctional settings (Fox, 1983). From the 1950s through the 1970s, many probation and parole officers were trained social workers, and many localities had the MSW as the preferred degree for these positions (Roberts & Brownwell, 1999). However, social workers abandoned most correctional work in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, as the focus in correctional approaches moved from rehabilitation to retribution. Since that time, social work has continued, until recently, to be underrepresented within the workforce of direct practice, policy makers and researchers, in criminal justice both here and abroad (Agllias, 2004). But social workers often work with populations who have been most impacted by the prisonization and mass incarceration (Young & Lorenzo, 2001).

SOCIAL WORK'S CURRENT INVOLVEMENT

Social workers should be at the forefront of seeking solutions to knotty reentry problems, and not shy away from this arena due to unexamined ideas regarding correctional work and populations. Social workers have a unique set of skills, approaches and theories, particularly the person-in-environment framework and strengths perspectives, and the long-standing commitment to social

justice as an underlying principle, that mark a good fit between the profession and correctional and reentry work. In addressing the lack of social work presence in the field, Agllias (2004) states:

There are many unanswered questions about the applicability of social work values and principles to work with women in corrections. There are questions about social work theories with mandated clients and issues about working in coercive environments. If the profession is to play a greater role in corrections in the future, it is imperative that we capture the experience of professionals already active in the field. (p. 339)

The question of the utility and purpose of imprisonment as a response to women's offending is increasingly an articulated theme of recent research (Deschenes, Owen & Crow, 2007.) A system developed to address adult male criminal behavior is, by definition, problematic for most women and differentially so for younger women. As social workers, we seek ways to mitigate the impact of unjust or poor policies while working simultaneously for social change. Social work research can and should work towards identifying and alleviating oppression (Mooradian, 2012; Strier, 2006.) It is important to this author to acknowledge that the inquiry of how young women reenter society from incarceration lives in the shadow of the much larger question of the justness and social utility of incarceration as a response to the illegal activity for which the majority of women are incarcerated. This is a larger policy and social justice question that social work is uniquely positioned to move forward in concert with clients and other advocates.

Social Work education curricula across the country historically have not addressed the specialized needs or skills necessary to work effectively in restrictive authoritarian settings, or with a forensic population (Fox, 1983; Young & Lomanaco, 2001). As the numbers of people whose lives intersect with the criminal justice system continues to rise, more social workers will encounter clients struggling with or facing reentry. Over the last five years, the number of

articles published in social work journals that include or are concerned with criminal justice involved clients has significantly increased, but there remain many gaps in both Social Work education, advocacy and scholarship on this population.

People returning from prison have specific issues related to their incarceration that other clients do not face. It is imperative that workers understand the impact of the loss of liberty, time outside the rhythm of mainstream society and exposure to brutalizing institutions on clients, at the policy, practice and individual level, to ensure that they are providing the best-practices to their clients. If a woman returning from prison is not eligible for financial aid for college, public housing or welfare due to a felony record, workers must have an awareness of the barriers to success that are based in policy, law and practice. Likewise, if a worker is unaware of the stress of incarceration, the ongoing stigma of ex-offender status, the difficulties in transitioning back to the world after a period of absence, and the prevalence of health and mental health disorders in this population (HIV/AIDS, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, substance abuse, histories of sexual and domestic abuse), they will not be able to provide appropriate professional services due to these clients. Familiarity with the issues, problems, challenges and barriers faced by these clients, as well as their strengths and capacities can help social workers to better serve these clients.

Research into the experiences of younger women, predominantly women of color, returning from prison to their communities can help to inform social work practice with this population. As the dialogue regarding reentry and community reintegration has diversified, social workers have begun to engage in more practice and research in this area. Given the values and strengths-

focused work inherent in this profession, it is important that social workers address the areas of discomfort, while working at the forefront of correctional and reentry work.

The 2003 National Association of Social Worker's (NASW) policy statement on Correctional Social Work states:

...Social workers in correctional settings need specialized training, including the ability to communicate with prisoners from other cultures. Finally, social workers should participate in national policy debates, collaborate with other organizations that deal with prisoners, and advocate preventative efforts ... (NASW, 2003)

However, nowhere in the policy statement by NASW does it specifically address reentry, although it recognizes both the rise in female incarceration, and youth adjudicated as adults.

This is an unfortunate oversight, as social workers are most likely to interact with young women in the process of reentry in jobs programs, mental health, health and child welfare systems.

Social workers are well suited to address their needs provided that they are prepared to work with this population. Judgment and fear of people who have been in prison is a contaminant to be faced head on by the profession. Workers must be open to these young women's struggles, be prepared for 'failure' and be able to work effectively with people who may engage in illegal activity without condoning or judging it. One of social work's functions is to act as a broker between clients and systems. Young women returning to their communities may need assistance identifying resources, communicating effectively with their parole officers and meeting the mandates of their parole, finding health care, education, jobs and housing, and in attending to needs of their children if relevant. Working from strengths- and empowerment frameworks familiar to most professional social workers, the profession is ideally placed to assist with the transition back home. Social workers can and should also advocate for a system that is focused on successful rehabilitation and reintegration. The continued absence of social work

practitioners, policy makers, educators and researchers from the Criminal Justice and Reentry fields limits both the profession's growth and the client's chances at encountering thoughtful and informed practice.

CHAPTER 4: CONTEXT

The early 21st Century is a particular moment in the history of imprisonment and reentry. The nation faces the challenge of how to successfully reintegrate the largest group of formerly incarcerated individuals back to often highly stressed communities (Petersilia, 2003; Travis & Petersilia, 2001; Travis, 2005), without compromising public safety, or continuing to incur great social and fiscal deficits. This section traces the origins of US penal and release approaches, particularly as they relate to women and girls. It examines the shift in public thinking about appropriate sanctions and environments for people under the age of 18, and finally, discusses the policy environment into which these young women are released.

WOMEN'S INCARCERATION

The History of Women in Prisons in the US

The first prisons were designed to meet the needs of male prisoners—early designers and theoreticians did not take into account the needs or place of women in a penal institution, even though female prisoners were not uncommon at that time. Freedman (1981) reports that in 1831, approximately one in twelve prisoners were female, with a range of 1:19 to 1:6 in different locales in the US (p.11). In response to pressure from activists and a growing recognition of problems associated with housing male and female prisoners together (e.g. prostitution rings run by male offenders), the first women's prisons in the United States were opened between 1870 and 1901, three of which were in New York State (Freedman, 1981).

Though set in the 18th century, the Scarlet Letter's (Hawthorne, 2000) Hester Prynne's crime and punishment remain emblematic of our current concerns of crime and punishment for women and

the historical trends and arguments about women's crime and criminality continue to be relevant today. Prynne's transgression was of a sexual, personal nature, and punishment extended far into her lifespan. The community's focus on the moral and sexual character of her crime, the complicity and involvement of men in her offending, and the harshness of her punishment all presage criminal justice policies of the late 20th century that have had a particularly devastating impact on women.

By the mid-1800s, there was a growing concern regarding the 'oversupply' of single women in urban areas who would not have males to depend on for support (Brenzel, 1983). The lack of males available for marriage created an economic problem for young women that could be addressed often only through semi-legal or illegal activities. During this period, lewdness, prostitution and petty larceny were the charges under which most women were incarcerated (Belknap, 2001), providing a peephole into the economic circumstances of women, and the obsession with female morality that guided the court's viewpoint towards women (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). These ideas did not go entirely unchallenged--early reformers identified a lack of economic opportunities as the primary reason for women's involvement in crime, and others focused on the sexual exploitation of women by men, and criticized the law-enforcement approach of prosecuting the prostitute while ignoring the 'john'³. While the focus on morality crimes may appear to be archaic and no longer relevant to women and girls' offending, until very recently (1990s) most girls and young women were prosecuted for these same transgressions,

³ Little has changed in this regard. NY State passed Safe Harbor legislation with the intent of recognizing the victim status of youth under the age of 16 arrested for prostitution, but the focus continues to be on law-enforcement rather than victim-services to address this issue.

most often focused on their sexual behavior, or presumed sexual behavior (Belknap, 2001; Chesney-Lind 1997 & 1995; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992 & 1998; Freedman, 1981; Gelsthorpe, 1989; Matthews, 1999) crimes for which men rarely, if ever, are prosecuted. Girls are still more likely than boys to be confined for status offenses⁴ such as running away, or incorrigibility (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004).

While these early reformers, generally women, presented a sociological and systems analysis for the causes of female criminality, nearly 100 years passed before these arguments of differential pathways and the needs of women in the system were given credence by policy makers and scholars, or much *attention* was paid to women in prison at all. The intervening years brought theories of criminality of women that were individualistic and biologically-based, where any theories existed at all (Belknap, 2001, Chesney-Lind, 1995). The needs of women and girls in the criminal and juvenile justice systems resurfaced in the 1970s with the birth of feminist criminology, which gave legitimacy to these concerns in the academy and the workplace, and has since become a major focus of scholarship, programming and policy.

The Increase of Female Incarceration & Reentry

The rise of young women's incarceration and reentry exists within a series of policy decisions that have had disproportionate impacts on women, particularly women of color. The confluences

⁴ Status offenses are offenses that would not be criminal if an adult committed them—running away, breaking curfew, truancy, etc. Status offenses have been at the center of analysis around gender and the juvenile justice system as girls have historically been more adversely affected by prosecution of these offenses than boys have.

of the domestic war on drugs and a shift in the balance of power from judicial to prosecutorial power created ‘perfect storm’ conditions for increased female incarceration. Over the last 30 years, women have had significantly higher rates of growth in incarceration than men, (Belknap, 2001; Chesney-Lind, 2002; Harrison & Karberg, 2004; Owen, 1998; Tonry & Petersilia, 1999). with African-American girls representing the fastest-growing population in juvenile justice facilities (*Prevention and Parity*, 1996). In June 1998, the number of women prisoners held in the US was greater than the whole prison populations of France, Germany and England combined (Tonry & Petersilia, 1998, p. 10). In 1980, there were 12,331 women in prison, and by 2008 there were 115,779 an increase of 838%--a pattern that belies the simultaneous reduction in crime rates. As the rates of incarceration have increased for women, so have the rates of those who come home. From 1977 to 1988, the number of women releasees of all ages exploded from under 9,000 in 1977 to nearly 60,000--an increase of 85% over 20 years, with the significant climb beginning in the mid-1980s (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004). Unless there is a change in policing and sentencing practices in the United States, we can expect the numbers of women who have to navigate the road home to continue to climb.

A number of scholars have identified the war on drugs and the sentencing changes it motivated as the reason for the explosion in the numbers of women in prison (Belknap, 2001; *Caught in the Net*, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 2002; Owen, 1998; Watterson, 1996). To curb the impact of the crack and handgun epidemic⁵ in urban America, politicians and law enforcement clamored to increase

⁵ I refer to the proliferation of cheap, readily available guns that occurred in the 1980s and 90s as an ‘epidemic’ to highlight the adverse health and welfare effects of this phenomenon. While there have always been guns in urban areas, the availability of guns increased dramatically in this

law and order on the street and remake sentencing policies (Tonry, 1999). In a foreshadowing of federal legislative responses to the increasing drug problems, NY State instituted the Rockefeller Drug laws in 1973. These laws imposed harsh mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes, including possession of relatively small amounts of particular substances. Like many other states, the NY laws had disparate sentencing for crack (used and sold predominantly within minority communities) and cocaine (more widely used by white people), with crack possession and sales carrying much stiffer sentences. The retooling of the sentencing laws created a series of problems, particularly for women. Although the public face of the drug war was inevitably a man, the war on drugs became inadvertently what some identify as a war on women (*Caught in the Net*, 2004) with an especially negative impact on African American women. From 1986-1991, “the number of black women incarcerated in state prison for a drug offense rose by 828 percent” (Mauer, 1999) an astonishing rise in just five years. It is unknown if women’s actual substance use and sales rose by the same 828 percent, or whether these figures reflect shifts in policies and application of the law. Often, women’s involvement with drug sales and trafficking are directly linked to a relationship with a man with much deeper involvement (*Caught in the Net*, 2004). It is important to note however, that while drug arrests offer significant explanation for the rise in adult female incarceration, it may not explain younger women, who tend to have more violent offenses (i.e. assault) than their adult counterparts (Harms, 2002).

HISTORY OF GIRLS AND DELINQUENCY

Prior to the creation of a separate justice system for youth, young women and girls endured

period with serious and persistent deleterious effects on health, social structures and policies.

similar treatment to their adult counterparts. Young women and girls were incarcerated in mixed-gender, multi-aged facilities until the mid 1800s, with the advent of the child savers movement (Platt, 1969). Prior to this movement, there was little codification or organized legal responses to youth deemed to be in need of protection, or from whom society might need to be protected. For example, dependent and delinquent youth were placed indiscriminately with adults in prison, as there were no special placements that addressed the needs of young people. The child savers' focus was not solely in relation to criminal law per se, but “in the normative behavior of youth—their recreation, leisure, education, outlook on life, attitudes to authority, family relationships and personal morality” (Platt, 1969, p. 99). In the early U.S. system, young women received differential treatment from boys in sentencing, with over 60% committed to institutions (Platt, 1969, pp. 140-141) in 1900, whereas significantly fewer boys received residential commitment as a means toward reformation. Girls were removed to training schools and reformatories throughout the country, often thousands of miles away from home, with little or no ability to refute the charges or the disposition of cases.

Definitions of Female Delinquency

Historically, girls labeled as delinquent have had different behaviors that bring them into contact with the system than boys. Traditionally, girls are more likely to have been involved in petty crimes such as shoplifting, illegal sexual behavior (e.g. prostitution), or status offenses such as running away, truancy, or sexual behavior deemed by an adult to be dangerous or immoral (e.g. promiscuity, partnering with older men) (Acoca, 1999; *Justice by Gender* 2001; Chesney-Lind 1995; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992, 1998; Miller et al., 1995; *Prevention and Parity*, 1996; Vedder & Somerville, 1975). Status offenses rely entirely on the legal status of the offender—

behaviors that would not be illegal if the person is considered a legal adult. Delinquency that includes status offenses is defined broadly and rooted in community norms of socially acceptable behavior, rather than more strict penal code (Vedder & Sommerville, 1975). This flexible and indeterminate definition creates areas for adult authorities to subjectively determine whether a behavior is dangerous to society or the individual.

The first delinquency law passed in 1899 in Illinois demonstrates the broadness of the concept:

any male or female who while under the age of 18 years, violates any law of this State; or is incorrigible, or knowingly associates with thieves, vicious or immoral persons; or without just cause and without the consent... absents itself from its home or place of abode, or is growing up in idleness or crime; or knowingly frequents a house of ill repute; or knowingly frequents any saloon or dram shop where intoxicating liquors are sold; or patronizes or visits any public pool room or bucket shop;...or habitually wanders about the streets in the nighttime without being on any lawful business or lawful occupation; or enters any car or engine without lawful authority; or uses vile, obscene, vulgar or indecent language in any public place or about any school house; or is guilty of indecent or lascivious conduct. (Vedder & Somerville, 1975, p. 20).

Incorrigibility is by definition a subjective experience of another person's behavior, and is so vague as to be almost meaningless. This term allows parents and authorities to utilize the juvenile justice system to discipline their children, and parents have been more likely to utilize the juvenile justice system for controlling girls than for boys under this rubric (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998). Based on societal regulations of women's roles, a girl who is *perceived* to be too sexually active, too masculine, too violent or beyond control of a parent can be considered delinquent (Chesney-Lind, 1997). It has been widely documented that girls continue to have a much higher arrest and detention rate for status offenses than do boys (*Justice by Gender*, 2001; Acoca, 1999; Chesney-Lind, 1995, 1997; Chesney-Lind & Shelden 1992, 1998; Miller et al., 1995; Platt, 1969; *Prevention and Parity*, 1996). This trend has continued throughout the history

of juvenile delinquency, although girls have been increasingly adjudicated for person and violent offenses (Acoca, 1999; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998, *Justice by Gender*, 2001, Scahill, 2000). Young women cannot be incarcerated in adult prisons for status offenses, but early involvement in the juvenile justice system is a predictor for later involvement in the adult system (Greenfield & Snell, 1999).

YOUTH AS ADULTS

Although the family court was established to draw a bright line for society between adult crime and youthful delinquency in the late 1890s, shifting attitudes towards youth crime less than 100 years later has blurred that line. In the 1970's New York State enacted the first laws to allow for the waiver of youth who would normally be tried in the juvenile courts to be tried as adults (Barrett, 2007). The crack epidemic in the 1980s created a fear of youth superpredators and media-driven concerns that youth violence was going to spiral out of control. All predictions at the time were that youth violence was going to continue to grow (Levitt & Dubner, 2005), predictions that turned out to be wrong, but not before a flurry of legislation was adopted to 'get tough' on youth crime.

In order to address the perceived menace young offenders represented, many states followed New York's suit and enacted statutes that allowed youth previously adjudicated in the family court to be waived to adult courts through a variety of means. Some states utilized statutory waivers (in New York State, any youth age 16 and over is tried in adult court); others utilize judicial waiver through a court hearing, discretionary waivers by prosecutors, or waiver by offense category (i.e. a ten year-old with a murder charge is tried in adult court). Over 80% of

states created mechanisms to move the jurisdiction of crimes from juvenile to adult courts (Glick & Sturgeon, 1998).

Without a nationally consistent definition of 'juvenile' or 'adult' in the United States as it relates to criminal justice proceedings, each state is able to address the issue differently. Since the 1980s, 23 states increased the number of juveniles held as adults. For example before the 1970s, only 8 states had automatic transfer laws. By 2000, 38 states had enacted these, significantly contributing to the rise in youth tried and held as adults (Griffin, Addie, Adams & Firestone, 2011.) From 1985-1996, 26 states held people under the age of 18 in adult facilities, and only half of those states had separate facilities for youth within those adult institutions. While many states already had limited ability to prosecute and detain youth in the adult criminal justice system, new laws opened the gates for an increase in the number of youth detained or incarcerated in adult settings by 74% between 1985 and 1992 (Glick & Sturgeon, 1998). This represents the largest number of youth to be held in adult facilities since the founding of the family court system. In 1999, youth under the age of 18 represented two percent of all new commitments to adult state prisons. Of these, 96% were males, primarily black. The four percent of females under the age of 18 committed to state prisons were charged primarily with robbery, assault, murder, burglary and drug offenses (Sickmund, 2004, p. 20) offenses which, with the exception of murder, may be just as easily handled by the juvenile courts.

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) research, over 200,000 cases for youth under the age of 18 were tried in the adult criminal court in 1996 due solely to age criteria in statutes (OJJDP, 2001). The number of youth tried as adults and

incarcerated in adult facilities reached a peak in 1994, and has been slowly declining. However, while youth crime has continued to drop significantly since 2000, the rate of incarceration for youth and young adults has not declined at the same rate (Sickmund, 2010). The 2004 census of juvenile offenders in custody indicates that placement rates were at the time, the highest they had been since 1991 (Sickmund, 2004; Snyder, 2004). Like their adult counterparts, youth in the criminal and juvenile system, both males and females, are predominantly from lower socio-economic backgrounds, with a significant overrepresentation of Black and Latino/a youth (Devine, Coolbaugh & Jenkins, 1998; Gaarder & Belknap, 2002; Sickmund, 2004, Sullivan, 2004).

While the majority of youth tried as adults are males, females can and are prosecuted in the adult system (Adams & Addie, 2009; Poe-Yamagata & Butts, 1996). While still relatively underrepresented, girls reflected 9% of waived cases in 2005, up from 5% in the peak year of 1994. Arrest rates and placement of juvenile girls increased dramatically from 1989-1998, at higher rates than boys, primarily due to person offenses⁶ (Harms, 2002).

Developmental Implications

The redefinition of youth as ‘adults’ within the justice system is a shift in thinking that has significantly undermined traditional juvenile justice approaches that take development and family context into account. Justice settings for children and youth are more likely to address and recognize the role of family systems, while adult settings are more likely to address individuals

⁶ ‘Person Offenses’ are crimes where a person is the direct victim of the activity (assault, robbery, rape, murder) versus non-person offenses (burglary, drug, possession of weapons, etc).

without these contexts. Youth in adult settings often face limited structural opportunities to continue family relationships on the inside than their peers in the juvenile system, leaving them more isolated and disconnected when they return home. Glick and Sturgeon (1998) report that fifteen states had no special programs for juveniles in adult settings, only fifteen had educational services, ten offered job training and only four offer pre-release programs for juveniles in their custody. They note that, “it is becoming increasingly more difficult to distinguish the adult from the juvenile” (p. 20) in practice and policy of the criminal justice system, both in approaches to adjudication and confinement of youth. While the plight of youth between the ages of 18-25 is not exactly analogous to youth under the age of 18 in the adult system, it is similar. Many of those returning home from prison at age 18 or 19 will have spent some portion of their ‘juvenile’ lives in adult settings.

The blurring of the line between youth and adulthood in the criminal justice system fails to recognize fundamental human developmental stages, and gives society permission to stop thinking of younger offenders as youth. This creates a convenient ‘out’ for adults who would otherwise need to examine the social conditions that contribute towards an increasing number of young people being arrested and incarcerated, particularly poor and minority youth. The developmental capacity of youth to understand their actions, be held accountable, and the means to reform must address their biopsychosocial stage and capacities. Important new research indicates that brain development continues through the early 20s, and does not end in earlier childhood as previously thought; specifically “the ‘executive functions’ of the brain—planning, impulse control and reasoning” (National Institute of Mental Health, 2001) continue to develop, indicating a biological difference between adolescents and adults.

This research and recent increasing interest in the implications of development on criminal justice outcomes are beginning to impact both policy and practice. In the last ten years the US Supreme Court has ruled that young people must be considered separately from adults. The first, *Roper v. Simmons* (2004), determined that the death penalty is unconstitutional for youth who committed their crime prior to the age of 18 (scientists and legal theorists submitted an amicus brief arguing that youth cannot be held legally to the same standards as adults if their brains are not developed fully (Bower, 2004), an argument that has gained significant traction within the public arena. *Graham v. Florida* (2010) ruled that juvenile offenders could not receive life sentences without parole for non-homicide crimes. These two cases indicate that norms may be shifting back to differentiating adolescents from adults as it relates to punishment, but these arguments have not extended out to those who achieve the age of majority and are unlikely to.

CHAPTER 5: THEORY

One of the drivers of this research was to give voice and light to a group of young women, who by virtue of their age, gender, socio-economic class, race/ethnicity and incarceration experiences, are virtually invisible (Braithwaite, et al., 2005). While it is an academic endeavor, the pursuit of knowledge is not simply an exercise in uncovering, but an engagement with women in difficult situations, and one that should, as a social worker, be pointed towards moving practical research and interventions forward. The inquiry is guided by several intersecting and re-enforcing theoretical models, which will be discussed below. The research is grounded in several complimentary theories, all of which worked together to inform and shape the inquiry.

FEMINIST CRIMINOLOGY AND INTERSECTIONALISM

Feminist Criminology

Feminist approaches to women's crime and reentry have helped to shape more comprehensive and targeted programs for women. The last 25 years has ushered in a wealth of research and policy literature focused on the specific needs of women and girls that does not rest on the assumption that women are the same as men, or that their differences are mainly biological. Theories about women's delinquency and criminality are important to reentry discussions as they help to shape understanding of and responses to reintegration. Gender responsive services are "those designed to meet the unique needs of female offenders, that value the female perspective, that celebrate and honor the female experience, that respect and take into account female development and that empower young women to reach their full potential." (*Prevention and Parity*, 1996, p.24).

There is now a rich body of literature that critiques the application to female offending of androcentric theories of crime and delinquency (Belknap, 2012, 2001; Bloom, Owen, & Deschenes, 2003a; Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2003b; Chesney-Lind, 1995, 1997 & 2002; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1992 & 1998; Covington, 2001; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Gaarder & Belknap, 2004; Gelsthorpe, 1989; Gilfus, 2002; Holsinger, 2000; Owen, 1998; Richie, 1998; Schaffner, 1999; Seydlitz, 1993; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996; Widom, 1999) and promotes a female-centric approach to questions of crime, delinquency, desistance and reentry. This theoretical stance, which values women, recognizes the impact of patriarchy and sexism on the lives of women, particularly in male-defined institutions, and recognizes the role of the researcher in relation to the research conducted, is an intrinsic part of this inquiry. It obviates the argument that women should be studied in comparison to men, and re-centers the narrative to value women's experiences in and of themselves so that their narrative and experiences drive the inquiry.

Historically, theories on criminality, etiology, punishment, confinement and desistance were based on responses to male criminality and behavior (Chesney-Lind, 1997). Until the emergence of feminist scholars, theories about female crime and delinquency and attention to female needs were either biologically based or were non-existent (Belknap, 2001; Holsinger, 2000). The earliest theories about female offending were positivistic and biological in nature. Heimer (1996) states "female delinquency often is viewed as gender-inappropriate behavior and thus as more problematic and deviant than similar behavior by males. Female delinquency, in a sense, is regarded as doubly deviant" (p. 42).

These beliefs have their roots in traditional, conservative attitudes toward women, who are viewed to be more passive, weaker, subject to greater social control, and less inherently deviant than men. These driving ideologies have had significantly negative impacts on the capacity of criminal justice to respond positively to women and girls. Until the 1990s, most theories of delinquency either subsumed girls or ignored them, creating de-gendered (male) theories that were then applied to girls (Belknap, 2001). Some theories of female rehabilitation subscribe to what Latessa, Cullen & Gendreau (2003) call the “offenders need to learn how to put on makeup and dress better theory” (p. 46) with unsurprisingly poor outcomes. Much of the literature that has examined gender as a correlate to delinquency and crime has focused on the fact that being female predicts a lesser involvement in delinquent behavior (Heimer, 1996). While the concept of femaleness as protective factor *against* delinquency is important, it leads to a blank wall when thinking about those women for whom gender was not enough to keep them from prison. Women-centered research on pathways *out* of prison has been slower than the proliferation of literature on pathways into prison.

Females are marginalized in a patriarchal and sexist society. Feminist criminological theory recognizes the importance of taking into account women’s gender and experience as women in an overwhelmingly male system when conducting research. This theory will be utilized to shape both the interview process and in data analysis and synthesis.

Resistance

Female crime can be viewed through a lens of resistance and survival (Chesney-Lind, 1995; Gilfus, 1993) Feminist critiques of psychology and social science have long argued that

psychologists have taken as their base norm male experience and behavior, and, when female behavior is not sufficiently explicable by theories based on men, female behavior is viewed as deviant (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976; Collins, 1986). Similarly, theories of delinquency based on un-examined and sexist assumptions can, and have been wielded against young women. An ideology informed by sexism makes assumptions about what constitutes appropriate 'girl- or woman-behavior' and what does not. These assumptions may then not be able to explain or make room for girls' acts of resistance, or survival, and may instead label them as problematic or pathological (Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1995; Fordham, 1993). The theme of interpreting acts of resistance as anti-social, defined in great part by rigid gender-roles, continues to be a major area of critique by feminist theorists and scholars who examine women's lives and the criminal justice system (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998).

Like any group of oppressed people, young women do not remain entirely acquiescent to the demands of the system. Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan (1995) speak about the acts of resistance that girls embody, such as remaining independent. Fordham (1993) frames the particularly difficult paradox in which self-assertive Black girls find themselves—those who resist shedding their identities as strong, loud Black women and do not become silent and 'nice' are perceived to be a problem. 'Loud girls' tend to be the ones who get in trouble at school, and thus, girls who resist can end up with educational problems, often a harbinger of 'delinquency.' Girls who maintain a cultural alignment to their concept of womanhood may be perceived as and responded to by systems as deviant. Means of resistance have been conceptualized as 'survival' or 'liberation' behaviors. Abrams (2002) states "(r)esistance for survival creates barriers to healthy youth development, whereas resistance for liberation promotes the cultivation of a critical

consciousness and pride in one's self and heritage" (p. 56). It is important to ask young women not only what has allowed them to survive as young women of color who have been incarcerated and are in process of reentry, but where they have found areas of liberation, if at all.

As a social worker interested also in understanding how individuals succeed or stumble in the face of macro-structures, it is important to look at the individual circumstances and life choices of each young woman who is coming home. While it is important to look for structural barriers and facilitators, we must be able to address the immediate needs of young women in the absence of large-scale change. The young women themselves must have a sense of agency and capacity to change, to "do" themselves differently if they are going to succeed. It does not serve these young women to speak only of macro-level changes, if we cannot offer real-time solutions, support and assistance. Therefore, theories that take the whole person, their environment, and the superstructures into account enriches both the analysis and the practicality of findings.

Intersectionalism

Incarceration and reentry in the United States necessitates a conversation about race (Belknap, 2001; Mauer, 1999; Owen, 1998; Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005; Watterson, 1996). The overrepresentation of ethnic and racial minorities in the system is widely acknowledged by the US Government's own data and program sources (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention) as well as in the academy and the community.

Intersectionality examines the intersection of oppression and privilege vectors in an individual's life, and the ability to wield power over others (Ritzer, 2000). The ideological underpinnings of intersectionality rest in beliefs in the right of individuals to equality, the recognition of

institutional structures set up by the powerful to retain their privileges through oppression of others, and that these institutions have differential effects on groups, depending upon their relative oppression or privilege. Unfortunately, few analyses include the impact of race, class and gender *together*, not simply as variables to be looked at, but as important theoretical constructs and actors in the lives of formerly incarcerated people. Fewer incorporate age and sexual orientation. Although acknowledged as a gap in theory and application, there continues to be little scholarship focusing on the intersection of oppressions on the experiences and policies faced by poor young women of color in the criminal justice system. Intersectionalist approaches are fairly new, and feminist criminologists are working to incorporate this standpoint into research and analysis. Belknap (2001) identifies this approach as necessary to our understanding of how to best understand and address the problems faced by women of color caught in the system.

The Intersectionalist approach demands that we look beyond individual causation, and seek structural and institutional factors for social problems. The search for larger-scale factors allows us to look at the young woman in her environment, and to see the effects of institutional barriers and facilitators working on individuals. Intersectionalism does not specifically identify age as a vector of oppression, but societal assumptions regarding a younger person's abilities and rights and the relative powerlessness of younger people make the use of this theoretical approach important in this project.

Gender alone is not a sufficient vector by which one can examine the experiences of young women returning from prison. Fordham (1993) urges us to be aware that "in a socially,

culturally and racially stratified society like the United States, cultural-specific routes to womanhood are inevitable” (p.8). Race and class exert enormous influences on notions of gender, and the experience of patriarchy. In the early days of criminal justice theory, standards of acceptable woman/girlhood were based in Victorian ideals, which reflected middle-class white women whose worth rested primarily in her capacity to be an object of beauty. These standards were never applied to women of color. Historically, Black women, and thus Black womanhood, have either been negated, or viewed as the opposite of white womanhood. Angela Davis (1981, p.6) wrote “when it was profitable to exploit them as if they (Black women) were men, they were regarded, in effect as genderless.” Black women in the United States have always been workers, yet as women were expected to remain subservient (Davis, 1981). This strain of multiple roles created the ethos of strong, dominant, stoic woman in opposition to the more passive traditional white definitions of womanhood (Fordham, 1993; Hill-Collins, 1986; Scott, 1982). Retention of historical African-American women’s ‘matriarchal’ role creates a potential gender strain in the eyes of greater society, and, as deviations from white norms, may make Black young women greater targets for delinquency. These different routes to womanhood create understandings of experience, and relationships to larger structures that are important to attend to. The experience of a white woman returning home from prison, and the impact her identity may have on her reentry process is likely to look quite different than the experience of a young Black woman returning to her community, as well as the community’s response to her return.

Using intersectionalism, the interplay of race, gender, age, class and sexual orientation of participants informs the methodology and analysis of the research. This inquiry does not focus primarily on the intersecting nature of multiple non-dominant identities on young women’s

reentry. The author does, however, acknowledge that the sum total as well as the individual identities that create unique and specific experiences and meanings of incarceration, reentry and reintegration. Intersectionalism is a developing theory, and is currently more of a standpoint, or lens through which work is approached and examined. It is included to acknowledge the complexity of identities and pulls, both internal and external that may impact on young women's reentry and reintegration, and it illustrates why it is important to look at multiple aspects of these young women's lives simultaneously.

These theories together—Feminist, Resistance and Intersectionalism—help to keep the researcher aware of the larger societal context within which these young women are living. Societal strains take real tolls on individuals, particularly those whose lives are circumscribed and partially controlled by systems and governmental agencies. Women's lives are shaped in response and in relation to society and also in relation to other individuals. The following theory focuses on the impact of individual relationships on women.

RELATIONAL THEORY

Of particular interest in looking at young women's ability to reintegrate is the role of relationships with peers, partners and family. Relational theory posits that women develop as humans within a relational context that is significantly different from men's development (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1991). This offers a framework to understand young women's experiences in and out of prison more fully. Essentially, the job of returning home is one of building or re-building relationships with one's self, family, community and society. Therefore, it is important to have an understanding of relationality and the centrality of relationships to

women's well-being and capacities for growth.

Relational theory stems from Jean Baker Miller's work in the mid-1970s (1976) and the subsequent creation of the Stone Center at Wellesley College. Carol Gilligan, also a pioneer in feminist theories of female development, re-examined the psychological developmental trajectory assumed for men as it was applied to women. Miller identified that, in contrast to the male-centered theory of maturity equaling a drive towards independence and autonomy, female maturity comes through connection to others. Girls and women need relationships, not as a pathological sign of immaturity, but as a separate, normative part of development. Gilligan (1982) takes on the wholesale application of the theories of Freud, Erickson and Kohlberg to women's psychological and moral development. She reiterates Nancy Chodorow's work which examined Freud's own acknowledged difficulties with the problems of applying his theories to women. Chodorow starts with the assumption that gender identity is at the core of identity formation. Since most early caregivers are female, she posits that there is a fusing of attachment and identity formation which does not occur with boys when the caregiver is female. From this theory, Gilligan states:

...relationships, and particularly issues of dependency, are experienced differently by women and men...Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation...(this) becomes not only a descriptive difference but also a developmental liability when the milestones of ... (pp. 8-9).

Gilligan goes on to establish further the concept that girls and women develop in relation to, rather than in separation from, others. Relational theory identifies relationships and connection as central to women's growth, creativity, and well-being (Miller, 1981). Covington (2001) states that for women in the criminal justice system, there are recurrent themes of relationship and

family, and that “Disconnection and violation, rather than growth-fostering relationships, characterize the childhood experiences of most women in the correctional system.” (p. 129).

Much of the recent literature on women in prison and in reentry identifies relational theory as a primary organizing theory (Covington, 2002; Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2003; Jacobs, 2004) and as a basis for program development. In recognizing the primacy of relationships to women’s lives, interventions can be built that focus on healing, creating healthier relationships, and connection to positive people and structures. Women in the criminal justice system often have early life histories marked by “disconnection and violation, rather than growth-fostering relationships” (Covington, 2001) making relationships both critical to healing, but often difficult for young women reentering society to navigate or sustain.

Relational theory was created by and based on white, middle-class, heterosexual women. Like theories based on males then applied to females, it is important to be cautious of assuming that relationality and relationships have the same meaning for poorer, racial and ethnic minority women who come from more fractured communities, or for lesbian or bisexual women. Gender-specific and culturally syntonetic interventions and programs are becoming more normative in criminal justice and community-based settings, particularly in substance abuse treatment. Tremendous work is still required to build solid theory that takes the whole woman’s experience into account and that will produce consistent, replicable results. Relationality provides a framework of person in relation to others, and a means to examine how these relationships impact on a young woman’s ability to reenter and reintegrate, what role they play, and how young women themselves understand the role of relationships in their struggle to stay free.

If theories were simply used for academic purposes, the impact on policy and practice might not be as concerning. However, interventions are created to respond to what are thought to be criminogenic factors. Programmatic and policy responses to female delinquency and crime need to be based on theories that apply to the reality of girls and women's lives, particularly the experiences of poor and minority women. Treatment programs that focus on 'tearing down' the participant (i.e. boot camps, shock treatment) may be effective in addressing male crime, but for many women, the aggressive nature of these programs can be re-traumatizing (Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2003; Covington, 2001). Effective programming for women needs to be gender-responsive and culturally relevant. Rules for parole that don't allow women to maintain relationships formed while on the inside of prison may work against women's need for relationships for growth. Staff who find women and girls too difficult, manipulative or too 'dramatic' can have a negative impact on inmates and program participants (Gaarder, Rodriguez & Zatz, 2004). In the past few years, much has been written that identifies program approaches that are gender responsive, but little has focused specifically on the process of reentry, with some notable exceptions (Covington, 2001; Michalsen, 2007; O'Brien, 2001a, 2001b; Women's Prison Association, 2004). The core principles of this approach—recognizing the centrality of relationships to women, understanding the reasons and appropriate interventions for female substance abuse, addressing trauma, and avoiding re-traumatization in programs—are all important when considering what facilitates a young woman's successful return to society.

PATHWAYS THEORY

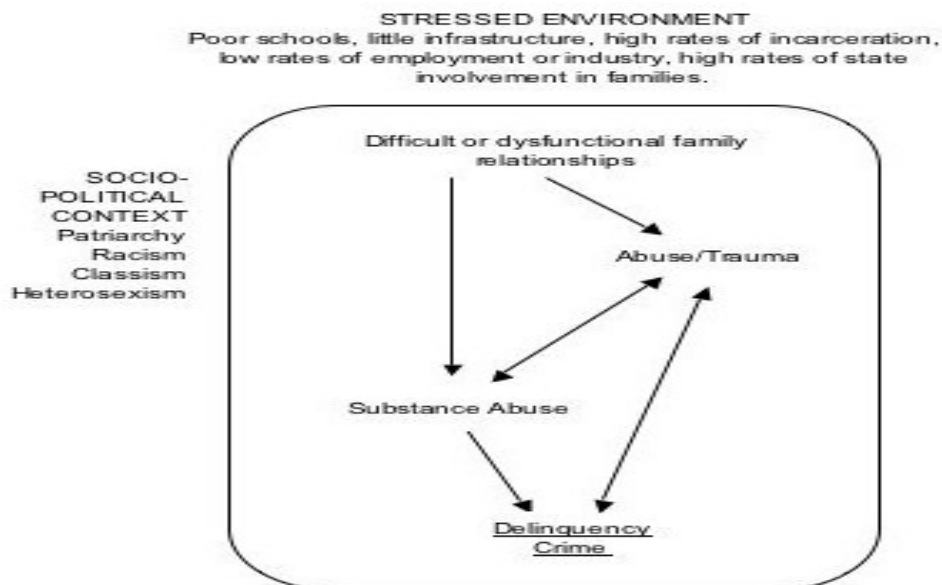
In recent years, scholars have crafted a theory of 'pathways' into arrest, conviction and

incarceration, as the roads that lead to those critical events often begin earlier in life than the age of first arrest. Grounded in feminist theory, abuse/trauma have been identified as a primary catalyst for women and girls' offending (Belknap, 2001; Bloom, et al., 2003; Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2003; Chesney-Lind, 1995, 1997; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004;; Widom, 1995, 1999). The experience of victimization and on-going vulnerability to sexual abuse in particular is posited to lead women into criminal and delinquent behaviors including prostitution/survival sex, substance use, petty larceny and other survival mechanisms (Gilfus, 1993, 2002; Widom 1995, 1999). Stress and trauma in childhood create biological and developmental changes in brain development that can be persistent and entrenched (Giedd, 2003). Research in the field of brain development and trauma indicates that permanent and significant changes in brain functioning and development are related directly to sexual, physical and emotional abuse in childhood, and that socially mal-adaptive behavior is a normative response to the stress the child encountered (Giedd, 2003). "Stress sculpts the brain to exhibit various antisocial, though adaptive, behaviors. Whether it comes in the form of physical, emotional or sexual trauma... it sets off a ripple of hormonal changes that permanently wire a child's brain to cope with a malevolent world." (Teicher, 2002, p.7). Given what is known regarding the prevalence of trauma histories for women in the criminal justice system, it is important to recognize that anti-social behavior may be an adaptive response to early abuse, and to seek means to mitigate or work with the adaptations that no longer serve to protect the young women, but in fact place them in the path of further harm and trauma.

Substance abuse is a related, yet distinct other pathway in. Pathways models allow us to look at individual female's experiences within a societal context of patriarchy and racism. It more

closely reflects the experiences of young women. It also reminds us that the juvenile and criminal justice systems themselves can replicate trauma and victimization of women in custody (Owen, 1998; Harm & Phillips, 2001). Figure A, developed by the author, provides a visual representation of the pathways into delinquency, taking into account the sometimes mediating influence of substance abuse, and the potentially reciprocal and reflexive relationship among substance abuse, abuse and trauma, and delinquency.

Figure A. Pathways to Delinquency



The box represents the individual young woman, and illustrates that substance abuse and trauma can both be intervening variables that lead to delinquency and crime. Trauma can lead to substance abuse, and substance abuse can lead the young woman into traumatic situations. The complexity of the girls' individual lives combined with increasing pressures from socioeconomic conditions create a web of possible explanations and causes.

Some research indicates severe family dysfunction as more prevalent in delinquent girls than their non-delinquent peers, or male offenders. These theories identify poor mother/daughter relationships, lack of caring and nurturing relationship, or an overly strict and controlling environment as a precursor to delinquency (*Justice By Gender*, 2001; Seydlitz, 1993) although there is some contradictory evidence that indicates that family disruption has a greater impact on male delinquency than on female (Steinberg, 1987).

This theory is supportive of a strengths-perspective, which is a critical approach for social work research, particularly with highly vulnerable populations. When investigating the experiences of young women returning home, it is important to seek to identify the internal and external assets and supports available. A strengths perspective is generally thought of as a practice orientation, however, it offers an excellent framework for social work research. While research is not an intervention, it can have a therapeutic effect on participants (Parsons-Robbins, 2002) or it can be a damaging experience. A strengths perspective fundamentally recognizes that all people have strengths and promise, and works from that place to reach for and shore up inherent assets. It shifts the focus away from pathology. Weick, Rapp, Sullivan & Kisthardt (1989) remind us that the profession of social work is “dedicated to the development of people’s strengths” (p. 352).

Embedded in this perspective are concepts of empowerment, healing and wholeness, and resilience (Saleebey, 2002). All of these concepts are closely linked with feminist criminology, Black Feminist thought, intersectionalism, and relational theories, and presents a natural fit that can amplify each other.

By reaching to understand the assets these young women already have, and what they identify as needed supports, this perspective allows for a richer understanding of both the individual and the environmental factors the young women encounter. Saleebey (2002) reminds us that although an approach rooted in respect for other people's humanity and autonomy makes sense, it is difficult to practice this. Individuals who live within multiply oppressed groups are less likely to have encountered researchers and practitioners who really have understood and utilized the tenets of empowerment and strength (Bryson, Lawrence-Webb, 2000). Given that the investigator is white, middle-class, well-educated, significantly older, and has not been incarcerated, it is imperative to approach the inquiry and thus the participants, from a clear place of valuing their experiences, and recognizing each young woman's strengths. Saleebey (2002) also admonishes us to "take individual, group and community aspirations seriously" (p. 15). It is critical to ethical and relevant research to take these young women seriously, viewing the research process as a collaborative experience in which the researcher is open and transparent with the participant, and accepts direction from them about what is important and salient to their reentry process.

Pathways theory offers a person-in-environment model for understanding how young women come to be incarcerated, and some of the personal, familial and environmental influences in play in reentry and reintegration. This theory is helpful in thinking about interventions to address

criminological behaviors for this population. As the women who are the focus of this inquiry are still quite young, it may be possible to re-route those paths and to mitigate the influence of trauma.

The age of the young women fundamentally drives this inquiry. Younger reentering offenders are theoretically in the end stage of final identity formation, and their developmental stage frames much of this projects hypotheses and questions. Newer theories on development offer theoretical vantage points from which to view the process of reentry, and to understand how their age and developmental stage may significantly contribute to and define their reentry experiences and struggles.

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

One of the weaknesses of the literature on young people and desistance from crime is the lack of grounding in developmental theory, and the relationship of those theories to the developmental trajectories and de-railing that incarceration has on a young adult's ability to achieve expected developmental milestones of their chronological age. Adolescence and early adulthood is often discussed in relation to identity formation, separation and individuation *by choice*, testing authority, levels of risk taking, and sexual development and exploration. Developmental theory indicates these tasks are necessary for full adult development, or for what Erikson (1963) identified as 'identity achievement' and capacity for intimacy and work. As adolescent theories have developed, ideas of affiliation and achievement were included as important tasks for this phase (Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002). Identity encompasses sexual, philosophical and religious

value systems and beliefs. Affiliation includes relationships with parents and guardians, siblings, sexual/romantic partners. Achievement relates to educational/ and vocational arenas. All three of these arenas are impacted significantly by context—what influences, social norms and opportunities a young person has surrounding them during this transitional time.

Recently, developmental theorists have posited a new and distinct developmental phase for young people ages 18-25 in first world nations, identified as “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 1998) —Emerging adulthood is distinguished as a discrete, albeit liminal phase of development between adolescence and adulthood. Arnett (1998) argues that young people ages 18-25 face a distinct set of tasks, markers and characteristics that differ from the earlier stage of adolescence, and are equally different from those tasks of ‘young adults.’ He argues that in first-world economies, full attainment of the adult identity, with the attendant responsibilities and orientation to the self and the world, is happening at a later age, and that the idea of an ‘extended adolescence’ does not provide an accurate description of the unique experiences of this age group. Emerging adulthood he proposes, provides a wide range of opportunities for young people, and that “the scope of independent exploration of life’s possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period in the life course” (Arnett, 2000, p.469).

Emerging adulthood includes what Arnett (1998) conceptualized as ‘consideration of others’, or the ability to take into account others in decision-making and actions. This concept dovetails with the themes of reentry and reintegration, as it is an integral part of rehabilitation. For those whose offenses directly impact other people’s lives (violence, robbery, vandalism), taking responsibility for harm to others and society, and having empathy are necessary for desistance

from criminal behavior, if the criminal behavior is rooted in anti-social attitudes and beliefs.

Emerging adulthood has some significant limitations. The skills are less clearly defined than in earlier stages of development (i.e. learning how to walk); it appears to exist only in cultures where there is an extended time period between the end of adolescence and the beginning of real adult responsibility, making it highly culture-bound and defined. Most literature on transition to emerging adulthood focuses on what Cohen, Kasen, Chen et al. (2003) refer to as “developmental ‘markers’” (p.657) such as moving out of the home, attaining full-time work, marriage/ partnership and parenting. Arnett acknowledges that his work is limited by a focus on the norms and views of the American middle-class white dominant culture. This framework needs to be applied with caution to youth who are part of non-dominant cultures, have had other experiences navigating racial and ethnic identities, are new Americans, or who grow up with different socioeconomic expectations and experiences. For youth whose developmental paths may have been thrown off-track by incarceration, the concept of emerging adulthood and the implied ‘markers’ may be either irrelevant or imbued with different meaning. These are currently unanswered questions. In addition, this theory, like most ‘mainstream’ adolescent development theories, appears to be fairly gender-neutral. Notions of differential paths to development for girls and young women have been developed over the past 20 years, and are moving towards an integrated theory that incorporates class, gender and socioeconomic situations (Abrams, 2002; Gilligan, 1982; Hill-Collins, 1990). The impact of incarceration on developmental pathways for young women of color needs to be studied. If we have a greater understanding of how these young women have been de-railed, it will assist in getting the tracks laid correctly, and assist in their re-integration and growth. This project cannot answer the questions of how incarceration impacts development, but these concepts help to frame the inquiry and analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 6: REENTRY LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the body of literature around reentry, particularly as it relates to the experiences and needs of women and girls, as well as the literature about the women, youth and girls in carceral settings. As it is a relatively new area of focus, the extant literature on reentry generally does not differentiate the experiences of young women from older women, men, or young men. The lack of literature addressing the unique needs of younger women returning from prison creates a need for a synthesis of several streams of literature. The literature on female juvenile delinquency is examined to illuminate the age/gender specific challenges of young women coming into and out of the juvenile system. It also provides extensive systemic critiques of how girls are failed by the system at all levels due to sexist and racist assumptions and approaches and provides excellent descriptive data about the lives and experiences of girls. The literature on adult women's reentry from prison describes experiences and needs of older women, many of whom have significantly different life experiences, and gives a perspective of challenges that the older young women may be facing. Studies that are based on males are included where the themes are relevant to the inquiry, but where there are no comparable studies that include females. The weaving together of these variant streams creates a landscape for understanding the needs and experiences of these young women, and lays the groundwork for understanding and study.

CONCEPTUAL LITERATURE

Total Institutions

The sociologist Erving Goffman (1961) lays out a framework through which we can begin to

understand and examine the impact of life in a prison on a young woman, and its subsequent effect on her ability to successfully reintegrate into society as a productive citizen. Goffman discusses that although each type of total institution has significant and important differences (e.g. prisons, locked psychiatric wards, the military, monasteries), they share some basic properties that define the experience of a total institution. The most obvious to outsiders are the physical barriers that restrict entrance and egress, and connection to the outside world. In the case of prisons, razor wire, walls, locked doors, lack of telephone or internet access, and geographical isolation provide this function.

More subtle restrictions exist within penal institutions--unlike the outside or free world, all functions of a person's life happen in one place, with one fairly homogenous group of people. High regimentation of daily routines, low personal autonomy and decision-making ability for the inmates or residents, and high levels of surveillance, both actual and perceived, are all part of the culture of a total institution (Goffman, 1961). In Discipline and Punish, (Foucault, 1977) a seminal book on punishment and control techniques in the West, the 'panopticon', a prison designed in 1791 with a large tower in the middle, from which theoretically all cells would be visible at all times, is discussed as an important development in the psychological control of inmates. The creation of an all-seeing eye was thought to place the locus of control in the inmate, who would internalize the fear constant surveillance. While this design was not adopted as the standard physical arrangement of prisons, the theory of psychological control and constant surveillance remains an important part of the process of discipline within prisons. The level of physical and psychological control wielded by the structure and staff of prisons can have significant impact on a young person whose job it is to gain autonomy. The 'prisonisation' of a

person, or reliance upon external controls rather than internal ones can halt or reverse a developmental trajectory of a person, creating a quality of dependence, and instilling great fear of autonomy for those who have spent many years within an institution (Goffman, 1961).

Growing Up In Prison

In both adolescent and emerging adulthood frameworks, young people must learn how to think independently, accept responsibility for themselves and their actions, and become financially independent. In order to complete this developmental task, one must have access to a variety of settings, viewpoints, experiences and opportunities that allow a person to explore their inner world's relationship to the outer world. The impact of the social context of adult prisons on the process of development is essentially unstudied, but critical. Steinberg, Chung & Little (2004) discuss the deleterious effects of incarceration on the development of healthy autonomy and interpersonal relationships. Development requires a certain amount of freedom of exploration, testing, trial and error, and risk taking, all of which are anathema to the prison setting.

Opportunities for increased responsibility are severely limited; the social sphere is restricted. It is both homosocial—very little contact occurs among people of the opposite gender—and peopled with others with histories of anti-social norms and behaviors. Early labeling and incarceration may put a young person's future goals seriously off-track (Chung, Little & Steinberg, 2005; Steinberg et al., 2004; Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). The impact of incarceration in an adult prison on identity development and on the reentry and reintegration process is currently not sufficiently explored, although it has gained greater interest in the past few years. The age of the young women in this project is central to the hypothesis that the experience of reentry—which is undoubtedly impacted by incarceration during late adolescence/early

adulthood—is significantly different than that of older females. The impact of prison on identity formation is not a core question in this research, however, the author recognizes the impact of prison on identity formation and the subsequent ability for a young woman to successfully reintegrate with age-appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes as an underlying theme.

The Body

Intimacy and autonomy are critical components to the finalization of identity. In the free world, young people generally make independent decisions regarding how they use and employ their bodies, and how and with whom they will be physically, intellectually and emotionally intimate. Most total institutions exercise some level of control over the physical bodies of their inmates or residents. According to Foucault (1977), control of the body by an external system is fundamental to discipline and punishment. The most basic corporeal functions—hygiene, voiding, eating, clothing, sexual (self)satisfaction, medical care—that young children learn incrementally how to control and take responsibility for, become out of control of the inmate⁷. Institutional rules determine what clothes inmates can (must) wear, when showers are available and permitted, when an inmate can use a bathroom, when meals are served. Verbal communication between and among inmates may be monitored or restricted at different times for different reasons. In most prisons masturbation is technically an infraction, although enforcement is often capricious.

⁷ The term ‘inmate’ is utilized in this section to refer to any inhabitant of any total institution. In later sections, the term will specifically mean prison inmates.

Normal physical contact *between* inmates— hugging, hand-holding, dancing, kissing, sex—is not only discouraged, but often illegal in prison. Physical contact between inmates and authorities (officers, wardens, medical staff, volunteers) is controlled by the authorities, except in the case of assault of peers or staff by inmates. Rape⁸ and sexual assault by authorities in women’s prisons and girls’ facilities is not uncommon (Human Rights Watch Project, 1996). The control of the physical self may have significant ramifications for young women returning home. They may struggle to regulate themselves, or given their youth, may respond to the freedom to exercise their free will with a level of abandon that places them at risk for abuse and harm, and may lead them back to prison.

Identities

The process of acculturation or, as Goffman (1961) posits, *disculturation* to the prison culture may have profound effects on a person who is still at the end of their identity formation process. Disculturation is an adaptive devolution from outside ‘normative’ societal rules to the social norms of the prison—which include manipulation, violence, and deception as regular means to get by. Disculturation may act against a young person’s capacity for desired reintegration once they are released⁹. Goffman describes this process as involving several procedures that happen to the inmate by both those in authority and their peers in the prison. The inmate experiences a

⁸ Due to the coercive nature of the relationship between inmates and staff, *any* sexual contact between inmates and authorities is considered to be rape, as the conditions on the ground do not allow for true consent.

⁹ This presupposes a previous acculturation to societal norms that are positive and substantially different from the conditions within the prison. While it may be difficult to imagine that there may be few differences for a young person between life on the inside and on the outside, this assumption cannot be made without some investigation with the inmates themselves.

‘mortification of self’ that springs from physical and psychological separation from the outside world, role dispossession and a shift in what he calls the ‘moral career of the individual.’ This shift involves “progressive changes that occur in the beliefs that he (sic) has concerning himself and significant others.” (1961, p.14), movement in a negative rather than positive direction. The mortification process is furthered by the physical humiliations that occur frequently in prisons—from the strip-searches at entrance and after each visit, to the sexual harassment, physical coercion and violence of all forms that can occur by both fellow inmates and officers.

Once a person has been on the inside, their release to the outside brings them into contact with the world with a new identity—ex-prisoner. Goffman (1963) in a later book looked at the impacts of the ‘spoiled identity’ in relation to the person’s social world. As Goffman describes it, stigma allows society, as well as the stigmatized individual, to view that person as other, less than human, and therefore deserving of either society’s animosity or discreditation. Stigma is an internalized shame that an individual can carry, and which can infect their self-concept.

However, unlike shame, stigma is attached in a very real sense to the outside world’s view and response to a particular identity. Women returning from prison have identified the new identity of ‘ex-prisoner’ as a mark that interferes with their ability to reintegrate, and that the stigma is both internalized and externalized (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Freudenberg et al., 2005, O’Brien, 2001a, 2001b; Severance, 2004). Little is known about the impact of stigma stemming from incarceration on young women—about how their new identity is viewed by their families, lovers, friends, and community, and how they internalize or reject this stigma, or if there are developmental protections against accepting certain labels into one’s self-concept and was one of the underlying questions guiding this inquiry.

Reentry/Reintegration

Reentry has been defined in a variety of ways that range from a very specific moment, to a long-range process (Petersilia, 2004). Petersilia (2003) defines the process of reentry as “includ(ing) all activities and programming conducted to prepare ex-convicts to return safely to the community and live as law-abiding citizens” (p.3). This simple statement has embedded within it a complex of activities that can, and many argue should, begin from the moment someone comes into contact with criminal justice system. Although sometimes used interchangeably, the term ‘reintegration’ is a fuller conceptualization of the process for the individual (Altshuler & Brash, 2004). Reentering society is done when one is released from a formerly restrictive and isolated setting. Full reintegration—productive engagement with society, family and work, desistance from crime, having a stake in the free world—is a much longer, more nuanced process that involves individual-level change. Reintegration incorporates the individual, their families and communities, as well the larger context of public safety (Altshuler & Brash, p. 73). An individual’s return to free society includes interaction with and impact on a wide array of systems and individuals, and the ability to stay free often means continued change and integration over time. Petersilia (2004) conducted a review of the literature on reentry, posing the question ‘what works’. The review illuminates that although there has been research on reentry and reintegration, few studies are rigorous, with sound methodologies, making the findings difficult to generalize. She identifies the criteria for programs that have shown, through a small body of studies that were methodologically rigorous and sound, to have evidenced a 30% decrease in recidivism at best. These criteria are: 1) programs should happen mainly in the

community; 2) they should have a duration of at least six months; 3) treatment approach should be cognitive-behavioral; 4) the programs should target the highest risk individuals; and 5) there should be a ‘goodness of fit’ between staff and individual (p. 6). The latter point is echoed by Vigilante et al. (1999), who note the importance of relationship-building in the success of any program model for women, as well as the difficulty of measuring this important factor. However, Petersilia, like Visser and Travis (2003) cautions against measuring the success of reentry solely as a lack of recidivism. For while this remains a pertinent and important public safety goal, it alone does not reflect reintegration to society. Instead, she references the literature on desistance from crime, and the importance of connectivity to social institutions.

While many steps of reentry are similar for men and women, adults and youth, it has been established that women are often much more influenced by their relationships throughout their lives. Jacobs (2004) offers a matrix to conceptualize women’s reentry in phases and across different life domains. Figure B, taken from the Women’s Prison Association’s (“WPA”) toolkit (WPA, 2004) illustrates three levels of reentry across significant life areas that bear directly on a woman’s ability to stay in the community. The matrix is based on WPA’s years of work with older women, and thus reflects their experience. It may be helpful to update or reconfigure some of the content for younger women based on the findings in the following chapters. Reentry is conceptualized in phases that echo Maslow, and focus on the areas that are known to be critical for adult women’s success—livelihood, domicile, family, health/sobriety and compliance with criminal justice mandates. Although necessarily linear on paper, best practice approaches to women mean addressing all domains simultaneously, and to ensure that services have been created specifically to meet women’s needs (Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2003; Jacobs, 2004).

Figure B: WPA’s Matrix of Women’s Reentry

REENTRY PHASE	BASIC LIFE AREAS*				
	Subsistence/ Livelihood*	Residence	Family	Health & Sobriety	Criminal Justice Compliance
Survival	Gate money Public assistance Soup kitchens, pantries Maintain basic hygiene	Family or friend Shelter Street	Find children Make contact	Continue with previous medication regimens Avoid relapse Emergency room care	Report to parole regularly
Stabilization	Public assistance, workfare Training/education Low wage or subsidized job	Transitional Residence Family or friend	Supervised visitation Get refamiliarized	Drug treatment; treatment of urgent physical and mental health issues Counseling	Comply with requirements
Self Sufficiency	Job that pays a living wage and provides benefits Education to improve employability	Permanent housing (with public subsidy, if necessary)	Reunify with family; receive family counseling Caring for others	Regular health visits paid by health insurance Ongoing support structure — 12 step, therapy, community activities	Earn reduced supervision or complete parole

(Chart from WPA toolkit 2004. <http://wpaonline.org/pdf/ReentryMatrix.pdf>)

The concept of reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals implicitly includes rehabilitation (Travis, 2005), but what encompasses ‘rehabilitation’ is not fully articulated. The matrix above delineates a path along which women can move towards this goal. While the ultimate goal is to reach the final phase of self-sufficiency in all domains, success can be measured at any stage along the way. In attempting to define and understand the event and process of reentry, most studies of reentry have been limited to looking at recidivism outcomes (Clingempeel & Henggeler, 2001; Petersilia, 2004; Visher & Travis, 2003) while the larger questions of long-term successful reintegration present methodological and definitional problems. Time frames are inconsistent across the literature, as are even the ways in which recidivism is measured. Petersilia (2004) tells us that definitions of reentry range from specific programmatic approaches that are narrow and definable (e.g. rearrest, reconviction), to larger, more encompassing processes (e.g. stability, family reunification).

Reentry and reintegration requires a coming together of multiple dimensions that concurrently

support individuals and families in transition, ensure public safety, and diminish unintended collateral consequences of incarceration. In the wake of the most recent attention to reentry at a national level, much of the literature has focused on the larger systemic issues faced by people returning from prison such as a lack of adequate and affordable housing, barriers to employment, and lack of health care. Policy-level and operational barriers and facilitators are an important area of focus, but individuals, families and communities are partners in the process of reintegration. Visher & Travis (2003) define a framework to understand an individual's experience, and the major areas that influence that person's journey home. They identify four dimensions— individual characteristics, family relationships, community contexts and social policies—within four stages of reentry—pre-prison, prison, post-release transition and post-release integration (p. 92). This helps to contextualize the experience of the individual within a larger ecological and socio-political context. This framework fits within a life course perspective (Sampson & Laub, 2003), which looks at the impact of incarceration and freedom from multiple dimensions and influences such as age, stability of relationships, education and training, and personal character on the persistence and desistance from crime.

Several scholars have highlighted the need for more research that specifically addresses the needs of youth incarcerated in, or returning from, adult settings (Gaarder & Belknap, 2002, 2004; Glick & Sturgeon 1998; Snyder, 2004; Travis & Visher, 2005). While these studies have identified themes for youth, (age- and stage-appropriate programming; staffing that recognizes the differences between adults and youth; need for family-focused interventions; work skill building), only two specifically address the needs of young women, and those only discuss their needs vis-à-vis incarceration, not reentry (Gaarder & Belknap, 2002 & 2004). This begins to

address some of the gaps in the reentry literature as it relates to younger cohorts of women.

Desistance

There has been a significant new body of literature looking at desistance from criminal activity, spurred by Hirschi & Gottfredson's General Theory of Crime (1990) and Sampson & Laub's life-course theories (1992). Desistance looks at cessation of criminal activity over a lifetime—this time frame of this project is not long enough to provide meaningful data on the young women's criminal career. However, understanding why and how women desist from crime is important to reentry. Farrington (2007) states that learning which factors move desistance forward should be looked at to formulate interventions, and that this information can also be utilized to inform supervision and service decisions for formerly incarcerated individuals.

The concepts of desistance and reintegration are inexorably linked—one cannot achieve true reintegration without significant desistance from crime, both behavioral (not engaging in illegal activity) and official (not getting arrested or incarcerated) (Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998).

Desistance from crime is broader than simply 'non-recidivism'—many studies of desistance measure relationships, life satisfaction, leisure activities, and other markers of success (Clingempeel & Henggeler, 2003; Cobbina, Heubner & Berg, 2012; Michalsen, 2007; Sampson & Laub, 1992, 2003; Simons et. al, 2002; Todis, Bullis & Weintrap, et al., 2001; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998). Most studies have looked at large samples that are primarily male, or have a small number of females. With few exceptions, the studies looked at males whose delinquency originated in the 1950's (Sampson & Laub, 1992, 2003), include little analysis by gender (Clingempeel & Henggeler, 2003), or were quite small, and were acknowledged to be the 'super

stars' of the corrections or treatment staff while incarcerated. (Todis et al., 2001, p.137). Other studies looked specifically at women and desistance (Cobbina, Heubner & Berg, 2012; Deschenes, Owens & Crow, 2007; Michalsen, 2007; Simons et. al, 2002; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998) but with the exception of one (Deschenes, Owens & Crow, 2007) they are not longitudinal. Much of the literature on women and reentry utilizes qualitative methodologies, creating a rich descriptive of issues faced by women returning home, but limiting generalizability. As large data sets have become more available due to technological advances and government transparency initiatives, it is reasonable to assume that there will be increased empirical research such as the secondary analysis of the 1994 recidivism data set from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (Deschenes, Owens & Crow, 2007).

The concept of recidivism is often slippery—each researcher defines it differently, and there are methodological and theoretical questions associated with each definition. Some studies use arrest, conviction, or incarceration data, or some combination. Some utilize police, court or prison data sources. Others favor self-report as a more reliable method, and others triangulate data sources. In some cases, self-report data directly contradict official statistics, creating confusion about levels of recidivism (Greenwood, 1998). There is no one agreed upon measure of recidivism, so it is often difficult to compare across studies for levels of effectiveness, factors relating to recidivism, or theoretical synchronicity¹⁰.

¹⁰ Policing practices are not discussed in this study. However, most people engage in law breaking activity of some sort across their life-span. Who gets policed and how have significant impacts on whether a woman is likely to end up re-incarcerated, and poorer women are much more likely to be “on radar” and crimes they commit addressed through legal channels more readily than richer women.

Some research on theories related to life-course persistence of criminal behavior and desistance indicate that people are either anti-social or they are not, and that desistance comes either from exhaustion from criminal behavior (ageing out) or from attachment to prosocial institutions and relationships (work, marriage) (Cobbina, Heubner & Berg, 2012; Sampson & Laub , 2003; Todis et al 2001; Uggens & Kruttschnitt, 1998). All studies looked at the impact of relationships on desistance. Todis et al. (2001) reported “consistent involvement with one or more adults other than parents” (p.130) as an important factor for those categorized as ‘succeeders’. Cobbina, Heubner & Berg (2012) found that strong parental ties and marriage to pro-social partners impact women’s success positively, and that substance use indicated a strong trend to impact negatively on social networks for women. They note that their findings indicate that more research for Black women and for women from more distressed communities must be conducted as marriage and social contexts and networks tend to have differential impacts.

In all the studies, desistors reported greater job satisfaction, and positive peer associations than their peers who continued to have criminal careers. Michalsen (2007) looked specifically at mothers, and found that time spent with children, not necessarily actual custody, was a primary stabilizing factor. Simons et. al (2002) found that stable (‘conventional’) romantic partners and friends and strong job attachment had significant impact on female desistance, while Uggens and Kruttschnitt (1998) find that women who engage in legitimate work or school do far better, and recognize the importance of a friend who is not involved in criminal behavior in a person’s likelihood of desistance. Other studies indicate relationships with deviant peers appear to support persistence of criminal behavior in women while positive/conforming peers appear to

provide some support in desistance (Rumgay, 2004; Simons et al., 2002).

Desistance research has gained much ground in the past 10 years, and researchers have begun looking at the impact of the process of psychological maturation on desistance, rather than simply chronological age. One of the only studies to look at development of young adults in relation to desistance found that impulse control and repression of anger were the key indicators desistance, rather than the hypothesized importance of future orientation or awareness of others (Monahan, Steinberg, Cauffman & Mulvey, 2009). As the study did not include women, these findings need to be used judiciously in this project, as they may not reflect processes that assist in young women's desistance. Few studies have examined factors that contribute to desistance from criminal activity for women, or even for those who *do* recidivate, what their experiences were re-connecting with school, family, romance, work and leisure activities (Snyder, 2004). This indicates the need for more formative and developmental research in the area of desistance, particularly for young women.

Transitions and Turning Points

Both rehabilitation and reentry are transitions from one state of life to another. Young women returning from prison move from a restrictive, controlled, isolating and brutalizing environment to the open-ended, choice-laden and chaotic environment of the community and the streets.

Reentry and reintegration involve not only transitions from one phase to another, but present a potential for a turning point in the life of the releasee. Transitions are fairly universal and embedded in life-phases. In contrast, turning points represent a "change in level, pattern or type of psychological functioning" (Rutter, 1996 p. 613). For some, incarceration becomes a turning-

point in a life. Although this is theoretically one of the purposes of imprisonment (the achievement of changed behavior, presumably desistance from future crime) the experience of confinement and release does not automatically create change. However, release from prison presents an opportunity for change.

In looking at what can help young women to achieve successful reintegration, it is important to pay attention to how they navigate and adapt to the transition. An important part of life development is this adaptation and maturation (Chung, Little & Steinberg, 2005). Schulenberg & Maggs (2002) tell us “successful adaptations to transitions are fundamental aspects of development.” (p. 64) and that facing challenges successfully is what allows personal advancement. The achievement of new competencies—values, work ethic, social relationships—is intrinsic to success in reentry and reintegration. A lack of successful completion of the transition from the inside to the outside has the potential for creating on-going problems for a young woman. She may internalize an identity of failure or criminality; lack of mastery of new skills and characteristics may reinforce stigma and diminish the impetus for continued attempts at transition. Chung, Little & Steinberg (2005) discuss the importance of maturation in three domains: “mastery and competence, interpersonal relationships and social functioning, and self-definition and governance” (p. 76).

Altshuler & Brash (2004) address the needs of adolescents with a reintegration paradigm that includes preparation of individuals for release to their communities, a full set of linkages to service providers and individuals in those communities, and an ability to ensure delivery of those services. Unfortunately, there has historically been very little coordination of the hand-off from

one system to another. For younger people coming home, it may be more of a case of entry and integration, rather than reentry and reintegration. Many of the young women who are leaving prison before the age of 25 have spent more time in institutions (mental health, juvenile justice, child welfare) than in family settings, and more time in the street than in schools and programs. As is discussed in greater detail in later sections, the educational, social and vocational trajectories of many of these women have been off the track from larger society often from a very young age. The attitudes, knowledge, skills and behavior that a person needs to survive and thrive in non-criminal and non-street life may be new to these young women. Although this concept of first entry may not be limited to the youngest of returnees, the under-25 population is still in an opportune developmental stage to change the course of their lives.

Preparation for Release

The process of and preparation for reentry should begin preferably at the moment of incarceration, and at the very least a period of time *prior* to a person's release date (Altshuler & Brash, 2004; Visher & Travis, 2003, Petersilia 2003). While this is often recognized as a best practice (Petersilia, 2003), the process is much more likely to begin at physical release from prison. Traditionally, the responsibility of the correctional system ends at the front gate; the responsibility of community-based services begins there (MacArthur, 1974). This moment of release is often experienced as a crisis, or period of intense anxiety for a returning prisoner. Release from prison or jail may occur in the early morning hours (2 or 3 A.M); the releasee is often provided with little or no money (known as 'gate money'). Prisons are generally located miles from the community to which the prisoner is being released, and the young woman leaves with the possessions she arrived with, and little else (Travis, Solomon & Waul, 2001). For young

women whose ties may be flimsy or severed in the home community, the transition moment of reentry may be highly dislocating and points of particular vulnerability—the first few days and weeks present critical points for transition.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Youth and Reentry

There is relatively little research on the reentry needs and experiences of youth outside of specific program evaluations. The small body of literature that exists on youth and reentry, focuses almost exclusively on males, has gender-unspecified samples, or has a small sample of females. Additionally, these studies are generally focused on youth returning from placement in the juvenile justice system rather than an adult prison, which are significantly different institutions. It has become increasingly evident that long-term residential placement is more deleterious to individual youth, families and society than family-based and ecologically oriented programs in the community (Altshuler & Armstrong, 1998; Dembo, 2005). Recent events in New York State youth residential secure placement have highlighted the institutional and system problems, and have created dialogue regarding the need to keep young offenders in the community and in touch with their families. However, these conversations are limited currently to youth in the juvenile justice system, and have not extended to youth in adult prisons¹¹.

¹¹ New York State's youth prisons were under Federal scrutiny after the death of a youth in custody in 2006. The report coincided with the organization of a task force to create system reform, subsequent legislation known as Close To Home and the re-organization of the juvenile justice system in 2011.

Altshuler & Armstrong (1998) identify the following as important components to any successful transition plan for youth: 1) Reentry preparation that begins while the youth is still detained; 2) Effective linking to individuals and organizations that target specific areas of risk and resilience for the individual youth; and 3) Ensuring implementation of those plans. Similar to Altshuler & Armstrong's findings, a meta-analysis of types of interventions with serious juvenile offenders demonstrated that the most effective treatment types that reduced recidivism were those that included interpersonal skills, behavioral programs, and links to multiple community services, and were individualized to meet the needs of specific youth (Lipsey & Wilson, 1998). Other meta-analysis shows that most interventions that begin in correctional settings/placement for youth have a recidivism rate of 45% on average, varying depending on adherence to best practices and duration and dosage (Lipsey, 1999.) There has been significant interest in recent years in looking at what works for young people leaving the juvenile justice system, but there have been no specific studies on young women's reentry.

Family-oriented Approaches

Intensive, family-focused interventions have been shown over the last 20 years to have successful outcomes in desistance from crime and delinquency, for youth in the juvenile justice system, increased family functioning, decreased substance use and decreased psychiatric symptomatology. Interventions that target the family system of the youth appear to have a greater impact on recidivism than individually focused interventions (Hinton, Sherperis & Sims, 2003). In particular, Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) have been shown to have positive outcomes (Borduin, 1999; Chamberlain, Leve & DeGarmo, 2007; Cunningham & Henggeler, 1999; Dembo, 2005;

Henggeler, Schoenwald, Borduin, et al., 1998; Henggeler, 1997) some of which are long-lasting (Schaeffer & Borduin, 2005). Incarcerated youth often come from families struggling with poverty, addiction, mental illness, and a history of family discord (Cunningham & Henggeler, 1999). Research has shown that family ties promote reentry (Osher & Hunt, 2002), yet there are significant systemic barriers to family involvement during imprisonment and prior to reentry. Facilities are often far from home communities, parents and guardians may have other children that they cannot leave behind unattended, and families may lack finances to visit (Osher & Hunt, 2002). One study of males returning from juvenile placement found that relatively low level of family engagement when youth are held in residential placements, and that those with the least amount of family involvement —campus visits, in-home treatment, or home visits by staff— were more likely to recidivate in adult criminal court (Ryan & Yang, 2005).

A significant gap in the literature is systemic interventions with youth who do not live with biological parents. In most localities, the child welfare system does not assume responsibility for youth over the age of 18, even if they were in the system prior to the incarceration. Although little is known of the prevalence of this particular problem, studies show a link between foster care involvement and criminal justice outcomes (Ireland, Smith & Thornberry, 2002; Jonson-Reid, 2002, 2004; Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000; Widom, 1999). In the 1990's, although youth in foster care represented only 2% of all youth in New York City, they represented 15% of youth in juvenile justice detention. The Commissioner of Children's Services recently testified that nearly one third of all youth incarcerated in jail had previous child welfare experience (Mattingly, 2010). Ryan & Yang (2005) identify that youth in out-of-home care face specific challenges regarding family-focused interventions. Thus, family-focused interventions may be

contraindicated or simply not available for young women without ties to a biological family. New York City does not have any family-focused interventions available for young women returning from State prison who fall within this age range, but the literature informs the inquiry that helping the whole family unit rather than simply the individual returning home can have a significant positive impact on the process and outcomes.

It is unknown if these types of wrap-around interventions are appropriate, efficacious or feasible with a slightly older population, given that there are significant differences in the lack of legal impetus for a parent to be actively involved in a young adult's treatment, or what that involvement looks like. The families of these young women may be so fractious, or overburdened, that they do not perceive the importance, or have the capacity to work with their returning daughters and granddaughters intensively.

Other family interventions, particularly La Bodega de la Familia (now Family Justice, Inc). have been shown to be effective in increasing family function, decreasing substance use, and decreasing recidivism (Sullivan, et al., 2002), utilizing a family case management approach. However, the participants in this study were overwhelmingly male (70%) and had a mean age of 36. In addition, this model is based on a neighborhood approach (i.e. a targeted geographical area) but may bear further investigating with a geographically diffused population.

Environmental Factors and Peer Norms

Environmental factors and peer norms have disproportionate influence on young people's beliefs and behavior, and must be looked at in relation to the reentry process for younger women. Peer

relationships and norms are a recognized influence on youth, and those norms are often acted upon by larger environmental factors (Steinberg & Schwartz, 2002). Sullivan (2004) reminds us that most youth in the system come from under-resourced communities, and that these communities have a far greater prevalence of incarcerated parents, friends, and siblings than other communities. Clear, Rose & Ryder (2001) inform us that high rates of incarceration, rather than making neighborhoods safer and more stable, in fact have a de-stabilizing effects. Some studies indicate that women of color, particularly Black women who return to communities of cumulative disadvantage have a greater struggle with reintegration (Heubner, DeJong & Cobbina, 2010).

Wacquant (2001) offers an analysis of the increasingly carceral nature of poor neighborhoods as a purposeful outgrowth of the lineage of slavery, Jim Crow laws and creation of ghettos for containing African Americans¹². He posits that as these neighborhoods became more single-classed, de-industrialized, and isolated from larger society, the structures in place to assist people moved from indigenous institutions (i.e. churches, civic groups) to governmental bodies of control such as child welfare, and public assistance. Schools in these neighborhoods more frequently “operate in the manner of *institutions of confinement* whose primary mission is ‘custody and control’¹³” (p. 108, italics in original) rather than as institutions of learning and

¹² Wacquant uses ‘ghetto’ rather than more contemporary terms for poor neighborhoods to illustrate the constriction and purposeful geographic containment of people of color. Although the term reads oddly, I chose to leave it in here to underscore the idea that the marginalization of poor people of color is not accidental, but an expected outcome of long-standing institutionally racist policies.

¹³ The phrase ‘custody and control’ is often associated with the purpose of departments of correction, sometimes with ‘care’ added to the phrase.

challenge that expect and demand achievement from its students. He further argues that the coalescence of these conditions then normalize and mesh with the cultures and norms of the prison with the ghetto.

Wacquant's theories that the social norms and culture between prisons and poor neighborhoods have blurred raises some questions for this inquiry. Recent studies indicate that women prisoners come from and return to neighborhoods of high economic disadvantage and often have more tenuous social networks than their male counterparts (Berman, 2005; Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2003). Given the importance of peer groups and peer approval for adolescents, this 'prisonization' may be contributing to further eroding the social codes that helped to protect young women from traveling the path towards prison, or stepping back on the road once home. None of the literature on women and prison or girls and delinquency has looked at the impact of current social mores on young women and delinquency. It is unclear whether this 'prisonization' has had any impacts on young women's comfort level with the prison experience, or if, as more women are incarcerated, the idea of doing time has become or will become a rite of passage for girls. More inquiry into the structural impacts on female offending and ability to reintegrate is needed.

Factors of Risk

Criminal justice systems have a history of creating and using risk-prediction tools to identify those offenders who represent the greatest and least risk of re-offending. The ability to predict which factors are likely to lead one to recidivate and which are protective theoretically allows for better decisions about inmate classification, treatment needs and release planning. In theory,

classification serves the purpose of choosing appropriate levels of supervision for those in the community, or the best-fit model for housing if incarcerated (Harm & Phillips, 2001; Sharkey, 2003). As with the other areas of research, until recently, little attention has been paid to the impact of gender on the assessments.

Risk assessments should inform release planning to assist in identifying those who will most need additional services and supervision, Risk assessments not validated for females then lead either to over or under-classification, which either puts women who do not need it under significant scrutiny, or potentially misses women who present public safety risks (Reisig, Holtfreter & Morash, 2006).

Funk (1999) looked at the utility of risk assessments for females on juvenile probation. As the youth were not already incarcerated, her definition of recidivism was a new offense that was brought to court. Looking at 500 youth, (22% female) she studied male and female delinquent's recidivism factors, and found that females had four significant variables compared to male's six, only one of which overlapped. A previous detention, the number of person-related offenses, history of child abuse or neglect and a history of running away were found to be significantly related to risk of recidivism. Only the first—past history of detention—was shared with males as a risk factor. Given what is known about the reasons girls run away from home, this variable may be another proxy for a history or current sexual or physical abuse in the home.

In an evaluation of risk assessments for males and females, Sharkey et al. (2003) found no single risk factor to be significant for predicting recidivism for female delinquents. Utilizing a modified version of a standard risk assessment, the only factor that approached significance was

being older at the time of assessment. For females, the risk assessment did not predict likelihood of recidivism any better than chance. The variable of age at assessment is not used on the standard tool. Although the study is limited by a small sample size and only included medium and high-risk youth, it found that this tool was essentially ineffective for females, and somewhat effective for males.

Factors of success

Risk assessments do not allow practitioners or law enforcement to identify facilitators of successful reentry and reintegration, yet they are a crucial part of approach to reintegration. This is an area that is significantly lacking in rigorous study. Parsons & Warner-Robbins (2002) utilized qualitative methods to rank order themes that contributed to successful reentry of a group of women who were participating in a faith-based community program for women coming home from jail or prison. They identified 12 themes to which the women attributed their successful reentry. Eight of the twelve themes are about relationships with others, (social support, belief in God/Higher Power, non-using friends, female previously incarcerated role models, children, helping others) both on the receiving and giving end. Only two, 'employment' and 'sobriety' are about concrete services, and two others could be considered intrapersonal—personal strength, and new cognitive and emotional scripts. The emphasis on relationship provides further support for supposition that relationships play a central role in young women's vulnerability to become offenders, yet offers areas for intervention (*Justice By Gender*, 2001; Covington, 2001; Deschenes, Owen & Crown, 2007; Funk, 1999; Gilligan, 1982; Seydlitz, 1993).

The role of friends and the supportive value of social connections may however be questionable

in relation to younger women. Aledort (unpublished) found that African American and Latina girls involved in the juvenile justice system were often extremely socially isolated, and did not have close friendships, particularly with female peers. The idea of friendship was suspect at face value by the young women. Maeve (1999) reported similar findings with adult women in a Southern prison—they had not had histories of female friendships, although they expressed a desire for them. Aledort (unpublished) noted that participants in girls groups conducted in family court probation had an aversion to female friendships, many of them stating a preference for male friendships, and they reported and exhibited volatile relationships with female peers. This social isolation, which may be different than the experience of older women, and is different than social patterns of the young males, may contribute to their vulnerability to criminal behavior and incarceration, and which may need addressing for successful reintegration.

Other studies that looked at adult females and adolescent males returning from jail found that having income from a job reduced the likelihood of re-arrest for both groups, while having health insurance reduced risk of drug dealing for the women, and reduced the likelihood of re-arrest for males (Freudenberg, et al., 2005). While it is unlikely that it is the insurance itself that has the effect, it may be a proxy indicator for stability for the adult females, and a family relationship for the young males. Pearl (1998) looked at the impact of service utilization on women's recidivism, defined as number of arraignments, and days to "first recidivistic activity" (p. 34). She found that women who utilized community-based services, particularly multi-service and residential (non-outpatient) drug treatment and completed employment programs had significantly more time out before recidivating. The women with the highest levels of recidivism were more likely to be younger, white, and have more children (no age range was identified, but the mean age was 34)

and have had longer incarceration histories. Although the findings indicate some utility of the use of multi-service centers, the sample was small, and almost 40% of the sample was never referred for services.

More recent longitudinal analyses (Deschenes, Owen & Crow 2007; Heubner, DeJong & Cobbina, 2010) indicate that returning to environments with greater stability and social capital, having not been arrested for a drug-related offense, and being older were factors for success—all factors which are not particularly mutable. Heubner, DeJong & Cobbina (2010) found that those women who lived with other former inmates in the community had lower rates of recidivism than those who either lived alone or with their families, and that marital status, unlike for men, had no protective impact. This finding is particularly salient for the relational needs of women – it may indicate that women create valuable relationships inside prison that can be leveraged upon release.

Parsons & Warner-Robbins (2002) found that spirituality/belief in God ranked highest among factors that helped the women in their transition. Given that the program they evaluated was faith-based, this is not a surprising finding. However, there is a long history of prison ministries, and cultural icons who have attributed their conversion to religion while in prison as the single most important transformative element (Malcolm X may be the most famous) but less is known about the role of spirituality, the church/mosque and God as a transformative force related to reintegration. The women who chose to participate in this program may have self-selected already based on a strong and valued belief in God or spiritual being. It may be as well that spirit/religion may have less impact for younger women who may feel less ready to give up their

previous lifestyles, or it may be a powerful protective factor in need of support and cultivation. Little empirical work has been done on the role of religion, religious institutions and faith as a variable for women in the criminal justice system. This is a rich area for research and exploration. Religious tenets that espouse forgiveness of self and others, combined with an exhortation to choose a different path, *and* a future reward for this path may be a powerful sustaining force.

Trauma, Mental Health Problems, Substance Abuse

Women returning home from prison have a multiplicity of intertwined issues that impact on their reentry and reintegration. The three most commonly discussed problem areas for women related to their criminal justice involvement are childhood victimization and abuse, mental health disorders and substance abuse and dependency (Belknap, 2001; Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2003; Covington, 2001; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). For many, the three issues intersect and interact to form a unique nexus of problems, or 'level of burden' (Covington, 2001) not similarly shared by men in the criminal justice system. Most of the empirical literature on victimization, substance use and mental health issues has focused on how women come into the system. Few empirical studies have been conducted that look at the impact of these problems on a woman's or girl's ability to make it on the outside, or successful interventions that target this knotty nexus.

Trauma/Abuse

The literature on women's pathways into crime consistently highlights trauma and abuse as a significant contributor (Accoca, 1999; Belknap, 2001; Chesney-Lind, 1995; Holsinger, 2000;

Justice By Gender, 2001; Owen, 1998; Parsons & Warner-Robbins 2002; *Prevention and Parity*, 1996; Siegel & Williams, 2003; Widom, 1999). Histories of sexual abuse alone appear to be in epidemic proportions in the population of women of all ages in the criminal justice systems. The vulnerability of girls and women to victimization is related to sexism and racism, although sexual abuse of females is certainly not limited to communities of color, or lower socio economic status. There is a global effect of victimization of girls and women—some young women run away from abusive situations and their attempts at survival are criminalized (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998). Victimization often begins in childhood, but, unlike males, women are far more likely to continue to experience physical and sexual abuse across their lifespan (Covington, 2001).

Sexual Abuse

The reported rates of sexual abuse of girls and women in the system are staggering—they have been reported to be between 54% to 80% (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998; Owen, 1998). While sexual and non-sexual abuse impacts boys and young men, as well as females, child sexual and non-sexual abuse puts children at greater risk of offending, and girls are more likely than boys to be victims of sexual abuse, particularly as they age (Belknap et al., 1997) A longitudinal study on the effect of childhood abuse and neglect on future delinquency for youth from lower socioeconomic classes showed that young women who were abused were twice as likely to be arrested as juveniles, twice as likely to be arrested as adults, and 2.4 times more likely to be arrested for violent crimes (Widom, 1999, p. 29). Belknap et al. (1997) showed that neglect and abuse did not predict risk for young men in the same way. The negative impacts of childhood and adolescent sexual abuse is documented to include lower self-esteem, depression, running away, multiple sex partners and substance abuse (Thyler, et al. 2000). These responses,

particularly the last three, put young women at risk for being labeled a delinquent and for involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Other functional and psychological impacts exist as well. A meta-analysis of the effects of childhood sexual abuse found there to be 143% greater likelihood of PTSD than the general public, 150% for depression/suicidality, 100% for sexual promiscuity and a 71% greater likelihood of reduced academic performance. (Paolucci, Genuis & Violato, 2001).

Non-Sexual Abuse

Widom (1995) in a large-cohort study of those with criminal records and validated histories of childhood abuse and neglect before age 12 found that neglect has similar negative outcomes for later criminal justice involvement across all crimes except prostitution. The study does not distinguish differential outcomes for males and females, and was limited to only one jurisdiction. Follow-up research (Widom, 1999) found that girls who experienced abuse and neglect were two times as likely to be arrested as juveniles and adults, and more likely to be arrested for violent crimes. This is not to say that all women who experience trauma are on a one-way journey toward a life of crime and substance abuse. Nor does trauma in and of itself argue against accountability or agency for individuals. It does however, offer an explanatory paradigm that illuminates areas of potential intercession and treatment to help women who are suffering from trauma move to a different pathway, and sheds light on areas for attention of practitioners and policy makers when planning interventions for females.

Personal and Community Violence

Adult women in the criminal justice system often have long histories of domestic violence (Belknap, 2001; Covington 2001; O'Brien, 2001; Owen, 1998; Richie, 2001, 1996). Domestic violence and partner abuse represent another area of traumatization for women that may pre-date, be concurrent with, or post-date substance abuse and delinquency and criminality. Women have identified partner abuse as something that can continue even while in prison, and their arrest history may interfere with their ability to access domestic violence services (Richie, 2001)

Women in prison, like women on the outside, reported reluctance to utilize domestic violence services for a variety of reasons—shame, guilt, lack of knowledge of services available, and fear of the abuser (Stanton, Leukfeld & Logan, 2001). The extent to which domestic violence is a problem for younger women, and the impact it has on their ability to reintegrate into their lives is unknown, including domestic abuse that may have occurred or be occurring in the home that they left at time of incarceration.

Girls and women involved in the system have personal histories of violence and abuse that often extend out of their immediate families. Much has been written on the impact of inter-personal violence on girls and women, and the sequelae of that violence. Over the past 20 years, stressed and under-resourced communities have experienced an increase in violence, creating a new area of study—community violence. In the reviews of the literature on girls and women in the JJ/CJ systems, the impact of community violence has rarely been addressed. One study looking at trauma exposure in female delinquents found that 78% of girls with PTSD witnessed community violence vs. 65% without PTSD, and 66% with PTSD witnessed domestic violence, vs. 43% without. Of those whose precipitating event for PTSD was community violence (21%), the event

always included a family member (Dixon, Howie & Starling, 2005). There are several studies that examine the impact of community violence on youth, although none that were found looked at the relationship to offending. Given the community districts that most young women who will participate come from, it is likely that they will have been exposed to medium to high levels of community violence—witnessing a violent act, hearing one occur, or having a friend or loved one who was a victim. Foster, Kuperminc and Price (2004) found that girls suffer higher rates of post-traumatic stress in response to community violence than boys, including greater levels of anxiety and depression, and that girls' responses to community violence were similar whether they had simply witnessed or were a victim themselves. While this study did not specifically look at youth involved in delinquencies or crime, it is an area of further attention for reentry strategies, as we know very little about the relationship between exposure to community violence and desistance.

Mental Health

Prevalence in Jails and Prisons

In the last ten years, there has been increasing attention paid to the high prevalence rates of serious mental illness of women in prison. Mental health problems are found in significant numbers of incarcerated females in the adult and juvenile systems (Ditton, 1999; Dixon, Howie & Starling, 2004; Pliszka et al., 2000; Teplin, Abram & McClelland, 1996; Steadman, et al., 2009; Teplin et al., 2002, Timmons-Mitchell et al., 1997; Vesey & Bichler-Roberston, 2002), sometimes at rates more than three to four times greater than the general population (Ditton, 1999). The prevalence of depression, PTSD, anxiety and other significant psychiatric and psychological illnesses has been shown to be significantly higher for younger women in prison

and jail than their male counterparts, (Steadman et al., 2009; Teplin et al., 2006; Teplin, Abram & McClelland, 1996) or older female peers (Vesey & Bichler-Robinson, 2002).

In a survey of mental health services in US prisons, one in four women were in some sort of mental health therapy or counseling by a trained professional, and 22% of women in custody were receiving some sort of psychopharmacological intervention (Beck & Maruschak, 2001). A recent survey of New York jails found that 31% of women had a serious mental illness at intake (Steadman, et al., 2009). Since the 1970s, states and localities moved to de-institutionalize people with mental illnesses. While advocates and practitioners welcomed the much-needed reforms, the lack of long-term treatment options have resulted in prisons and jails becoming de facto mental health facilities, and poor ones at that (Butterfield, 1998; Lurigio, Rollins & Fallon, 2004, Torrey et al., 2010). A recent study shows that jails and prisons hold more mentally ill people than do hospitals throughout the United States (Torrey, et al., 2010). In many localities, the lack of appropriate-level treatment beds and facilities for young people, combined with a lack of monetary resources to pay for a bed, even if found, creates a perfect formula for a revolving door of young women coming in and out of prison. In 2001, over 9,000 youth in the U.S. were placed voluntarily in the juvenile justice system as the means for accessing mental health treatment that was not otherwise available to them while staying in the community (Ashby, 2003). Thirty-five percent of those placed were female, indicating an overrepresentation of girls placed for mental health treatment needs, given that females make up only 15% of the overall custody rate in juvenile residential facilities (Sickmund, Sladky & Kang, 2008).

Over three-quarters of female detainees in adult jails meet the criteria for one or more psychiatric

disorders, even when conduct disorder was excluded (Dixon, Howie & Starling, 2004; & Teplin et al., 2002), and up to 84% for any serious mental health problem (Timmons-Mitchell et al., 1997). Teplin et al., (2002), in the most rigorous of studies on prevalence of mental health problems in juveniles, found that that 73% of females had any psychiatric disorder, 46.8 % substance abuse, 45.6% disruptive behavior, 30% an anxiety disorder, 27.6% had an affective disorder, 21.4% ADHD, and 1% psychoses. Males had an overall prevalence of 66%, with only category higher than females being substance abuse (50.7%). While no one particular diagnosis has been found to be the reason for girls and women's criminal justice involvement, a relationship between depression and the development of delinquent behavior has been found in girls. Girls who were mildly to moderately depressed were 28% more likely to engage in property crimes, and 40% more likely to engage in person crimes than their non-delinquent peers (National Institute of Justice, 1999). Several studies have found relatively high rates of substance, mood, behavior and anxiety disorders in juvenile detainees. Non-Hispanic white females in the juvenile and criminal justice systems are more likely than other groups to have psychiatric disorders (Jordan, et al., 1996; Messina et al., 2004; Teplin et al., 2002). No author has offered an explanatory framework for the discrepancy in rates of mental illness across racial/ethnic groups.

Mental Health and Reentry

While there is now a significant body of literature on the needs of inmates with mental illness, there is far less regarding the impact of mental illness and trauma on reentry (Lurigio et al., 2004). The majority of adult inmates with mental illnesses have histories of previous

incarceration, probation and parole (Beck, 2001) and are at risk of further recidivism if not supplied with ongoing supportive services once released (Lurigio et al., 2004). While there has been more research on adjustment back to society for mentally ill adults after incarceration in jail, the experience of jail differs significantly from prison. People in prison are incarcerated longer, have felony convictions, and prisons are much more likely to be located far from the community from which the person came, making family, services, and other social ties more difficult to maintain (Jacoby & Kozie-Peak, 1997). Little has been studied for the transition back home for mentally ill youth in the juvenile justice system. In one of the studies that looked at the connection between discharge planning and recidivism for mentally ill youth, an association was found among post-release planning, the procurement of financial assistance, and connection to mental health services with lower recidivism rates (Trupin et al., 2004). The results cannot be generalized however, as the sample size is small (44) and only 21% of the total sample were female. The process of reentry itself presents particular stressors and challenges for individuals. It may mean discontinuity of mental health care, interruption of medication, re-exposure to the traumatizing events, people or places, or just stress inherent in change. There is some evidence that reentry is a time of increased depression and anxiety (Freudenberg et al., 2005) and that it can result in decreased health outcomes (Maeve, 2001). While not all the young women in prison have a mental health problem, it is likely that a high percentage will have some mental health need or history.

Substance Abuse and Reentry

Since the war on drugs escalated in the early 1990's, women have been incarcerated at significantly higher rates. Some have indicated that the war on drugs inadvertently became a war

on poor and minority women (Caught in the Net, 2004). Changes in criminal justice policies allowed for greater numbers of women using drugs to be incarcerated. However, these policies did not lay the foundation for the substance use itself. There is a dramatic and important link between female incarceration and substance use. Most women in prison have a history of substance use (Belknap, 2001, Maeve, 1999; Mumola, 2000; Owen, 1998;) and are more likely to be imprisoned for drug or property offenses than violent offense. Over half of incarcerated individuals were under the influence of substances at the time of arrest (Mumola, 1999) and data from the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) project show that over 50% of women tested positive for at least one of five substances (cocaine, opiates, marijuana, methamphetamine or PCP) with rates ranging from 31-80% (Taylor, Newton & Brownstein, 2003). Incarcerated women that have minor children have more serious drug abuse histories than their male counterparts in prison (Mumola, 2000). Given the levels of reported abuse and trauma discussed above, substance use by women and girls in prisons should come as no surprise to policy makers and scholars. We do know that alcohol and drugs are potent avenues for self-medication. What is not known is how trauma and substance use work together to create the conditions for a woman's incarceration, in ways that either alone may not. Although trauma research is a growing field, and many authors have discussed the connection between drugs and females and incarceration, the specific ways in which trauma, substance use and criminal behavior interact are much less clear. Mullings, Hartley & Marquart (2004) found a strong association between childhood abuse and neglect and later alcohol dependency in female prisoners. The mean age of first drink for alcohol dependent women was 14, vs. 16 for non-dependent inmates, and for regular use, 17 years old vs. 19. While this study is retrospective, it indicates that alcohol use begins at a younger age for traumatized girls, and it may have serious impacts on their

involvement with the criminal justice system.

Substance Use and Younger Women

Substance abuse is a significant factor for young women (Huizinga, Loeber, Thornberry & Cothorn, 2001; McClelland, Elkington, Teplin & Abram, 2004) as it is for adult women (Covington, 2001; Zlotnick, Najavits, Roshenow & Johnson, 2003). In the most recent comprehensive survey of substance use attitudes and behaviors for girls and young women, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) surveyed over 1,200 girls and young women (*The Formative Years*, 2003). The report found evidence that suggests that girls and young women are more vulnerable to negative impacts of substance use than boys of the same age with similar usage patterns. Girls may be more biopsychosocially vulnerable to negative health and behavioral outcomes of substance use, and may have faster rates of dependency. Higher rates of substance use were linked with physical and sexual abuse for high school girls 26% v. 10% smoked cigarettes; 22% vs. 12% drank alcohol; and 30% vs. 13% used drugs (*The Formative Years*, p. iv). While much of the findings provide relevant background for this population, the survey's participants were school-based. As stated earlier, many of the younger women returning from prison are outside of the school environment, creating other levels of vulnerability and substance use opportunities. Therefore, the findings may be conservative for this population. Other data sources raise questions regarding the intersection of crime and substance use. The younger cohort (<26) in the ADAM study appear to have significantly less substance use with the exception of marijuana, which was most likely used by those under 21, and methamphetamines, which was used most heavily by those under 21 and those 26-30. Cocaine and opiate use appear to be significantly lower in the younger age

categories of under 21 and 21-25 year olds (Taylor, Newton & Brownstein, 2003). Caution must be used however, as neither random nor probability sampling was able to be utilized due to the small number of female arrests. However, these data indicate that the link between substances and crime that is well documented for older women may not be as clear for younger women.

Treatment needs

Women who are incarcerated for drug-related crimes, particularly possession, and who have a substance dependency or addiction often do not get the treatment they require or desire while incarcerated. Adequate treatment for substance use is rare in prisons, and adequate gender-responsive treatment modalities are even rarer (Covington, 2001; Richie, 2001). Two years in prison without treatment does not guarantee that a person is returning to the community without a drug problem. O'Brien (2001a) identifies the need for women to 'extend their sobriety' as one of the key areas for successful rehabilitation. Given that drugs can be available in prison, it is conceivable that many women need to begin sobriety upon release, or at least continue with lower-levels of use they may have acclimated to in prison. In several qualitative studies, substance abuse treatment has been identified as a primary need for older women for successful reentry (Covington, 2001; O'Brien, 2001a, 2001b; Richie, 2001). It is as of yet unknown if younger women have the same levels of substance abuse, or will identify treatment as a need they desire.

Co-Occurring Disorders

As all three issues—mental illness, substance use and crime--are frequently entangled, it is

important to examine the literature on co-occurrence and reentry. Co-occurring disorders of substance abuse and mental health are prevalent in relatively high numbers in the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Huizinga, et al., 2001; Messina, et al., 2004; Prescott, 1997, 1998; Teplin et al., 2002) Most literature about co-occurrence, women and the criminal justice system examines the relationship of co-occurrence to imprisonment, rather than reentry. One study that looked at rates of return to custody (RTC) for both men and women (Messina et al., 2004) found that prisoners in Texas with co-occurring mental health and alcohol dependency had lower rates of employment, lower earning power, more arrests, used drugs at an earlier age, had higher rates of RTC, and returned faster than participants who just had an alcohol dependency. They found that women returned to custody at lower rates than men, and that younger cohorts had higher rates. The study only looked at alcohol dependency and mental health. Huizinga, Loeber, Thornberry & Cothorn (2000) looked at co-occurrence of serious delinquency, drug use, school problems and mental health problems in a community-based sample of youth at three sites in the United States. It identified that drug use was more likely to occur in conjunction with serious and persistent delinquency only in males. For the females, while five percent were identified as serious delinquents, only 6-11% were identified as having mental health problems. However, the authors did not clarify if their only measure of mental health problems was “externalizing behavior problems” such as hyperactivity and aggression. While these measures may be legitimate measures of mental health problems for males, they are problematic for measuring female problems. It is widely understood that females are much more likely to internalize than to externalize. Behaviors such as self-mutilation, eating disorders, and withdrawal, which more accurately represent young female mental health problems, may not have been measured. There is currently not enough research on the scope and scale of co-occurring disorders for young

women, and the impact on reentry.

While we have evidence that mental health, substance abuse and co-occurring disorders are present in high numbers, the literature offers little in the way of how to address these young women on their way out. Connection to services appears to be helpful (Freudenberg et al., 2005; Gupta, et al., 2005), and mental health and substance abuse treatment can and does work. However, we also know that there are significant cultural roadblocks for young women of color in accessing mental health services. Historical mistrust of medical services combined with bias in the mental health professions that normalize white experiences and see otherness as a deficit have worked together to create barriers to treatment (Dana, 2002). In addition, there is a lack of services that address the specific, gendered, developmental and cultural needs of young women of color returning from prison and that provide adequate treatment for young women with mental health needs who are using primarily marijuana and alcohol. There is a gap between knowledge of how to help, and the ability to engage young women in programs that work.

Health

Prisons, jails and detention facilities are some of the few settings where health care is a mandated service. For some women, incarceration presents an opportunity for access to healthcare not available in their communities. Although prison is not a 'healthy' environment, for some, it is the best access to treatment for a variety of illnesses and conditions, chronic or acute. Thus, one of the great challenges in reentry and reintegration is continuity of medication, connection to adequate, affordable and welcoming health care, and maintenance of whatever health gains occurred during incarceration (Maeve, 2001). A break in treatment adherence for certain types of conditions puts the person at risk of developing drug-resistance or relapse. Access to resources

for medical care is difficult upon first reentry. Historically, Medicaid cases were closed upon incarceration, and take up to 90 days to be reopened, and require documentation that may not be readily available for a woman just returning home after a period of several years. The impact of not having immediate access to health care, treatment, and medication costs the individual and society both health and health care dollars (Freudenberg, 2005; Gupta, et al., 2005; Hammett, Roberts & Kennedy, 2001). Connection to Medicaid appears to have a small but significant effect on adult women's success in reentering from jail (Freudenberg, et al., 2005).

People involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems have significantly higher burdens of disease than do the general population (Gupta, et al. 2005; Hammett, Roberts, Kennedy, 2001). While HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B & C, and tuberculosis are the 'trifecta' of communicable diseases within the prison population, inmates also report high prevalence of speech, learning and hearing disorders, and other physical problems (Maruschak & Beck, 2001). Juveniles have dental, dermatologic and respiratory problems as well as the mental health and substance abuse issues previously discussed (Gupta, et al., 2005). Young women are more likely to have an STI or be pregnant. One study found that adjudicated young African American women in a large Southern city were 4.5 times more likely to have an STD than non-adjudicated African American females (Crosby, DiClemente, Wingood, Rose & Levine, 2003).

HIV infection is significantly higher for incarcerated women than for incarcerated males at a rate of 3% vs. 1.3%. (Maruschak, 2004). People living with AIDS represent .48% of the overall prison population in the United States, compared to .14% in the general population. In the early 2000s, New York State had the highest percentage of both female and male inmates infected

with HIV, at an astonishing 13.6% and 7.2% respectively (Maruschak, 2004). A 2006 serosurvey of jail entrants estimates the true HIV prevalence for women incarcerated in New York City's jail is 13.9% with younger women (<30 years) hovering at around 3.4% prevalence. Women in New York City jails are 14 times more likely to be HIV positive than the general population of women in New York (Bennani et al., 2008). This indicates that younger women coming home from prison who may not yet be HIV positive are at high risk for HIV infection if they are not successful at reintegration and desistance. Given the high level of health care needs, discontinuity of care from prison to home may be a contributing factor in the outcome of reentry (Hammett, Roberts & Kennedy, 2001; Maeve, 2001) although like many other areas, young women's health burden is currently unknown in contrast to older women returning from prison.

Families & Relationships

Parents and siblings

The dual role of relationships in a young woman's life is an important theme throughout literature on female desistance from crime (Michalsen, 2007; Simons, et. al, 2002; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998). While men who were still tied to families while in prison appear to do significantly better on the outside than those who have fewer family ties, the role of family and partners for women is murkier. Petersilia (2003) notes that there is essentially no research on the role of the family on women's ability to successfully reintegrate into society. This is a critical gap, given the often fractious relationships women have had with their families prior to incarceration, and the importance many women place on reunification with their children if they have lost custody. The centrality of relationships to women's identities and well-being imply that

families, children and partners may play a crucial role in a young woman's reentry and reintegration.

Family is identified as both a stressor and support for women during their reentry and reintegration (Harm & Philip, 2001; Holsinger, 2000; Miller et al., 1995, O'Brien, 2001a). Harm & Phillips (2001) note that for some women, family judgment, cramped living conditions, resumption of parenting roles and negative behaviors by family members create stress upon their return. Several studies note that relationships between mothers and daughters were strained and negative, both prior to and post-incarceration (Holsinger, 2000; Miller, et al., 1995; O'Brien, 2001a). Issues of rejection, and control and custody of children prior to and following reentry were cited as major themes in the older women's concerns regarding family reconnections. Other women experienced their family as a source of closeness and support (Harm & Phillips, 2001). Family relationships will be explored in greater length in the data analysis section as a key finding of this project.

Parenting and Reunification

Overwhelmingly, studies of women's reentry discuss the desire for and the struggle with reunification with their own children (Covington, 2001; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Michalsen, 2007; Jacobs, 2004; O'Brien, 2001a). In mid-year 2007, 55% of women under age 25 in state prison and 47.5% of women in federal prison reported being mothers. The majority of incarcerated mothers were between the ages of 26-45, and a previous criminal history increased the likelihood that you would have minor children at the time of confinement (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). The same report indicates that the number of children under age 18 with an

incarcerated mother has more than doubled since 1991. This highlights the importance of supporting younger women in being successful at reintegration—the most recent data show that there has been an increase in the number of children with incarcerated parents, and that more than half of the mothers in prison reported having a family member incarcerated. The cycle of familial incarceration can be halted, and while the younger women represent a relatively small number of the overall population, the generational impact of success cannot be overstated.

Reunification with children is a central focus for many of the women returning from prison (Jacobs, 2004; Michalsen, 2007), and is often a motivating factor in women striving to stay clean, obtain permanent housing and permanent employment. On the other hand, the financial strain of trying to provide for children can lead women back into illegal activities, and increase the likelihood of reincarceration (Owen, 1998). Although the literature does not delineate the age of the mothers, and therefore little is known regarding the parenting status of women between the ages of 18-25, we can extrapolate from Sickmund's (2004) figures on younger girls' pregnancy and parenting histories in juvenile justice settings that more than 6% would already have children and more than 4% would be pregnant while incarcerated. The likelihood of motherhood increases with age, so these figures may be extremely conservative. Issues of custody, reunification and being a young mother were present in the project and will be discussed in later chapters.

One of the difficulties faced by women of any age in trying to gain custody back of their children are the regulations put into place under the Adoption and Safe Families Act, or ASFA. ASFA was instituted under the Clinton administration to decrease the time it took to terminate parental

rights, mandating termination if a child has been in care for 15 out of 22 months if certain conditions are not met. One of these conditions is on-going contact with the child, including visits and phone calls. Prisons are generally located far away from inmates' home communities, and phone calls require either money, or the willingness (and ability) of the person on the other end to accept collect calls, which can be costly. While ASFA has provisions that allow for situations such as incarceration to extend the timeline, it is up to the child welfare worker to do so. Incarcerated women are at high risk for having their children "freed" for adoption, as there are significant barriers to continued contact with their children (Margolies & Kraft-Stolar, 2006). Young women may also be less likely to have someone to send them money and goods such as stationery and stamps that can help them fight for keeping their parental rights until their release.

Romantic Partners

The role of partners is often even more complicated for women returning from prison. There is no literature available at all regarding same-sex partners in relation to reentry, although the author is aware that many women in prison may have come from same-sex partnerships, which cannot be assumed to be either supportive or not-supportive. Male partners are often instrumental in women's initial engagement in crime and imprisonment. Abuse, coercion and violence may be very present in the relationships between women and their male partners (*Caught in the Net*, 2004; O'Brien, 2001a). Additionally, as one case manager notes, while male prison visiting rooms are full of female family members and lovers, women's visiting facilities are often entirely devoid of males or visitors of any kind (Saundra Curtain, personal communication, 2003). Young women may be returning to men or women who do not desire reconnection, or may pick up dysfunctional and traumatizing relationships upon return. They

may also be returning to men or women who are solid, stable and who have been awaiting their return. The section following addresses women in same-sex relationships, and the implications for reentry and reunification in greater depth.

Sexual Orientation

The role of sexual orientation in the lives of women coming home from prison has been essentially unexamined. Historically, attention has been paid to the role of sex and sexuality in women's prisons in research, however, a survey of books on reentry in the sociological, criminological and psychological fields, revealed that "lesbian", "same-sex", "homosexual" and "sexual orientation" were rarely found in the index. A search on several electronic databases in the sociological, criminological and social work disciplines of the phrases "lesbians and prison" "lesbians and reentry" "homosexuals and reentry" and "homosexuals and prison" resulted in very few articles, most of which looked at media representations of sex in women's prisons.

While the issue of sexual orientation may seem secondary to reentry, especially given the many barriers previously discussed, the role of internalized and externalized homophobia may have a mediating role in a young woman's ability to return home for those that identify as lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Given that emerging adulthood is a period of sexual exploration and sexual identity development, it may be of even more importance for a younger cohort.

Substance abuse, school failure, sexual exploitation and running away can be associated with stress related to sexual orientation, either perceived or expressed (Savin-Williams, 1994). As has been discussed, gender bias, and gender-role stereotyping has a long history of importance in criminal and juvenile justice for girls and women. Girls have not only been singled out for sexual

behavior, but for gender-transgressive appearances and behaviors as well. Staff in prison, detention, probation, and other criminal justice settings often target or single out girls who are perceived to be (or identify as) ‘aggressive’¹⁴ (Aledort, unpublished; Schaffner, 1999) as being trouble-makers or somehow not quite female enough.

According to Maeve (1999) prison staff report that “up to 80% of incarcerated women are sexually active with each other.” (p. 47). It is generally understood that sexual activity does not necessarily equal sexual orientation, and that ‘situational homosexuality’ is common in same-sex settings. Many jurisdictions are poorly equipped to help the girls to sort out behavior from orientation, exploitation from comfort, and poor boundaries from actual desire. Girls are rarely given any information about same-sex behavior, sexual orientation, and safety in relation to same-sex relationships while incarcerated in any setting (Sherman, ND), so they may run into difficulties navigating their relationships with other women and to themselves. Not enough is known about how young women incorporate these experiences into their lives upon release, and the impact it may have on return to prison or continued freedom.

In many communities, being a lesbian or having a same-sex partner is still considered sinful and deviant. Women’s prisons, as a homosocial environment, have a higher level of acceptance of same-sex sexual and romantic relationships, although sexual activity may be considered illegal (Maeve, 1999; Owen, 1998). Homophobia certainly still exists in prisons, particularly among

¹⁴ The term “aggressive” is used by African American and Latina girls in NYC for what others might consider a ‘butch’ lesbian. Like ‘butch’, the term connotes a way of being sexually, as well as a presentation in the world that is considered more typically male.

the staff (Maeve, 1999) but it may be far less stigmatizing to be an 'out' lesbian in prison than in the free world due to different social norms. For some younger women, the relative 'safety' of the prison environment vis-à-vis their sexual orientation may be a pull back to institutional life. The relationships formed while in prison are discussed at length in the chapters following.

There is some indication that prison may provide some safety for a group of women. One study found that a woman's reluctance to return to society correlated to higher rates of recidivism (Stuart & Brice-Baker, 2004). Not looking forward to release is related to the women reporting the importance of friendships and romantic relationships formed in the prison as a force for return. Although it may seem counter-intuitive that prison provides a structure and holding environment in which women can form important and potentially healing relationships, it reinforces the importance of relationships to women as a factor in pathways in and out of the system. While this is a fairly small finding, it lends support to the importance of relationships in women's lives. It also raises the question of the function of homophobia and heterosexism in the larger community as a potential push against successful reintegration. If prison is the only place a woman feels comfortable being openly engaged in a same-sex relationship, this may draw a young woman back to a place where she can meet her romantic and sexual needs. Questions of attachment to prison or other institutions as a safer haven than the streets or previous environments for young women have remained essentially unexplored.

Gangs

Gangs are an important influence on young and adult male's acclimation to and survival in adult prison (Wacquant, 2001). While there is a body of literature on girls and gangs, both historical

and current, it is focused almost exclusively on the social arrangements of gangs out on the street, and not on the function of detention, jail or prison on gang affiliation (Chesney-Lind & Hagedorn, 1999). Owen (1998) indicates that gang activity and affiliation appears to exist in the juvenile system for girls, but that the role of gangs as a major organizing force on the social environment is negligible for women in adult prison. Youth join gangs for a variety of reasons, and young women join for reasons that are often different than young men's. Safety from sexual and non-sexual violence at home friendship networks and economic pressures are all reasons the literature indicates for female gang involvement (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). Owen's research, was limited to California, may no longer reflect the reality on the ground in adult prisons for women.

Housing

Lack of affordable available housing remains a large stumbling block for anyone returning from prison, and has been identified as an issue of significant concern for women (O'Brien, 2001a, 2001b, Jacobs, 2004; Owen, 1998, Petersilia, 2003). Homelessness following release creates a serious risk for *reoffending* and *reincarceration*, as it interferes with an ability to find stable work and regain custody of children, and housing permanency is often a condition of parole. Many women enter jail or prison with a history of homelessness, often longstanding (Freudenberg, et al., 2005; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Richie, 2001). Certain options, like public or section 8 housing are less available to people with a felony drug charge. While the New York City Housing Authority has the right to make case-based decisions regarding tenancy, a ban of 2-6 years may be imposed depending on the severity of the charge (*After Prison*, 2004). Younger women may have an extra burden of being undesirable tenants as few landlords are willing to

rent an apartment to an 18 or 22 year old with no work history, no family backing, little money and a prior felony record. Young people in foster or congregate care at the time of incarceration may have no family available to take them back upon release, and are often too old to return to the system for permanency planning or to access independent living programs.

Education

Young women returning from prison, like young men, often have educational levels well below their age. A majority of previously incarcerated youth have significant educational difficulties—learning disabilities, school failure, special education (Katsiyannis & Archwamety, 1997; Archwamety & Katsiyannis, 2000). Women with histories of abuse show higher levels of school failure, greater cognitive problems, and lower IQ's than their non-abused peers (Teicher, 2002; Widom, 1999). Some studies have found the detained females have higher rate of school failure than detained boys (Timmons-Mitchell et al., 1997). Educational interventions have been shown to be one of the most effective tools for lowering recidivism, although many localities have defunded college and basic educational programs. In an attempt to quantify the financial and social impact of educational programs, a large three-state study was conducted from 1997-1998. The study found that participants in educational programs were rearrested, reconvicted and reincarcerated at statistically significantly lower rates than those who did not participate in educational programs while in prison (48:57%, 27:35%, and 21:31% respectively) (Steurer, Smith & Tracy, 2001). The cohort was 12% female, with a mean age of 30, and the authors did not indicate if there were age or gender differences in the impact of educational programs.

For most youth, school functions to provide not only formal learning, but offers structure,

opportunities for increased autonomy within a protective setting, positive adult role models, and exposure to new ideas. Return to school for offenders is a difficult task—the period of incarceration generally represents a long interruption in school sequencing, and many of the youth were not in school regularly if at all prior to incarceration (Roy-Stevens, 2004, Sullivan, 2004). These youth often have what Sullivan (2004) refers to as ‘accumulating educational disadvantage’ that may date back to their first arrest. They have discontinuity of schools, are often over age/under-credited, and have low levels of numeracy and literacy. Participation in an educational program (GED, HS, vocational or training school) may be a condition of parole, and these types of programs offer a kind of structure for the youth to work with upon first return. However, educational needs may not command the same level of urgency as housing and healthcare for a returning young woman, or their previous experiences of failure may be a serious disincentive for further pursuit.

Employment

There is relatively little research on the economic needs and employment experiences of women returning from incarceration. Legal economic self-sustenance is recognized to be an important part of successful reintegration for women once other needs have been attended to (Jacobs, 2004; O’Brien, 2001a; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998). Legal employment is a goal for many returning inmates, yet it can be an elusive goal, particularly for women. Many states, including New York, bar people with felony convictions from obtaining certain licenses, working in particular settings or with certain populations (*After Prison*, 2004). Employment for low-income, uneducated women is often difficult, even without a criminal record to navigate. Most female releasees of any age enter prison with a sporadic work history. Freudenberg, et al., (2005) found that only

26% of women returning from jail worked legally in the six months prior to incarceration, with the majority sustaining themselves through public benefits or illegal income. The ability to be financially independent is a primary psychological and event marker for young women (Arnett 2000, 1998; Cohen, Kasen, Chen et al., 2003).

O'Brien (2001a) discusses the importance of employment in her study of women who have successfully reintegrated after release. The sample in O'Brien's study is significantly older and whiter than the population under discussion here. Access to public benefits can help ease a woman's transition back home, and act as potential barrier between her and the pull of street economies. In the era of welfare reform, however, there is a lifetime ban on public assistance and food stamps for anyone with a drug felony. While states can choose to accept, modify or reject the ban, only 12 states rejected the ban outright (*After Prison*, 2004). The lack of availability of public benefits may have a significant impact on releasee's abilities to stay home, as illegal means of support may become necessary.

Factors Impacting Employment

A recent study by Pager, Western & Sugie (2009) looked at employer's attitudes towards young White, Black and Latino males in NYC. While the study did not include females, disturbing hiring preferences regarding race were uncovered. The study looked at over 1,500 employers seeking entry-level workers. They were more likely to call back White males with felony records at the same rate as Black males *without* an incarceration history, and that Black males with an incarceration history were the least desirable group. The best indicator for someone willing to hire a young person with a criminal record was having had a previous positive

experience with an ex-offender in the past. This study indicates that race acts as a mediating variable in for employers looking at male workers. It is unclear how previous incarceration history, race and age work together for young women.

Prior Vocational History and Training

Freudenberg et al. (2005) examined factors related to recidivism, drug use and health outcomes on adolescent males and adult females returning home from New York City's county jail, found that having employment income decreased the likelihood of rearrest, heavy drug use and drug sales for young men, and decreased the likelihood of rearrest for adult women. Because these studies did not include young women, it is not possible to generalize to employment opportunities and barriers to young women. This is an area for much more research.

Interestingly, although economic strain is one reason for engagement in criminal activity, research on employment opportunities for young minority women is sparser than that for males. A literature search on 'girls and employment' 'girls, employment and poverty' and 'girls and unemployment' indicated that there is very little scholarship on the role of employment for young women and girls in the United States. While there is historical literature, and much on prostitution and trafficking worldwide, the literature appears to ignore the real vocational needs of young women, particularly urban ethnic minority young women.

The economy has shifted in urban settings in the past 30 years—most entry-level jobs for young women include some sort of interaction with the public—receptionist, home health aide, cashier, assistant in a day-care center. Young women returning from incarceration may have few job experiences and fewer marketable skills that make them good candidates for public-facing

positions. Many have dependent children and no place to put them during the day. The wages paid by service jobs, often without benefits, may be less than public assistance and Medicaid. Vocational training in women's prisons has historically been limited to low-paying trades such as cosmetology and home health aids, if vocational training exists at all (Belknap, 2001). Better-paying trades that traditionally are friendly to previously incarcerated people (carpentry, construction, plumbing) are historically unfriendly to women. The current recession may make financial independence even more difficult, as even entry-level jobs are in high demand from experienced workers.

Barriers to Reentry and Reintegration

Over the past few years, much has been written about the systemic, policy-level barriers faced by people reentering society with a felony record (Caught in the Net, 2004; *After Prison*, 2004; Petersilia, 2004; Travis, 2005). The rising crime rates of the 1980s and 90s influenced legislatures not only to imprison more people and keep them there longer (e.g. "three strikes laws" that create mandatory life-sentences for a third conviction, regardless of the final offense), but to narrow the opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals upon their return home. Restrictions at the federal and state levels on ex-offender's civil and personal lives increased, with wide-ranging consequences. Travis (2002) calls the unintended or collateral consequences of imprisonment forms of 'invisible punishment.' These range from the very specific denial of civic rights (such as the permanent loss of suffrage in several states, highlighted during the 2000 Presidential election in Florida) to limits on where and with whom people can live, impacting a larger section of communities (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002). While most Americans may believe that people released from prison have paid their debt to society, criminal debt in civic life

currently has an exorbitant interest rate to pay off.

These collateral and invisible punishments have the potential to negatively impact a young women's capacity to stay home and achieve full reintegration. Policies are in place that limit or deny tuition assistance for people with a drug felony for college educations; states can deny welfare benefits for a lifetime to women with felony offenses. Many states have laws that affect a previously incarcerated person's ability to hold a driver's license, ability to adopt or be a foster parent, or live in or be eligible for public housing (*After Prison*, 2004). Additionally, information on someone's criminal justice history is easily accessible on the internet. While criminal records have historically been public records, the ease with which anyone can now access criminal justice data has changed significantly, making it harder for the previously incarcerated to move beyond their past. Many of the collateral consequences are limited to felony records, but there is a differential impact for those with drug-related felonies. The policies focusing on continued punishment may have a harsher impact on women, given how many are charged with drug-related crimes. Having a felonious rape conviction or weapons charge does not bar a person from applying for and receiving Pell grants for higher education. Drug-related charges that occurred after 1985 disqualify a person from applying for these funds. The federal application states:

federal law suspends federal student aid eligibility for students convicted under federal or state law for possession of or sale of illegal drugs (not including alcohol and tobacco). (US Department of Education, FAFSA application, 2005).

Documents necessary for public benefits, employment and identification are more difficult to come by since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, due to increased concern of illegal immigrants. In New York State, getting a non-driver's ID requires more 'points' (i.e. forms of legitimate identification) that may be impossible for some young women to obtain, particularly

those who are not returning to families of origin (Petersilia, 2003). Most people returning from prison are utterly uninformed that arrest and conviction can lead to permanent disenfranchisement from civic life, employment or benefits. These restrictions present a significant maze of hurdles. While much has been written in detail regarding the specific losses of civic rights post-incarceration, and the cost of these to adults, less has been discussed specifically regarding how these policies interfere with or act upon young women's reentry.

Conclusions

The literature explored here outlines the framework for thinking about young women's reentry. Several themes emerge from the literature that can be synthesized as a grounded approach for supporting young women in their reintegration once home from prison. They are likely to face housing, educational and vocational, health and mental health and relational challenges on both micro and macro levels. Experiences of trauma, substance abuse and mental illness will impact their abilities to navigate complex and often unfriendly systems. Relationships that we all rely on for daily support may be strained, dangerous or non-existent. Social stigma and internal shame may further hamper these young women's abilities to successfully reenter and stay home a significant challenge.

While the literature does not speak to the specific needs of younger women, a gender- and age-appropriate reentry program should include the following principles gleaned from the research:

- Oriented towards women and girls
- Oriented towards the needs of younger people
- Individual in nature, addressing various levels of risk and need

- Levels of intensity in response to length of time released
- Begins prior to release
- Capacity to address trauma, mental health and substance abuse
- Family-centered/friendly (including child care and parenting classes)
- Staffed by people who like and respect young women
- Staffed by people who understand the developmental needs of younger women
- Strengths-based
- Theory-based (with a cognitive-behavioral approach)
- Relational in nature
- Non-sexist educational and vocational opportunities
- Non hetero-sexist in orientation

The literature on reentry and reintegration indicates serious and important gaps in the current knowledge, and in theories that can be utilized to test explanatory hypotheses for young women's successful reentry. This study, framed in light of the literature discussed above, presents data on a small set of young women returning from prison in a single geographic area. Younger women share similarities with their male and older female counterparts, yet they have unique circumstances and challenges for reentry. They have supportive and corrosive relationships with family, friendship networks and partners that will have an influence on their reentry. They harbor aspirations, but struggle with poor education, few skills, and stigma. These young women entered prison at a time where their development as adults was generally not yet closed, and return to society having achieved identity closure within highly restrictive settings. The orientation these young women have towards the world, and their ability to navigate that

world in a positive and productive manner has been heretofore unexplored. This study begins to present a picture of strength and capacities of the thirteen young women who participated in this research and the implications that result from the data.

CHAPTER 7: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is a mistake to assume that producing knowledge about an issue is always likely to lead to an improvement in a situation. (Hammersley, 2003, p.31).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RATIONALE

Embarking on a journey of research engenders several questions regarding appropriate methodology. The body of existing knowledge, the basic questions to be asked, and the stance of the researcher all interact to guide the choice of appropriate methodology. The previous chapters have indicated where there are significant gaps in knowledge regarding young women's reentry and reintegration after incarceration in adult settings. Little is known about the specific problems faced by young women who spend time in and are released from prison before their 25th year of life—relationship supports and strains, housing, motherhood, levels of mental health needs and trauma and health and substance use issues. Less is known about how being young and female impacts specifically on reentry and reintegration. Thirty plus years following a study of the reentry experiences of boys coming home from placement (MacArthur, 1974), there have been few studies that examine the needs and experiences of young people returning from incarceration, and none that have delineated the experiences and needs of young women. Thus, in the face of little or no extant formal 'knowledge,' qualitative methodologies are indicated. Qualitative research "seek(s) to understand human experiences from the perspective of those who experience them." (Yegidis & Weinbach, 1996, p. 107). While qualitative methodologies are regularly utilized in sociological and anthropological investigations, particularly ethnographies (Burgess, 1994) they are relevant to social work inquiries. Qualitative inquiry provides tremendous flexibility and responsiveness to emergent themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998;

Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Research Question

The study sought to describe the reentry and reintegration experiences of young women, ages 18-25, who returned to New York City after incarceration in adult prison or jail. It was hypothesized that younger women have age and gender defined needs upon release, and that their movement towards reintegration would be informed by their age and developmental stage. The inquiry sought to cull out what experiences or themes, most likely related to their age and stage and informed by their gender, would be fundamental to young women's capacity to be successful in desisting from future criminal engagement.

For the purposes of this inquiry, reentry was conceptualized as the actual transition from prison to community (last few weeks in prison, first week home), and reintegration as the process and activities that follow the first week, through the following 12 months and beyond. The impact of pre-release planning (or lack of it), life circumstances pre-incarceration, goals and expectations post-release, the role of relationships, and the social and environmental structures that have helped and hindered their success in staying home and moving forward were the areas of inquiry regarding their journey home. In essence, the author sought to give the young women an opportunity to inform the field about their lives, expectations, and needs, and to offer a space where they might be able to examine their experiences within the interview process.

Research Design:

Experimental research designs are preferable when seeking an explanatory framework, or

seeking to disprove specific hypotheses (Yegidis & Weinbach, 1996). It could be argued that a large body of work exists regarding adult experiences with reintegration to create hypotheses for testing against younger female's experience. However, the author believes that the young women's experiences differ so significantly, based on the developmental issues described earlier, that to do so would only further hide their unique circumstances and struggles.

Without a rich body of extant theory regarding reentry and reintegration for this population, a grounded theory approach will be utilized in crafting the interviews, and in analyzing the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach seeks to study "concepts and their relationships" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 284) to understand not only what was happening to the particular group of young women interviewed, but to add to the body of knowledge of reentry and theoretical approaches to it. This study sought to analyze dynamically collected data in order to uncover new hypotheses for future examination, verification and exposition. This inquiry walks the tightrope of what Hammersley (2003) identifies as the dilemmas of doing research for academic reasons, versus research for practical application. Social Work research is necessarily attuned to practical application as it is an applied social science discipline. The author sought not only to 'know' the experiences of the young women in question as an academic pursuit of knowledge, but to influence policy and practice to better serve the community of young women who are reentering society.

The research was also influenced by feminist research principles that focus on the nature of the relationship between participant and interviewer as a more open and transactional one than traditional researcher-subject relationships (Yegidis & Weinbach, 1996). However, as Abrams

(2002) points out, gender cannot be assumed to be the primary organizing force in the lives of young women of color from lower SES. Feminism is not so much a methodology as it is a “stance...that can provide insight or a perspective on a phenomenon and also help to generate theoretical questions.” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 24). Stances can also “focus an individual on one perspective or set of ideas so that he or she may not be able to see what else might be in the data.” (p. 24). Thus, the methodology for asking questions and analyzing the data required that the author held a commitment to young women, while being open to the story that unfolded, even if and when it might contradict the tenets of feminism and feminist research. The method and inquiry did not contradict feminist theoretical approaches, and the gender issues, while rarely explicit, are inherent in the themes that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Grounded Theory

A grounded theory approach recognizes that there is either a new problem for which there are no sufficient explanatory or applied theory to guide the research, or an existing social condition for which current theory is not adequate to at this time (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). The subject of this inquiry fits the latter—while there has been an increase in the development of theory of women’s offending, more work is needed to promote a robust understanding of women’s desistance in general, and specifically in light of the purpose of this study, young women.

According to Glaser & Strauss, (2012) “generating grounded theory is a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses” (p. 3) As discussed at length by feminist criminologist, theories that are general theories of crime and resistance are de facto based on males and often miss key implications for women. Likewise, because the median age of incarcerated and criminal justice

involved women is 35 and above, the theory on women may miss important developmental approaches for younger women. Grounded theory is intimately tied to how data is generated, and the theory comes from the data, applied to an idea post facto (Glaser & Strauss, 2012).

ANALYTIC FRAME

The analytic frame, defined by the methodology of grounded theory and the theoretical lens of strengths perspective and relationality allowed for themes to emerge that defined the experiences of these 13 young women. Grounded theory utilizes the data garnered through the interviews to build new hypotheses to be tested in larger samples in the future. This study identified and explored the experiences of a small group of young women (n=13) attempting to reintegrate into free society after a period of incarceration in an adult correctional institution. No data were expected to be generalizable given the small sample of 13.

There is no denying that the lives of these young women reflect the well-documented risk factors for entrance in and continued entrapment in the criminal justice system. They disclosed histories of early deprivation, rape, trauma, loss and lack of stabilizing parents and guardians, growing up in high-risk neighborhoods and losing interest and connection to school and educational achievement between 7th and 10th grade. They return home to the economic strain of a deepening recession, contend with the pull of the street and fast money, wrestle with complex relationships with family members and partners, and face the strains of complying with parole and program rules. Focusing on the risks and challenges however does not contribute to the literature in a significant way, and as stated previously, does not help to illuminate the path *out* of risk. It only

presents further warning signs for women, practitioners and policy makers that are redundant at best. In light of this, the investigator chose to focus on the themes that have been heretofore previously unexplored and, in keeping with feminist research principles, in honor of the shining spirit of the women who shared their stories. The analysis focuses on their strengths, coping skills and capacities for survival.

By purposefully reaching for the strengths, both in the interviews and in the data analysis, two overarching themes emerged that were used for the purposes of this inquiry and that raise interesting questions for further development and investigation. Specifically, these are the two prominent themes: 1) participants' constructive use of time while incarcerated to reflect on where they were, who they wanted to be and what they could do moving forward and 2) participants' bonding with and using positive relationships both while incarcerated and upon release to support growth and freedom. These two themes re-framed the data analysis to seek out the characteristics, experiences and phenomena that the women expressed that reflected both their ability to learn new skills and in effect take stock of their lives in a constrained and anathemic institution, where growth and opportunity are not even tertiary agenda items, and their capacity for connection and bonding even in the face of lifelong interpersonal trauma and harm and institutions that do not support connections.

In many respects, the participants in this study may be outliers from the generally understood picture of women reentering from prison and jail, as the majority (eight) were successfully out in the community for at least one year, and several were out for nearly two or more.. The literature indicates that at least 30% return to jail or prison within a three year time frame (Deschenes,

Owen & Crow, 2007; Tripodi, Bledsoe, Kim & Bender, 2011) and thus already the women had beaten the odds. The women who were in early release at the time of the interviews showed similar signs of promise¹⁵. The findings give voice to particular lived experiences of these 13 young women and to their strengths, hope and capacities to navigate complex and confusing life passages. These choices and the resulting forward movement are explored in the following chapter.

Interview Instrument

Based on the review of the literature, and several preliminary conversations with previously incarcerated women, service providers and parole officers, data were collected utilizing a semi-structured interview (Appendix A—Interview Schedule). While Silverman (2007) cautions about ‘manufacturing’ data, it would not be possible to discover data in the field through ethnographic approaches, given both the nature of the population and the resources available for this study. The questions, which were crafted to elicit stories of their successes and struggles, the relationships that support and hinder, and the impact of their gender, age and stage on their journey homes changed over the course of the interviews, as themes emerged and the process made clear that certain areas of investigation, while rich in experience, actually inhibited the dialogue around the here and now experience of reentry and reintegration. Based on the initial six interviews, the author adjusted the questions to focus on how the young women were navigating their lives, relationships, their sense of who they were and opportunities in and for the future.

¹⁵ At least one of the women interviewed at her fourth month out was in the community one year later. And one woman was interviewed eight months after her initial interview, giving her over two years of freedom in the community.

The interview was designed to not only allow the researcher to listen to their stories, but to allow the young women to have an opportunity to identify how and why they are succeeding and what else they might need to continue. In a conference on reentry and poverty, a presenter discussed the use of an ‘aspiration’ assessment, rather than a needs assessment (Maloney, 2006) for an incarcerated population, and the impact on asking future- and success-oriented questions on the inmates. This orientation—understanding that the simple act of asking questions that point the young women towards thinking about their own successes and strengths—was important ethically and theoretically for the investigator. Some descriptive data—race /ethnicity, age, age at first arrest, age at last incarceration, number of previous arrests and incarcerations, living situation prior to last incarceration, number of children, last grade completed, means of economic support, currently on parole, and current living situation, were collected. These questions helped to contextualize the individual’s reentry and reintegration as well as provide some demographic information on the sample.

In keeping with feminist research principles, a transactional dialogue between participants and researcher was opened and made available to the participants throughout the process. The theory behind this is that it opens pathways to richer data and stronger relationships between interviewer and participants (Yegidis & Weinbach, 1996). Thus, the interviewer welcomed and was prepared to answer questions directed at her by the participants as part of the process. In addition, the author had available a list of concrete resources—health centers, drug programs, educational resources, benefits centers—that was offered to the participants at the time of the interview).

DATA COLLECTION

Research Sample

Over the course of one year, thirteen (13) young women were interviewed in a variety of social service settings in New York City. The investigator had initially sought to recruit up to 25 young women to ensure the greatest range of experiences, however, as will be explained further below, the availability of young women who fit the criteria was far more limited than had been anticipated.

The sample was, out of necessity, non-representative. Research with stigmatized and hidden populations presents greater difficulties, as the people are by nature, not easily identifiable (Heckathorn, 2002, Lee, 1993). As the total population of young women ages 18-25 released to the New York City environs is approximately 100 per year (NYSDOC, 2002), the author sought to interview 15-25 young women between the ages of 18-25 who had been released within a 24 month period. The first few months are a critical time period in reentry, as people are often more vulnerable to rearrest during that time period. However, to have limited the sample to those who have just been released for a few weeks would not have allowed for enough time to discuss the deeper, more complex struggles of reintegration or to identify strategies that were ultimately successful. The author originally had hoped to stratify the sample to ensure representation across the time span of freedom in the community, in essence to have theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 2012) from fairly immediate to having the widest time at liberty without being too far from the experience. By stratifying, it was hoped that different themes across time and the

impact of environmental supports and barriers would have become more evident. The sample ultimately provided a wide range of time frames post-incarceration, but it was pure chance and good luck that this occurred.

Sample recruitment:

Young people returning from prison do not necessarily congregate in one place, and are not identifiable through visual cues making location sampling infeasible. Women returning from incarceration are not entirely a “hidden” population in the traditional sense—they are better described as in the shadows. Many are attached to institutions of control (parole) and may be utilizing service providers and advocates. However, as a stigmatized population, they are not likely to be willing to self-identify in a neighborhood or housing complex. Multiple avenues for participant recruitment were utilized, but ultimately the sample remained a convenience sample due to the small universe of possible participants and the limits of the research resources.

Young women were recruited from a wide range of social service agencies, listserves and through word of mouth. The investigator sent emails or made phone calls or both to over 30 local organizations that were most likely to have young women who fit the criteria. The organizations were categorized in the following ways:

Criminal Justice/Reentry Organizations: Organizations whose primary mission is to provide services or advocate for those involved in the criminal justice system. Often multi-service in nature.

Health: Primary mission is to provide health care.

Housing: Primary mission is to provide housing or advocate for housing

Multi-Service Organizations: Social service organization that provides a multitude of services that may include health, reentry, substance abuse, harm reduction, employment or legal services.

Substance Abuse: Provides abstinence-based or harm-reduction approaches. Residential and outpatient/drop-in

Employment: Provides job training and placement services

Runaway and Homeless Youth Services: Serves runaway and homeless youth and young adults—often multi-service in nature.

Legal Services: Provides legal counsel including representation

Government Agencies: State or City agencies that serve or provide services to the population.

Education: Provides direct educational services or support for academic/educational achievement

Academic Institutions: researchers and academics with ties to target population

The initial recruitment plan included placing flyers (Appendix B-Recruitment Flyer) at NY State Department of Parole offices around the five boroughs, but some of the administrative hurdles and research requirements were incompatible with the research design and thus the plan was abandoned. Of the thirty organizations contacted, only five resulted in referrals for the study. Follow up emails, phone calls and presentations to staff were conducted throughout the data collection period but yielded no additional contacts or referrals.

As part of the recruitment design, it was anticipated that snowball sampling would be an effective means of recruitment. Snowball sampling (also known as chain-referral) is an excellent means to access and penetrate populations and networks that may be otherwise difficult to access, or who are ‘hidden’ due to stigma, shame, or illegal activity (Heckathorn, 2002). It also

increases the chances of participation in the interviews if the participants are referred by trusted friends, or those who have shared similar experiences and can vouch for the researcher or research. Aside from issues of non-generalizability, snowball sampling presents issues of homophily bias, or oversampling of a group that is homogeneous along beliefs, life experiences or some other trait (Heckathorn, 2002). A pure snowball sample is biased as “the social relationships which underpin the sampling procedure tend towards reciprocity and transivity” (Lee, 1993 p. 67). However, snowball sampling did not produce any live referrals for this research project. All of the women who were successfully interviewed were encouraged to refer their friends for participation, and several enthusiastically agreed to do so. All participants who provided the researcher with a contact number or email were sent a message reminding them that enrollment was still open. Despite these efforts, no referrals were generated from this methodology. It may be that an incentive for referrals may have proven more fruitful, or it may be that the young women were happy to participate themselves, but did not feel engaged enough to put the word on the street or to their peers. It may also be that the young women do not have many peers who share their experience, and thus may not have had anyone in their social circle to refer.

The author created a separate email address that was used only for potential participants to respond to for recruitment and had a phone number (Google™ voice mail) that was attached to the email. That number forwarded to the author’s mobile phone and participants could text or leave voice messages through that number.

Criteria

The initial criteria for participation were: 1) ages 18 to 25 at the time of the interview, 2) returning from state or federal prison 3) released within the last 4-24 months and 4) biological women. These parameters were chosen to ensure that the expected small sample would not have so wide a variation of experiences to render analysis and comparison difficult across the sample. Incarceration in prison by definition is almost always longer than jail time, and results in much greater time out of the routine life activities, is generally more isolating and restrictive, with the possibility of release planning as there is a sentence termination date. The relatively small window of time was initially thought to be able to result in enough participants who were close enough to their initial reentry to be able to speak from within the experience rather than looking backwards at it. Given the small sample expected, there was concern that inclusion of transwomen (people who identify as women but whose birth sex is male) would be a confounding factor in the study as their experience around early life/childhood, family relationships, housing options, employment and medical and mental health issues are often different than biological women due to societal transphobia. How transwomen reenter and reintegrate given the specific lived experience of transgender people is a topic for future study.

As recruitment progressed the yield was extremely slow-only three participants within the first six months from a single service provider, even with significant follow up and outreach. The study was close to failure based on a lack of participants. Due to the low rate of referrals and at the suggestion of some of the providers in the field, the criteria were expanded to include women who spent eight (8) months or more consecutively in county jail (the equivalent of doing time),

to expand the time frame to include women who had been back in the community between 3 and 36 months and to include women who had returned at 25 but had recently turned 26.

The expansion of criteria not only opened the potential pool, but had additional benefits to the scope of the research. The extension of the time frame allowed young women who had been home long enough to solidly reintegrate and to include those who had a violation of parole, done their time and come back home. Even with the wider pool a very small number were found to meet the criteria, and of those, several of them were referred more than once by different service providers, indicating to the researcher that the pool of eligible participants who were connected to reentry and service institutions is extremely limited.

There were 13 women in all that were interviewed. Three potential participants who contacted the researcher by text or voice message were not eligible for participation. One was a man, one was a woman in her 40s and the third was a young woman who had not been in jail for more than three weeks. All other referred or self-referred women fit the criteria for participation. One potential interview participant did not arrive for the interview, and could not be re-engaged.

Most of the women who were interviewed early in the process were contacted for a second interview but only one participant was able to meet for a second time, which occurred as a result of the participant being referred through a different organization. One participant was willing to speak with the author a second time, but was unable to coordinate schedules and childcare and then stopped responding to emails. Another woman expressed regret that her life was too complicated at the time of the request to be able to sit with the author a second time.

The women were overwhelmingly referred for participation by staff of their programs, with the exception of two participants who self-referred when they heard about the study through listserves (electronic email-based communication communities) about reentry. Participants generally used the Google™ voice mail/text option that was listed on the contact information, but a few used the reentryresearch@gmail.com email address. Some programs were the intermediaries between the researcher and the participants until the time of the interview, while other programs simply provided the author with a space and time where they thought the young woman was most likely to be there. In only one instance did the author come for an interview where the young woman did not show up and an alternate time was not found. Two organizations invited the author to come and spend some time hanging out in case there were any participants that fit the criteria. Neither of those visits yielded participants, but they were both helpful in engaging direct-service staff who would be most likely to refer potential participants.

Compensation

The interviews lasted between approximately 60 to 120 minutes. Participants were offered \$20 cash for their participation. Compensation was intended to compensate participants for their time and effort, but not be sufficient to present a coercion hazard.

Interview Settings

The interviews were all conducted in private rooms at the organizations that referred the women. Each room had walls that went all the way up to the ceiling, and were either offices, class or group rooms or conference rooms that were not in use at the time of the interview. They were

comfortable and generally quiet enough for clear tape recording and gave the interviewee the ability to speak freely without concern that staff or others might overhear the conversations.

HUMAN SUBJECTS

Most research activities that involve human subjects present some level of risk to the participants, and offer certain benefits. Qualitative research however, in contrast to interventions or evaluation research, is generally not geared toward the research participants gaining significantly from the interaction, although there are secondary gains that can occur, discussed below.

Potential Benefits Of The Proposed Research To The Subjects And Others

The data were elicited through a transactional process among the participants, researcher and the questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). There is some evidence that the process of research participation itself can give voice and support to underrepresented people, and that this in and of itself can be considered a direct benefit of research participation (Parson & Warner-Robbins, 2002). It is possible that the process of interviewing changed the participant's understanding of their previous and current experiences. The young women who participated may have felt a great sense of accomplishment, or relief from having an opportunity to 'tell their story' to someone. They might have been able to identify previous behavior/relationships/patterns of thought that have either been problematic or supportive in the past. They may also have a sense of accomplishment from participating in a study that may serve to help other young women who are returning from prison. They may have chosen to share with their Parole officers their

participation in this project. In fact, several of the women thanked the author for an opportunity to talk about their experiences and said that they felt good having been able to talk freely about some of their concerns and successes.

This report may be used by policy makers and program planners to better address the needs of young women returning from prison. The information may be shared with local and national stakeholders to inform future decisions. Thus, young women in the future may benefit directly by the outcomes of the research.

Risks to Participants

There were no physical risks to any participant in this study. However, engaging in dialogue about reentry experiences may have heightened anxiety or dismay about current or past experiences with family, substance use, relationships, incarceration or education. Thus, the research presented a possible risk of psychological distress. As part of the informed consent process, participants were informed prior to being interviewed of the possible risks. In the event of ongoing distress or discomfort, all participants received the names and phone numbers of programs available to them at no cost in their communities.

There is always a risk of disclosure of illegal activity when engaged in criminal justice-related research. The investigator sought and obtained a certificate of confidentiality from the National Institutes of Mental Health which further protects any information regarding illegal activity that the young women may have been engaging in at the time of the interview. Limits of confidentiality (harm to self, harm to others) were also explained, and reiterated as necessary

throughout the interviews. Interestingly, there is some conflict between the limits of confidentiality held by a practicing social worker, even a researcher, who remains a mandated reporter, and the requirements of a certificate of confidentiality for the researcher to vigorously protect the information obtained in a research project. The author unsuccessfully sought guidance from the National Association of Social Work but received useful guidance from a recognized social work ethics scholar (S. Marson, personal communication, February 22, 2011.) However, the pathway forward remained murky. In the end, the researcher was able to advise participants that certain information – as defined above, including child abuse—might require disclosure to authorities, and that the researcher would warn or stop the participant if she felt that the participant was close to disclosing information that would create a need for disclosure. In the end, none of the interviews precipitated these events. However, the strain between the ethical and legal responsibilities of a social worker (mandated reporter) and the requirements of ethical research, particularly when a Certificate of Confidentiality is being utilized is an area for more investigation and discussion in another forum and perhaps a topic to be tackled by practice and research ethics professionals.

Protection Against Risk

All participants were reminded at the time of interview that their participation was completely voluntary, and that their choice to stop the process would not interfere with any activities, referrals, or their parole process in any way. They were informed that there were no penalties for withdrawal from the study altogether, or a decision to not answer any particular question during the interview. The data safety plan (below) was shared with all participants through the informed consent process.

Data safety plan

Informed consents and receipts for compensation with participant names and contact information were kept separately from all research data in a notebook, and will be destroyed at the completion of the study. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The files were transcribed and then password protected, on a secure computer and in a locked file cabinet. Once the files were transcribed, they were password protected, and aliases were utilized and any identifiers were removed. All recorded material will be destroyed five years after the analysis is completed. All signed consents and receipts for the incentive were kept as required by the Certificate of Confidentiality, in the office of the dissertation chair, in a file that did not identify the study by name. Thus the participant's information was kept secure. This file was destroyed at the completion of the writing of the dissertation. Each young woman was given a number and ultimately an alias that was in no way related to her for the purposes of identification. No real names were used.

DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH

The data were analyzed by the researcher in an iterative process. As the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed by the author and early coding and analytic memos were created (Saldaña, 2009). Interviews were looked at first for repetitive themes, and the interview instrument was adjusted based on the first five interviews that were conducted. While a computer program such as NUD*IST and ATLAS.ti were considered, they were ultimately rejected for this study. This was in no small part due to the small sample size and the author's

relative inexperience with both the technology and the methodology. These technological tools appeared to the author to be better applied to large data sets rather than to small single interviews of 60-120 minutes. After some experimentation with NUD*IST the author experienced a much richer relationship with the data by hand coding and thus decided to stay with this approach.

As will be explained in greater detail in the chapter following, questions relating to historical trauma were truncated due to the impact the subject had on the interviews. Additional questions about the women's thoughts about their futures, their views about their own strengths and what they would want to tell a young woman in their situation were added to ensure that enough time was spent on strengths rather than on risks. In vivo and thematic coding were utilized early on to identify and highlight important data clusters (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009) as first cycle coding. Codes fell into broad categories of strengths and barriers, which were then further delineated by type such as relationships, system issues, and age-related. Gender as a separate code did not emerge, predominantly as the young women did not identify their gender as a specific concern that was easily separable from other issues. That and the homophily of the sample—that all the participants were women and thus their answers were seen through that lens—made a separate code of gender seem redundant and forced to the author.

As the interviews continued and then were completed, the coding became more specific and differentiated. For several areas, relationships in particular, matrices were utilized as a tool to organize and analyze the data for finer analysis. Themes were identified and elaborated through code lists and cross-referencing, and later both pattern and focused coding were used to condense and make the data more coherent (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009).

Ultimately, for the purpose of this study, the author decided to focus on those themes that had either not been previously explored in relationship to young women's reentry, or which were so pervasive and deep that they declared themselves central to the analysis.

The author additionally was keenly aware in the analysis that given the small sample, that identities must be protected and thus creating profiles or even creating descriptions of the participants with too many details might present a danger of inadvertent identity exposure. All of the women were given aliases rather than using numbers in this report so that the reader would be able to better track and connect to the data and the young women's stories. However, the chart with demographic information on page 98 is purposefully devoid of certain information that the author was concerned might allow for recognition of participants.

CHAPTER 8: FINDINGS

*Right now what's important to me is staying out of jail for the rest of my life, handling this parole thing, going through the program, staying clean ... 'cause I'm not **trying** to go back to jail.*

--Marie

Like all cohorts of incarcerated women, these thirteen young people presented with significant risk factors, both mutable and immutable. These risk factors (e.g. race/ethnicity, age, educational history, age at first arrest) are well documented to have an impact on the likelihood of reintegration success. The first part of this section lays out the risks that were present, but will not look at risk in detail as these issues have been covered extensively and more comprehensively in the empirical literature discussed in the previous section. The risks are indicated, and illustrative quotes from the young women will be utilized where relevant, but the predominance of findings will focus on the areas of strengths that emerged, as that is where the most textured and rich learning lay in this study. A table of salient participant characteristics (p. 99) was created but due to the very small sample in the study, a more robust profile of each woman was not created, so as to protect confidentiality.

IMMUTABLE RISKS

Consistent with the literature on women in prison, the participants were predominantly women of color, (n=11) incarcerated or detained on primarily violent charges. The few drug offenses were confined to sale or possession. In the main, study participants were from low socio-economic backgrounds. However, five of the participants identified that they came from middle-class backgrounds defined as having at least one parent who worked full-time and did not consider

themselves to be poor, but three of those five who had more stable economic circumstances had significant de-stabilizing experiences that included homelessness, sexual abuse/assault, rejection or loss of a care giver that made their childhood economically and socially unstable.

Personal histories were replete with family chaos, loss and betrayal, with mothers who were often in the street in the grips of addiction and fathers who were dead, in prison, absent or abusive. Marie, who had one of the more extreme examples of home-life chaos described her father's relationship to her in this way:

My dad used to rape me. I don't even call it rape. I used to just give it to him freely cause I didn't want to get beat up and you know, he used to hit hard.

The women in the sample were less substance-involved and mentally ill than predicted by the literature as discussed in a prior chapter and their educational achievement was slightly higher than expected—while it was not a surprise that one had earned a high school diploma prior to incarceration, and ten had obtained a GED either while incarcerated or after release and one was in process, the fact that two had obtained a college degree since their release and one was taking college courses was impressive.

Racial/Ethnic Identity: In keeping with the general data on women in prison in New York State, women of color are disproportionately represented in this sample. Of the thirteen respondents, four self-identified as Black, three as Black/Hispanic, two as Hispanic, non-Black, two as White/Hispanic and two as White/non-Hispanic.

Age: As stated previously, a person enters adult criminal justice institutions in New York State if they have committed a crime above the age of 16. Eleven women entered adult prison or jail. Two women began their incarceration at age 15 in the juvenile justice system and aged up into

the adult system. At the time of study participation, the women ranged in age from 18-26, and the mean age was 22.5. Their age at last incarceration ranged between 15 and 24, with the mean age of 19 and a mode of 20.

Incarceration Charges: As expected, and in keeping with the national trends and data the majority of women were incarcerated for either violence or substance-related charges. A violent charge indicates that either force was used or there was a threat of force. These charges included attempted murder, assault, armed robbery, robbery, attempted gang assault. Table 1 below indicates the highest level charge (e.g. top charge) that each woman reported at their last incarceration.

Incarceration history: Given the age of the participants, it was expected that their incarceration histories would not be extensive. Only two women had done at least one significant jail sentence for prior offenses before the last incarceration in prison, two indicated that they had been previously arrested as an adult but had only been detained until arraignment. Only one participant had a previous arrest as a juvenile delinquent; with the exception of the two who were charged as Juvenile Offenders, everyone else had their first arrest past the age of 18.

Length of incarceration: The women represented a wide range of time on the inside from 8 months to 8 years. The mean time served was just shy of 3 years (34 months) with a mode of 2 years. Of note, two women spent over 8 months in the local jail. Those two women were the only ones in the sample who did not have felonies and who spent their entire time in at the local jail rather than at an upstate prison. As indicated previously, prisons are generally located far away from home communities and often create more isolated existences for inmates. Jail in contrast are far more transient, holding inmates for a range of times from 24 hours to 3 years for those awaiting trial, and hold in New York City a separate population of sentenced inmates who do

‘City time’ of less than one year. Both women who were jailed were awaiting trial. The differential experience of jail versus prison will be highlighted in the various sections where any differences emerged from the data.

Table 1: Top Charges at Time of Last Incarceration

CHARGE	N	%
Violent Charges		
Attempted Murder	1	8%
Assault (including attempted gang assault)*	5	38%
Robbery	2	15%
Armed Robbery	1	8%
Non-Violent Charges		
Drug sales/possession	4	31%
Burglary	1	8%
Larceny	1	8%
Undisclosed	1	8%
N is greater than 13 as women may have had more than one charge		

Parenting: Nationally, 55.4% of women under the age of 24 were parents at the time of incarceration. Five (33%) study participants were mothers at the time of the interview and only one had an additional child after release. Two of the five mothers did not have custody of one of

their children at the time of the interview one gave birth in prison and thus never had a separation from her child. All of the children were young (under the age of 7) at the time of their reentry as is to be expected given the age of the participants. None of the women identified that they were pregnant at the time of the interview.

Community Factors:

neighborhood in Brooklyn accounting for five of the 13 women's originating point. Two were living in other parts of New York State at the time of arrest but were in New York City at the time of the interview, and one had recently moved to New York City from the South just prior to her arrest and conviction. The young women grew up during the height of the crack epidemic and experienced the destabilizing effects of that scourge—concentrated poverty, high levels of crime, peak child welfare involvement, drug abuse, violence and a lack of stabilizing institutions (e.g. banks, grocery stores). As Annie says:

Brooklyn, is not, as you know, is not the best environment, the best area to live and raise a child. I...I look at it now, so much negative vibe, lot of gang violence a lot of drugs and not so much positiveness I would say.

Trauma: Nationally, it is documented that upwards of 60% of women in prison and jail have had at least one and often multiple trauma (Ditton, 1999; Covington 2001; Widom, 1999.) The women interviewed for this project bore out the literature regarding prevalence of complex and sustained traumatic events in the lives of women in the criminal justice system. As part of the initial interview protocol, the young women were asked about their childhoods—how they grew up, what their family lives were like. One of the fact patterns that emerged almost immediately was the overwhelming commonality of strained and unstable relationships with their mothers (three women referred to their mothers as 'crack hos'), absent fathers (even when physically

present), loneliness, emotional neglect, rape/sexual abuse, and chaos in their homes and neighborhoods. The pattern was so prevalent that saturation was reached by the seventh interview and the theme was no longer pursued. In fact, the prevalence of trauma is so well known even to the participants, that Tracee identified it spontaneously in her interview:

If you look at a lot of people who was in jail, our patterns is always mostly the same. They was raped, they was abused, they was an only child, they were lonely...its all the same pattern. So, that's sad the statistics.

In addition to reaching saturation and confirming the literature, an interesting dynamic developed in the interview process that required some analysis and reconfiguration of the inquiry. The participants appeared to know how to talk about their trauma – it was almost expected that a researcher/social worker would reach for their histories, and the information was easily accessible. However, what was sacrificed to this narrative was both enough time to investigate their current situation in the here and now of reentry and reintegration but also their strengths and capacities that allowed them to survive all of their tribulations. Once it became clear to the investigator, through consultation with a mentor, that the participants might in fact be more comfortable disclosing historical experiences but that new territory for the purposes of this inquiry was being lost, the topic became foreclosed.

Substance Use and Mental Illness: In contrast to both national and local studies, the women interviewed here presented with relatively low rates of diagnosed mental health problems (Teplin et al., 2002). Only two participants identified that they had been diagnosed and of them only one was actively in treatment. The one not in treatment had been given a diagnosis of ADHD as a child and her mother had stopped her medication years ago due to the side effects. The lack of identified psychopathology does not however reflect what may in fact be a much higher

prevalence of undiagnosed conditions such as PTSD, depression, or bipolar disorder. This study did not seek to diagnose or screen for such conditions.

In contrast, 66% of the women indicated that they were either habitual users of substances or were struggling with addictions. The overwhelming substance of choice was marijuana alone (33%) or marijuana and alcohol (13%) but two women had struggled with crack and cocaine and one had a heroin addiction. Most of the participants who identified any substance use and who did not use anything other than marijuana or alcohol were required to attend a substance abuse program while incarcerated, and almost universally it was found to be useless. As Angie stated:

First of all, going to those drug programs all a waste of your time, you could be doing so much different things with your time, drug programs, no one takes those things seriously, especially like people in my age, we're just like I'm not a crackhead!

Some of the women could draw connections between their traumatic experiences and their resulting incarceration. For some, substances—both sales and use—were an intervening variable as defined in graph A on page 35 (Pathways to Delinquency). Tracee talked about the intersection of the trauma of her first child dying from SIDS and connecting to her mother who had been a crack addict for many years and with whom she had lived on and off in her youth, her decision to try crack and her subsequent decision to stop:

This is when I started smoking crack. This is gonna sound real crazy. Psychologically I don't really understand. So my mother smoke crack, right, and I always wanted to know what the hell is in this damn drug that got you smoking like this, that got you proposition me for dudes for crack that you smoking that I ain't even smoking and stuff like that. What's in the drug? I said Mommy, you know I smoke, right? She said "what! She said girl stop lying! I got \$40 right now.... My mother got money 12 o'clock that night from welfare. She spent that whole check on me. AND she went outside and fucked a couple guys, sucked a couple dick... I said ma, here it is that we're smoking, and you'll spend every single dime in your pocket to smoke with me, but there was times that I needed a pair of panties or a pair of socks that would cost no more than \$10, less than a bag!. You'd rather give me drugs than give me nourishment. So I guess that was one of the

reasons I stopped smoking too. But I STARTED smoking because I guess I kinda wanted to understand how my mother did what she did.

Tracee's experience of wanting to understand her mother's inability to mother her properly brought her into the cycle of drug abuse, but her understanding that her mother would spend money to have her as a drug partner rather than take care of her as a daughter helped her get clean and stay clean once released.

Table 2: Participant Characteristics							
NAME	AGE	AGE IN	TIME SERVED	Charge	TIME OUT	CHILD	RACE/ ETHNICITY
Annie	22	16	8 years	Attempted murder	1.5 years	N	Hispanic
Bea	22	20	2 year	Drug possession/sale	4 months	Y	Black/Hisp
Lisa	18	16	1.5 years	Larceny	4 months	Y	White
Marie	22	19	2 years +	Armed rob/possession drugs	3 months	Y	Black/Hisp
TJ	19	18	8 months	Attempted gang assault	3 months	N	Black
Angie	25	15	8 years	Assault	3 years	N	Black/Hisp
Tracee	25	23	1 year	Assault/robbery	16 months	Y	Black
Jessenia	26	24	10 months	Drug possession/sale	1 year	N	White/Hisp
Alicia	23	21	2 years	Drug possession/sale	1 year	N	White/Hisp
Shondra	23	18	5 years	Robbery 1	1.5 years	N	Black
Aliya	22	20	2 flat	Assault	8 months	N	Black
Michele	25	20	2 years +	Drug sale	3 years	N	White
Jennifer	23	20	18 months	Burglary	2/6 years	Y	Hispanic

Length of Time Out

Three years is often used as the benchmark of success for reentry in the analysis of recidivism. Recent analysis on a cohort of women parolees from 1994 indicates that 58% of women returning home are arrested within 3 years. Thirty-eight percent face reconviction and 30% return to prison (Deschenes, Owen & Crow, 2007). Three years provides for enough time to measure arrest, prosecution and re-incarceration, and takes into account the longer-term reintegration and stability necessary for true success. By any measure, the women in this project were well on their way to being successful. The women spanned the full range of time home in the community from 3 to 36 months, with the mean time out in the community of 15 months, nearly halfway to the point of success. Two women were out for three years at the time of the interview, one for more than two years, five for one to two years and five were out for less than one year (see table 2 Participant Characteristics, p. 99). One participant was re-arrested, plead guilty and did time on a charge of violating an order of protection (the interview took place after her return from her second incarceration) and one woman reported being picked up by the police since her release from prison, but that no charges were filed against her. Although the sample is too small for a differential analysis to be generalizable, where there are any differences in those women who will be considered in early reintegration, or home for less than 12 months, from those women who have been home for more than 12 months, those will be highlighted. Overall, the participants in this study were managing to successfully stay away from re-arrest and detention. The study does not indicate if the participants were successful at avoiding all illegal activity however.

USE OF TIME

As discussed in the literature section, the early conception of prisons were those of penitentiaries—where it was expected or hoped that the incarcerated would take the time to reflect, in a monastic environment, to repent and to ultimately rehabilitate (Foucault, 1977). The structures of modern prisons and jails do not encourage or even support reflection—they are noisy, chaotic, dank or cold and there is little guidance on how to use the time inside. However, several of the participants indicated that they did just that—they DID their time in a way that promoted growth and allowed for the connections that will be discussed in great detail below. The reader is cautioned here—not every woman or man who is incarcerated is able to or chooses to use the time for reflection and change. The data is culled from a small sample who showed a tremendous ability to grasp the opportunity from amidst the misery of circumstance. It is not known what allowed these particular women to do this, and what can provide sustenance and nurturing of the instinct to do so for other young women. But their expressions of growth on the inside created the framework of strength that will be used going forward.

Time and how inmates choose to and are allowed to use it while incarcerated is an under-studied sociological and criminological phenomenon. The initial literature reviewed for the project did not cover how inmates utilize their time on the inside, as this was not an anticipated theme of importance. Additionally, there is some, but not much about this topic in the sociological, criminological and psychological literature outside of how women adjust to prison, particularly on the level and number of disciplinary infractions (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2001). Few studies have connected better adjustment in prison to lesser likelihood of re-offending and those that have focus on male inmates (Zamble & Poporino, 1990). A more recent study, while of

female drug offenders, show that better adjustment in prison may simply reflect a greater comfort with chaos in life, and does not impact (i.e. lower) recidivism (Loper, 2002.) A study of the relationship of time in prison to the level of infraction recommends that future research look to what programmatic factors can and will support better reintegration, implying that better programming will lead to better use of time for women (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2001). Time is both highly coveted and the loathed by inmates during incarceration—coveted for those moments when time is owned and defined by the individuals in spite of the system of control and loathed for the way in which it is often the enemy of sanity and identity (Scarce, 2002; Wahidin & Moss, 2004). Wahidin & Moss, in a study of elder women in English prisons state “the routine of daily activities in prison comprise a single rational plan which has been designed to fulfill the official aims of the institution rather than the needs of individuals.” (2004, p.87) While this is true, the women in this study found ways to invert that structure and to make of it what they would.

Growth and Self Awareness Inside

The literature on adjustment to prison often refers to the concept of “doing your own time”, or not getting drawn in to the drama of the other inmates, or as conceptualized by Scarce (2002), as doing their individual time – a way to manipulate the little personal time an inmate has while incarcerated. Personal time is an oddly scarce resource in prison—much of the time is defined by institutional requirements—chow, programs, count—and even external actors such as visits and medical appointments, are out of the control of the inmate. The ability to own time is difficult and as often the most precious commodity. The literature on how time can be used as a productive resource for women in prison is sparse, although there has been more focus by

correctional officials on what is termed the enhancement model (Tripodi et al., 2011) which looks at how psychological factors can be addressed to minimize problems during the incarceration and help women reduce criminogenic factors for reentry. As stated earlier, many of the women in this sample indicated that the experience of incarceration was a time to step out of the stream of their life trajectory and opened an opportunity to take stock of who they were and where they were headed. This is not to imply that incarceration opens that door to all or most inmates, or that the institutional structures support and create those opportunities. It seems in fact, that these women were able to take respite and insight in *spite* of the conditions inherent in prison and jail. Here several of them discuss how they used their time. Jessenia, who had done a long jail bid prior to her last prison term on a felony drug charge said:

I got locked up, I decided to change my life. I didn't want to take no chances no more you know? ... When I got arrested this last time I worked hard this last time to get my GED so that I could get a good job, and stop selling drugs.

Tracee, who was a young mother who had drifted toward the street and drugs after a rape by a family member, and did over a year in prison. About doing time she said:

So I needed to be away from it to really take a good look at myself. Like who do you really want to be? Do you really want to be a crackhead like your mother? Lord knows that's not what I want, and that was a real reality check.

Lisa who, at 18, was the youngest participant, said

I gotta remind myself to take everything that they told me and use it to survive out here. Because IN THERE (prison) is not a place for me.

TJ was the only woman interviewed who was in a prison alternative at the time of the interview. Based on the facts of her case, she was concerned that she was going to get a long sentence, and

reported that while she was in jail, she prepared herself for the likelihood of doing significant state time. When she talked about what jail was like, she said:

When the lights go out at night you got nothing but time. Just you and your time. I just said to myself, stay to yourself, do your time, and get it over with. Ain't nothing else to do.... I felt like I failed myself—I was supposed to make my mother proud. But I am NOT a statistic. I'm TJ.

She did not have a good benchmark of her case for many months and was able to keep her head down do her own time, not get involved in what she called “jailhouse drama” and earn a jail alternative with the potential for getting a youthful offender status, which would result in ultimately a sealed record.

The awareness of time while incarcerated and that it can and ultimately is up to the individual to use it was surprisingly present in this group. Jennifer, who was detained in the local jail for 18 months, talked about her prior life as an exotic dancer, being gang-involved, and trying to support her young son prior to her arrest and detention. When she was in she realized what road she was on and wanted to make a different choice. She stopped smoking marijuana for the first time since she was 12 while in jail, and says:

Well, right now, before I was in custody I dropped out of school. I was in love you know, with my first love (smiling) and I wasn't really into school so now is where I feel like you know after being incarcerated I learned to appreciate things a lot, it opened my eyes a lot so, like, as far as education, I believe that's like SO important in life and I don't want my son growing up like, “my mom was a dancer, you know she's uneducated” I want something to fall back on in the future. So I'm in school here.

The decision to get sober in jail and to re-evaluate her choices around education and financial support were driven by her feelings about being a mother and hoping to give her son a sense of pride. Jennifer did all 18 months in the local jail, a highly chaotic and fairly un-structured

environment that is even less apt to provide support for growth and reflection due to the churning nature of the population and the uncertainty of a person's length of stay.

Gaining Ground: Obtaining Skills and Benchmarks

Some of the women discussed specific opportunities—education, vocational training or a program that they took advantage of, and how those programs helped to move the needle for them on their life trajectory. The women in jail had different experiences of doing their time—jail by its very nature is far more transient, and turbulent. The average length of stay for detainees is less than 10 days—bail, release on their own recognizance, probation, jail alternatives—all contribute to the revolving door of jail and the lack of regularized programming. The two young women who spent more than eight months in the local jail had very little in the way of formal program opportunities—one was in general population and not in any specialized housing, the other spent some time in seclusion for fighting and then on the medical unit for an infection, further limiting her already slim choices for learning. High school is available but not mandatory for anyone over 18, and one of them already had finished high school at the time of her incarceration, although the other attended school while in jail. Thus they were not provided with the same opportunities for skill attainment.

Annie was incarcerated at 15, and did 8 of her 3-10 year sentence. She started in the juvenile justice system and moved up to adult prison at 18. She talked about how angry she was about the length of sentence she received, but that over time she used the therapy and resources to change who she was and what she aspired to. She was able to, over time, take advantage of the resources

available in regard to education, training and support:

At Tryon (juvenile justice facility) I'd gotten my GED, so and then, Albion (prison), they offer college courses, so I took college courses...At one point I just came to accept it and do what I had to do to get out. That was like one of the benefits out of it. I took trade, vocational, the college part, mainly, like my support, my therapy that, the way I—thinking about things that made me try... It wasn't a great experience but I learned a lot out of it.

The ability to settle in and take stock of herself AND her situation radiated out to her ability to shift her responses to her mother, with whom she had a volatile and unstable relationship. She describes here how she was able to take things more in stride rather than be reactive:

Back then I would've been like, what are you talking about? And now I just sit back, calm and relaxed like, Mom, are you serious? You're gonna argue with me about that? Whereas back then I woulda been like, I hate you and cut the bullshit, you know?

She was able to make different choices about how to respond to negative relationships, even those with deep roots and long histories, no small feat for any young adult, but especially impressive for a young woman who had not lived under her mother's roof since she was a teenager.

Most prisons have some sort of training or educational programs, many of which are only available based on good behavior while incarcerated. How the young women experienced themselves shift and grow through some of these programs indicates not only age-appropriate expected development, but a hunger for change opportunities Angie participated in a college initiative while in prison and then went on to get her bachelor's degree right after she returned home. The opportunity to be a student and not a prisoner on the inside and the exposure to new ideas radically shifted her perception of herself. She says:

This is where I stand in relation to all these ideas out in the world, and this is how I want to think about my place in the world now as a citizen, as a umm, as a sister, as a daughter, as a student, and so that was never open to me before and so I was always I always saw myself in relation to all those things that were around me in Brownsville, so I was that girl who always fought, I was that girl who always did this. And now I had a wide range of things I could place myself in relation to and so I thought about myself a little differently. so I didn't have to be that girl who fought all that time, I didn't have to be that girl who did all that time in prison and did all these bad things and blaseblaseblah, I wasn't that girl anymore.

Angie grasped the opportunity presented to her to be that student, to open her mind and world view and to expand beyond the known world she had come from. Later in the interview she talked about how disappointing it was to have programs come in to prison and have them read street literature or books about urban experiences and prison, and questioned the base assumptions that people “like her” would only want to have their current reality reflected and not expanded.

Marie's time was informed primarily by a boot camp program focused on substance abuse. Some recent literature indicates that substance abuse interventions have a positive impact on recidivism for women (Tripodi, et al., 2011), and her experience may bear this out. She describes here the benefits she felt she gained from participation in the program:

Well in (Prison Program) they prepare you a lot because they got um networking and um, that did help me out too. They teach you time management, they teach you how to be responsible, how to teamwork, they teach you how to respect, they teach you how to exercise and stay focused and stay healthy...they MAKE you practice this stuff, they MAKE you get ready for the outside, they MAKE you do this stuff. That's what the program is for, to help you stay out of jail.

She took the information from the program and changed how she thought, not just what she did. She spent a significant amount of her prison time in a boot-camp substance use alternative,

available only to women under 35. It may well be that in-prison substance abuse alternatives are better structured to prepare women for release, given the technologies of substance abuse treatment, and how much they focus on people places and things and understand the often arrested development of their clients due to the impact of substance use.

RELATIONSHIPS

Time outside of their chaotic lives in and of itself was not sufficient as they described it for the unfolding and transformation, but was intricately linked to how they did their time and the connections they built and continue to build in the community. Understanding the importance of relationships to women in general and to the reentry process specifically was a critical part of framing the interviews and the data analysis. As stated earlier, relational theory posits that relationships are central to women's growth and development and that connectivity rather than individuation creates strength and resiliency (Miller, 1991). Thus, themes of relationships were mined with particular attention to how the women sought and used relationships inside and outside to support their growth, development and success.

RELATIONSHIPS IN PRISON

As is supported by both the theory and the literature, the women sought out connection while incarcerated. The data confirmed the literature about the relational nature of women's prisons, and revealed relationships that mimicked family structures, that involved love, sex and romantic bonds, and that developed into important friendships. It is important to look at the impact of these within the framework of the women's emerging adulthood, and in the context of their early chaotic lives where intimacy was often shattered and not to be trusted. Emerging adulthood is a

period of continued social growth and definition, where the self develops in contrast and in relation to one's close social networks (Barry et al., 2009). For some women, the homosocial nature of prison created an experience of a supportive network, as brutal and horrific as prison and jail can be.

Friends

Several of the participants discussed discovering that their friends at home and in the streets with whom they had been tightly connected, essentially disappeared upon incarceration. The fragility of these connections were added a level of strain to the time they spent in prison/jail. Tracee took the time to realize that friends that she thought she had and were important to her before she went in were nowhere to be found while she was in need upstate, and sought out women who could and would help her:

I kinda found out that I didn't really have no friends, I didn't have no family members helping me out so I basically fended for my own up there. So when I came home it was kinda like a rude awakening, it was time to wake up because its like you run around with these friends, and now where's everybody at? You upstate by yourself. No commissary,¹⁶ no nothing I mean, I ate, and stuff like that but I said it just so happened that because I was so young instead of me getting into problems, I kinda went to people who was positive.

The understanding that her previous social network was occasioned on being available to smoke and hang out and that finding new connections was vital to her survival and change. The women interviewed were able to articulate important relationships developed both in prison and on the outside.

¹⁶ Commissary in prison is how inmates get lotions, soaps, hair products, extra food—the 'niceties' of life that can make a big difference. Commissary accounts can be set up through money earned inside but are usually provided through relatives on the outside.

Angie talked about looking for women who would have her back in the event of trouble in the prison. Having come from a history of group homes and juvenile justice institutions, friends or associates who would be available for protection was a keen coping strategy that she brought forward into prison. She says:

Its like you just know a person who is down with drama and the person who isn't really so down for drama. And you don't really want that person who is not down for drama because there is ALWAYS a chance of having that kind of drama. So you don't want to deal with a person who is going to handle it lightly because in the end, if you handle drama lightly, there's gonna be an issue, you're going to have an issue. A funny thing is also about adult prison and being young in adult prison which in a woman's prison anyway, its not gangs—its not crips, its not Bloods, that's not what it is at all. Its families. So you find someone, a older woman who is just like, that's my jail daughter. That's my jail brother/sister, that's my, you know brother as far as like females that act...act like guys, and you so you got like that's my jail dad, that's my jail mom. And so, it's a family.

Angie recognized the currency of relationships within the environment, and quickly adapted her style of connecting to fit where she was.

Annie discussed how connecting to the older women in prison helped get her mind organized for her release and how she brought the support forward internally when she found herself struggling during the early part of her reentry journey:

When I was inside, it was basically, the older people, that have been here, done this, you know. Focus on what you really want to, you can—basically say like, you want something, you strive for it, you get out. You get—you get something positive out of it. So, but what I felt then, I was like, do what you gotta do, do the right thing and get out of here, don't come back. You're not gonna come back. Okay? And when I came up here (program in the community) it was like, oh, structure and things. So, I maybe looked at what they had told me if you want this, if you want this really bad, you gotta make it work.

The strength of the relationships in prison, as a means to cope with the day to day monotony,

strain and loneliness appear to have been high for many participants. An interesting question, opened here by Michele, is whether the friendships young women make in prison are analogous to the intensity and longevity of those that are made in other settings such as college during this age period. She talks about the power of the relationships with others in prison as a support and learning experience and others echoed this sentiment. For Michele, the moment of leaving the prison after three years was frightening primarily because of the disconnection from her previous relationships and connection to her prison ones. She also recognized that for some women the loss of the friendships might cause a pull back to the prison environment, something she struggled with in early reentry:

I do remember being really sad that I was leaving behind some really close friends and probably the closest friends I've ever had were in prison...you're in an environment where you're all sort of its survival and ... umm, it was a coming of age experience, so I grew up in that place in a way that I didn't if I went to college, or maybe I would have if I went to college, I don't know, like it was that time period in my life where I was really, really fortunate to meet some really great friends and umm didn't want to leave them behind because I had never experienced life in that way before. ... so walking out into a world where you had been isolated from and your contact had been 2 hours on a visit with a family member of a friend or letters from a friend, it's really different leaving and going out where you're not really sure who you can trust, or who knows you you're not sure if you can be yourself. I was like really scared...I wanted to go back all the time, I mean, you learned how to cope with the environment there, so what was terrible and awful and shocking now to me at the time wasn't so awful because I coped with it and dealt with it, and to have the friendships and experiences that I had, I wanted that back.

Friendships created during young adulthood are often be long-standing and meaningful—relationships made by young adults in college, the armed services—all situations that are concentrated experiences, and that can bond people together. This is not to draw any analogies between college or the service and the experience of prison, but that the age group itself may lend itself to heightened feelings of connection to peers who are sharing a specific life passage.

As discussed in the literature review, these can present a pull back to prison, but did not appear to be at play for the women in this sample.

Staff

For some women, there were correctional or programmatic staff who made a tremendous impact on them. For some, the idea that staff in prison or jail can be supportive is at total odds with the roles of the system. It may however, be more of an indication of the openness that young women have to seeking adult supports, or an interaction between the older staff's desire to be change facilitators and having a younger inmate to work with (see section on Parole in the implications chapter for a fuller exploration of this themes.) Bea had become very close to a counselor at her prison who she identified as being the one person who “*helped with my self-esteem. I was just so...I don't know, I didn't know I was so depressed. She just helped me clear my head and think right*” and Annie found several staff in prison, both juvenile and adult that she identified as having had faith in her and assisting with her ability to grow. Jennifer, who was in jail for 18 months identified a Corrections Officer with whom she bonded and why the relationship was important to her at a time in her life when she was in great pain:

I had a really good relationship with a CO. and he was married, it wasn't like I liked him or anything, it was like a friendship. Whenever I had a problem he always happened to be there, so he kinda like, kinda like started caring for me. Which of course you're not supposed to do because there's a line between work and inmates. But he helped me out a lot. He tried fighting for me. You're like wow, you're surrounded by strangers, why should they care, and here you have this man who works here and he's actually trying to fight for me, he's defending me. Its like wow, there's actually people who care. That impacted me a lot because I didn't have nobody. I had just my mom. I didn't have my son visiting me, I refused to have him come to that setting and um...I needed somebody you know, I needed somebody to care for me...so HE was there everyday, so it was like (fist in hand slap) he was my brother, defending me, I felt cared for.

Jennifer highlights the vulnerability of many of the women who are incarcerated—even those in jail, who are cut off from their support networks and how those relationships can potentially be supportive but can also be exploitive.

Bea found a strong relationship with a counselor in her prison who she came to love as a friend and mentor, and who she identified as someone who challenged her, connected to her and that she allowed to help her. She said

The only person that ever explained to me about making changes was my counselor. I really had low self-esteem, I was depressed, but she would tell me all the time that there is so much more to life. ... I think that she is the only person I had an open mind to understand what life is about what I wanted to do. To this day I always think about her.

Bea understood that she had difficulty with other counselors and could not identify precisely what was special about the relationship she had with this particular staff, but knew that she had made an important bond, and more importantly, was actively trying to stay in touch with the staff member after release, even though the rules prohibit the staff from keeping relationships with former inmates until parole is finished. Bea's ability to recognize what she received—someone who saw something good in her, and helped her see something new and good in herself—was an important lever for her change. She was given the support and guidance to make a decision to go to a mother/daughter program on release with a lot of strict rules, rather than go back to her family and risk being in her old environment. She credited the relationship with this counselor to helping her make that choice.

Romantic/Sexual Relationships

While the phenomenon remains for the most part unstudied, it is well documented that women in prison form relationships that are romantic, sexual, familial and supportive (Casey-Acevedo & 146

Bakken, 2001; Severance, 2004.) Most of the women volunteered readily the connections they fostered and sought out for themselves while incarcerated, and the longer the time in, the more likely the woman was to seek out relationships with other women. For those women who found romantic and sexual connections, (nine of the 13), it was often cited as an important survival strategy. Survival here is conceptualized as both physical survival— women often obtained commissary, extra food, protection, and other material gains from being in sexual relationships with other inmates. But they also identified the importance of those bonds and connections for emotional and mental survival—someone to do their time with, someone to cry or laugh with, to look forward to and fight the boredom and routine nature of institutional life. Both of these needs are intertwined. No relationships were identified as wholly exploitive on the side of the other women or by the participants themselves. Some women were surprised by the experience and most pleasantly. It did not appear to create fundamental identity dislocation around sexuality. Of the women who were interviewed, three (24%) were self-identified lesbians. The rest did not identify in any way – straight, bi or lesbian. For some participants, the experience of being with women in a sexual/romantic connection provided clarification and permission to explore and be who they wanted to be, inside and outside of prison or jail. See this exchange between the researcher and Michele:

MICHELE: umm you know, I did have a girlfriend while I was there, it was also a coming of age experience (smile) and I think that when there is little else to trust or rely on, it feels safe and it feels probably safer in some ways than a m/f relationship and the co-dependency is a little deeper I think sometimes, especially with the younger women, like you saw, almost every incident that I saw as far as people acting out or getting tickets or getting into trouble, or, just anything, it's like in the regular world relationships and romantic relationships affect so deeply decisions that we make and the things we do, it's the same in there except its ramped up because it's your security blanket and it's the one person you think you can rely on so
RESEARCHER Had you ever been with a woman before you went in?
MICHELE: yeah! In sort of growing up, you know, it was something I had experienced

before and I wasn't sure about it, so I was sort of thinking that'll pass and I was primarily dating boys, guys from HS and college but having the experience in being in an environment that was primarily homosexual for the most part, um, it was actually great because I didn't feel the sense of shame or um you know that you would feel in regular society. It was so accepted that it was like okay, I can further explore this and it's still ok, ummm...I think it was a really positive part of the experience. I think it was really, I think, I think yeah, definitely.

RESEARCHER: and coming home, were you able to integrate and be freer in your choices about who you are as a sexual human and a romantic human?

MICHELE: definitely. I think so. I think it gave me a lot of strength to say, either hey, I'm gonna be you know I'm gay, I'm bi or I'm not or I 'm gonna change what I wanna be, and another I am or I'm not or I'm not anything. I think it gave me a lot more strength to make those decisions and accept myself, um, being in that type of environment, so that was definitely one thing that was very positive about the experience.

Michele here identified how she took the experience of being in a homosocial world, where same-sex relationships were normative and accepted, and integrated it for herself to help navigate her way on the outside.

Going in to this study, it was an open question as to how same-gender relationships that evolved in prison for women might impact their sense of who they were as sexually developing young adults. It does not appear to have had a negative impact on the young women who disclosed that they had first-time experiences during their incarceration. When asked how being with women upstate impacted how she viewed herself now Bea said:

*I don't even know. I mean it's different from dealing with a man because with women we're emotional together so it was like a totally different thing. At first it was uncomfortable 'cause I'm just like, ew, and I **have** a pussy, but I had experienced it...but it was not something that I even picture myself doing, even the day that I went to (prison) I never seen myself a year down the line doing it with a girl...I didn't even see it coming and I enjoyed it. Like we had fun. I was, even at time when I didn't have a visitor or I couldn't go home just talking to her or going to meet her outside kept that off my mind that people not coming to seeing me, not gonna love me, not being bored, so I don't know. It was a good experience. ... We had emotional conversations about family situations, I mean how do I felt being there, what you gonna do when you come home, are we gonna stay in contact, like that.*

The relationship she had with another woman opened a question for Bea about if she would be continuing relationships with women on the outside, but in a way that was not anxiety provoking or concerning for her. She also identified here that this relationship kept her from dwelling on how lonely doing time often is, and to fend off the boredom.

Tracee was more upfront about the survival aspects of getting into a sexual relationship with another inmate in prison—her desire to eat and have access to commissary items—as well as the benefit of boosting her self-esteem and to connect to another person emotionally. It was also her first experience with a woman:

I'm not gonna lie. I had no commissary, I was hungry, the girl liked me and she was keeping my belly filled. So....I was dykey (laughing)... like I said I wasn't really gay, but I was lonely...it made the time go by... I looked forward to seeing her at rec...you know it was nice to hear someone say 'oh you look nice today' like....stuff like that. I guess it made the time go by just knowing that somebody was there, somebody to talk to and I don't know, someone to cry on. So... yeah that's why I had a relationship.

The complexity of feelings about having been with a woman, the reasons she chose to engage and what she ultimately got from the relationship were echoed by several other participants. There are multiple reasons why she got into the relationship, and several primary gains (food, comfort, sense of self) and unexpected gains including making the time go by easier, it created some internal stimulus for doing time (looking forward to going to recreation) that might not have been quite the same if the connection was just a friendship. The women took the support and connection available to them and utilized it to its fullest, and did not appear to carry forward shame or regret about the relationships.

Relationships Post-Release

Most of the women returned to the community with fragile or non-existent social networks and almost none had any instrumental networks on which to call. Those social networks that had existed previously, particularly peer and family, were often the source of risk of re-incarceration or re-engagement with risky behaviors, and the women who had a social network jettisoned them in their search to support their new path. The women described their processes and actions taken to find new and strong relationships, and how those, some of them surprising, act to help them stay on their pathway away from the penitentiary.

Relationships on the outside were considered in various ways and categorized to examine the ways in which they were a potential or real support or hindrance to the women's reentry. The relationship to family of birth was considered separately from the relationship to the women's children—motherhood is a very specific experience and the majority of the women were not mothers and children were often a motivating factor. The relationship to parole officers was also separated out from relationships to other professional staff as Parole holds the power to violation decisions, and is an extension of the surveillance and incarceration experience. Other professionals, e.g. counselors, lawyers, program staff, while may be required to report participation to parole, have a less direct power relationship.

These categories were used to think thematically about what relationships created supports and which ones were more likely to prove to be problematic for the young women's successful reentry. For the purposes of discussion they will be considered as part of a larger story of relationships as supports. The themes will be supported by the data in detail below, and the

relational frameworks supported and defined.

Family (parents/siblings)

Family for many young adults is a double-edged sword of support and barrier. Young adults who have been out of the family environment for some time and return may have to navigate not only family who may still treat them as the age at which they went in, but may also be looking for the young woman to be the same person as they went in. Angie talks about the difficulty she had with her family accepting a change in who she was and what she wanted from her own life:

So my sisters...my whole family expected from me was that I was going to be a bread winner, because before I went to prison, when I was in group homes. I would come back home with stacks of money. ... So I came home and my family expected that from me again. They didn't expect that I changed, they didn't expect that I was looking at college. ... They were like you talking that college shit, go get some money.

For some young women, roles are inverted where they become the primary support to their parents/families at a time when they still need some help and guidance. Kylie was struggling not only to come home herself, but was highly encouraged by her parole officer to leave the three quarter house and move back in with her mother. She talks about the burden this placed on her. She expresses a sense that she has had a deleterious impact on her mother's mental health due to her incarceration, interestingly characterized here simply as 'leaving':

I've been taking care of my mom's apartment. Cause she has like, she has like what is it, she has major depression, she goes through these, and its like all day every day I deal with it and it gets kind of annoying. She's just sometimes very sad and it kind of makes me miserable you know, everything's just strained. Any way she's a hoarder too. So I already knew when I was coming home what I was going to face because it happened years ago when I had to clean the apartment it was horrible though like dog shit....horrible, I can't even express.... So basically since I've been home that's what I've been doing. And I've gotten it to where now at least my mother can open the door and talk to people, you know, before she couldn't like, she would hide and stuff like that. And

I know its partially my fault leaving her, she went into a depression.

TJ had been thrown out of her house prior to her incarceration by her father due to her sexual orientation and external expression of it (she presented as very masculine). She said:

Since my grandmother died I can't go to my dad. He's trying to tolerate me, but I need more than that. I can't live with him if he can't accept who I am and how I am. So I'm in a shelter again... I'm comfortable being who I am. I told my father that he is my father and he needs to not worry about what his family thinks about me. We get along, we just can't live together because he doesn't like me being a lesbian. I'm grown now and I know who I am—if I was 16 or younger, then he could tell me what to do. But I'm an adult.

TJ was able to recognize that her relationship with her father, with whom she had no contact for many years growing up, and who rejected her once she cut her hair and presented visually as 'butch' was salvageable as long as she chose the terms of engagement with him.

Participants expressed close relationships with siblings, but their primary relationships with parents/guardians were nearly universally strained and uncomfortable. Lisa talked about a positive relationship with her younger brother and that her mother would threaten to kick her brother out of the house for having contact with her if Lisa and her mother were not getting along, but she drew a line with her mother that drastically changed her relationship:

I said you know what I'm a mom, you're a mom, so I respected your wishes growing up I think it's time—high time that you know you respect mine or else I'm gonna have to cut you out of my life cuz I'm not dealing with the drama no more. I'm not dealing with the bullshit.

Lisa went into to prison at 16 and pregnant, and came out determined to stay out for her son's sake. She made choices to take control of a very contentious relationship with her mother—a relationships that landed her in prison in the first place.

Jessenia is the only participant who lived with her mother and talked about how much she relished and loved her and felt supported and loved by her when asked about their relationship she said:

It's good. You know, she's just the type of person that wants to see me doing good, doing the right thing especially staying off of drugs, which is the weed. That's my drug of choice so she's just, she just wants me off of that. I guess she just likes the way I am when I'm off of it... I want her to be proud of me.

It Stops with Me: Ending the Cycle of Poverty, Abuse and Incarceration

Several of the women had mothers who were addicted to crack and wholly unreliable as parents. They had experiences that ranged from being traded for drugs by their mothers to a dealer to smoking with their moms and realizing that their mother would spend her last 10 dollars to get high with her but would not buy her shoes or underwear with that same money. Several of the women, particularly the mothers, talked about how they were determined to make life different for their children. The idea that they want to and can show their children a life that is not dependent on programs and welfare resonated very strongly for Marie:

I feel like I don't gotta drag my daughter to a program. I feel like that be selfish of me. She already didn't have a mother for 4 years and now I gotta drag you through my recovery stage of going to a program? No. No. I want to break the cycle. Because if I go to a drug program with her, then guess what? Its 8 out of ten she's gonna be in a drug program with her kid. I'm telling you. Its gonna go like that. I'm trying to stop it. When I go to welfare, I go by myself. I'm not taking you in them lines because that's what you're gonna get used to! No...that shit stops with me.

Later, she talked about seeking a better life in general for herself and her daughter, to get out of the neighborhood and move into a more middle-class life, something she thinks the rest of her

family cannot and will not aspire to. In response to being asked if she was felt like she wanted to do better than her family she responded:

Makes me feel like I'm on top of this world, like I'm ' rich and I ain't got no money in my pocket. Cause anybody else in my family, they all got comfortable...being abusedbut everybody is comfortable with it, but I'm not comfortable living in the projects.

Tracee also aspires to be a very different mother than who she had. Her father was middle class, but she felt judged and unprotected by them, as he allowed an uncle he knew had raped her to stay in the same house when she was young. In talking through doing better than her mother, Tracee was adamant and radiated pride and determination to not repeat her mother's errors, even in the face of her felony conviction. Tracee says in response being asked what it would mean to her to do better than her mother:

I will be the first one in my family, from my mother, I will RAISE my kids unlike her. I don't know, that's what my mother side, I would be like taking care of myself, I wouldn't be like leaning on my kids, and from my father's side ... I don't know, not that I really need to prove nothing to them .. but they always made me feel like I was never gonna be nothing.

Jennifer, who had no preparation for her release as a detainee in jail, stated that she had no plan once she came home. She planned with her mother and decided to enroll in a college preparatory class in a community college and began working. She was on her way to stability by month four of her release until a tragedy befell her:

I lost my love—my son's father, my first love. When he was killed, I stopped working, dropped out of classes, I was in jail all over again, except this time I was outside. I started smoking again, would not leave the house. I was depressed. ...Eventually, after almost a year, I realized I had to come out of jail. So I came to (name of community program) and started all over again. I knew I had to do better for myself, for my son. So now I'm in classes and I'm working again. I am GOING to take care of my kid financially, and BE someone—I believe education is important now.

She had been gang-affiliated, had worked in a strip club and was selling drugs and heavily street involved. Her incarceration experience made her, in her words, “open her eyes” and decide that she could have a different life than she had known about in her earlier life.

Not Going Back

Most of the women clearly articulated a belief that they would not return to prison, and that they had the means and the wherewithal to achieve their goal of permanent freedom. For several, the desire to do better and to stay free in light of being a mother is a theme supported here and in the literature (Michalsen, 2007). Bea talked about how she struggled with being materialistic and selfish prior to her incarceration and that her time in shifted her priorities to her daughter and providing for her properly for the first time:

I mean all I could say is its a learning experience.... even when I knew I was doing time I was going 'let me get this GED when I'm in so I get a job'. That, everything I did back then was on my mind when I came out. So when I was in there I kept saying I'm gonna go to school, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna help the people that I talk to that don't have 'cause I wasn't that fortunate... But when I was coming home I was just like I can't do this no more. It's not about me. It's about my daughter. That was like my main goal when I was in there. I got to do this not for me but for my girl.... I'm not gonna sell drugs anymore and I'm not fighting women again. I stopped all that.

For Lisa having her son was the only thing that kept her from going back to prison—she stopped fighting, stopped drinking and said “*Well you know, I just say if I didn't have my son, I would have gone back already.*” Both Marie and Tracee identify that they are in a cycle of abuse, substance use and poverty and to be able to state that they want something better for themselves and their children is powerful. The ability to put words, to a stranger, those desires and to evidence a belief and articulate the steps needed to succeed—Marie knew she had to stop smoking weed, Tracee had already gotten clean and was working to get an education and a job—

are concrete steps to success. But they also were creating a different identity for themselves, one that separated them from the family members who either did not believe in them, would likely hold them back, or who were role models they chose to reject. This differentiation of self, away from family, particularly of women to reject who and what their mothers before them were, is an area for further investigation. It is no small feat to move up in the world not as simply a way to do better, but as a way to outright reject the familial path—family history can be a strong predictor and pull to stay the same, and these women found a way to begin their journey away from that identity.

Throughout the interviews, the young women talked about expectations they set for themselves, their interest in working and in succeeding. At the conclusion of each interview the women were asked what they thought their chances of staying free of jail from now on. All but one hovered at the 90-100% mark that they felt there was no way they were going back to jail or prison. Marie, was one of the few women who appeared to really be right at the edge when we met, was surprisingly clear-eyed about how she was navigating her chances of staying free over the long term:

I don know. I don know (shaking head). I just take each day for what it is, today I be like I am not going to jail today. Not today. Tomorrow? I don't live in fairy tales. I come from a real straightforward family, like my mother be "I smoke crack, I don't have no time for you, bitch get the fuck out." So honestly, I have no problem with it, take it or leave it that's how that is. Today I'm not going to jail. I'm not robbing, I'm not stealing, fuck that, I'm not selling no pussy, no no no no.

Jennifer was less sanguine. She put her chances at 50% even though she was only one of two who had no felony conviction. She said:

I just can't say what's going to be the future. I'm not gonna say I am not trying. That's

why I'm in the program. I am just saying I'm being real. Look at all these women who tried and didn't do it right the first time...

It might seem intuitively that women who have been out in the community for a shorter period of time would have less reality-testing, and would be more likely to believe that they were not likely to ever go back to jail or prison. Upon a closer look at the data, no differences were found in length of time out to conviction of certainty of future freedom—women out less than one year were equally likely to project future freedom and their capacity to stay crime-free as those who had already navigated through some of the trickiest passages of reentry and reintegration. This belief in one's ability to beat the odds and stay free can be seen as a strength and a self-concept that can be built upon and shored up, and is aligned with this age group's capacity for optimism and hope, even if the road ahead can be difficult to map out.

In reaching for strengths, several participants talked about what they had done that made them proud. Jessenia expressed her pride and amazement at her capacity to study on her own for the GED and to have passed it while in prison:

I didn't think I could get my GED. I didn't think I could do it. I knew I was smart but when that happened to me (incarceration) I had to work really hard to do it. ... I did it! I worked hard...what did I wake up to? The GED book. What did I fall asleep to? The GED book. Any time I had that I was in there...I was so damn proud of myself.

Angie, when faced with being home with no job and no prospects, was able to use her ability to hustle that kept her alive on the streets, but transformed it to a legitimate strategy for networking and building connections. Anyone who had previously indicated that they were interested in helping her was contacted and connected:

I was scared that all this potential that I knew I had, and I always believed in myself, I

was never one of those people who beat up on myself, I mean sometimes I did, I did some fucked up things in my life and I had to ask myself who does those kinds of things to other people, but as far as I knew I was smart and so I was just like, 'dag, I'm just gonna stay here and do nothing with my life', and I know I'm capable and like feeling like, starting to kind of strategize. I had to begin strategizing because I'm not the kind of person who just lays down and just like, I mean I felt beat up and I was beat up but my first instinct was to find something and so back in the days that was bad things, I found me a hustle, and it was the same kind of energy being mustered up but I had to find a way to hustle something...ummm, so I called everybody who said they believed in me! All these people who was like 'we think you're smart, we think you're brilliant, you should be doing something different" so I start dialing their numbers. Oh I'm so brilliant, what can we do. I'm home and I don't have shit to do, this is not cool right now!

For others, they found strength in having done new things and in having succeeded in environments or challenges that they could not have imagined as their younger selves. Annie talked about how she has matured and found a strength to persevere in the face of real challenges like paying the rent and being on her own. She says:

I know myself today. I know who I am, I know what I want, I know where I'm getting at, the way I think, the way I go about day to day basis, even to my challenges, I don't give up whereas back then I would've. I would've chose something to numb (myself) or take away and today, I know like, the problem will still be there even if you do this. So, might as well get over with it. I'm just—I'm proud, I'm proud of myself. I've matured a lot. Even if it means being away from my family and I know that I'm capable of doing things if I want them that bad. I want that golden egg. [...] know that there's nothing there to stop me, I mean, nothing can stop me from where I'm going. And I seen it, there's little things that I gotta do. I never seen myself in college and I'm there. Never seen myself at a law firm, but I was there. There, by my own. I'm here.

Jennifer who spent 18 months in jail discussed how she came home from her experience determined to turn her life around, and enrolled in college and looked for work. She was working on gaining full custody of her child back when her first love and the father of her child was killed.

The narratives here show how far the women grew – some of it can no doubt be attributed to a

natural maturation process, but if age alone were the key to desistance, then the prisons would be empty (Sampson & Laub, 1992). The women who shared their stories showed their ability for reflection, growth and of creating and seizing opportunities to leverage

Romantic partners

During the course of the interviews, many of the young women spent a significant amount of time talking about the importance of their boyfriends or girlfriends, and about their first loves, again, not surprising given their age. While some of these relationships had hallmarks of abuse many of them were presented as early life stage romantic connections—of great import, laced with first experiences of either trust or love of a non-family member, and complicated by the intercession of their incarceration. The literature on desistance discusses the importance of (heterosexual) relationships as a stabilizing influence for men over time (Sampson & Laub, 2003) the same frame is not clear for women as discussed earlier (Heubner, DeJong & Cobbina, 2010). Having support from a partner was important to a number of the young women—for some it was financial support but mainly it was a sense that there was someone there for them to help ease the transition or simply be a support. Jessenia talked about how she felt a partner could help her:

I would like to have a boyfriend to push me, somebody that I love somebody that cares about me really like deep inside, like rooting me, like you can do it. ... I have a boyfriend now and he is pushing me...he just got out of jail too, we have a lot in common that way too. ...He makes me feel like, I feel like I'm worth like you know like someone who I like who likes me back makes me feel good. He's like 'go to your program... and I didn't have that before you know, like pushing me. It's either like "you do the right thing and we be together or you smoke weed and you go back to jail. I tell you right now, I'm not going to do no visits."

Annie in contrast struggled with a relationship with a former boyfriend who had gotten married to a different woman while she was in prison. She was extremely torn by the relationship and it ended up becoming a burden and an interference with her ability to focus and move forward. But she decided in the end to let the relationship go as it had become an interference to her life goals:

I was struggling with two of my classes which I had to withdraw, I had too much going on, um I didn't, I wasn't prioritizing, I was being sidetracked with my old relationships, which I had to let go... Yeah, it was just hectic with me. It was just like a rollercoaster with me. I was just up down, up down, it was affecting my school I didn't feel like going to work, um, but, its difficult, it's been difficult.

Angie talked more broadly about how theory and practice do not take into account the prominence relationships take in young women's psyche and the impact of incarceration and freedom on how women navigate their way back to romantic and sexual relationships. She says:

One thing we didn't talk about when you come home and you're a young woman, and you think about falling in love again, and when you're in prison and some young women do become bisexual and they fall in love with other women and then they do come home, and they thinking about like love relationships and what sex is like, and after you do like 6, 10 years, however many years, and what is having sex again like, Like what is having a relationship like with a man or a woman on the outside, whatever your preference is. It's a whole 'nother process other than going through a job and everything else.

Angie raises questions here about how to help a young woman navigate her emotional and relational reentry, similar to the concerns Michele identified. That the almost singular focus of reentry programs on the concrete needs of women may miss an important means to supporting and strengthening where a woman coming home might be headed.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

FRIENDSHIPS

While women's relational theory generally frames relationships in a positive light, many of the women interviewed had a moment, often while incarcerated, of recognizing that their friendships were either hollow or upon release detrimental to their aspirations of freedom and achievement. Little in the literature on women's reentry focuses on the broader social networks and friendships of women reentering, or how they navigate away from those relationships that pose a potential harm to them. Several of the women discussed their needs to either stay away from their friends, and the ensuing loneliness of that choice, or the difficulty in explaining to their old friends that they were making different choices.

Kylie struggles with how to entertain herself, but talked about making choices to stay out:

I stay away from it. Stay in the house, I don't hang out with the people I used to hang out with AT ALL. If I do its just to go smoke, just get air as I smoke a cigarette. Usually if I'm not with my girl I'm in my room with the TV. I'm a TV bum now, which I never was before, even like the other night, I was sitting and watching TV and kind of depressed, just sitting there not doing anything, and then I thought about it, I'm not outside getting in trouble...so, I'd rather be sitting and watching TV rather than getting locked up!

INSTRUMENTAL NETWORKS

One of the underlying themes of the interviews was the need for a wide pool of relationships for support and assistance. Much literature on transition age youth indicates the importance of extended relationships with supportive adults, and how those can be critical stabilizing and enhancing connections (Youth Development Institute, 2008) The young women were both aware of the need for them and the difficulty of reaching out to networks for support and assistance.

Angie spoke eloquently about feeling like a burden but having to rely on a network to survive, particularly in early reentry:

You really have to bug people that you don't really want to have to bug, and you have to call on favors cause you feel like you a burden on everybody because you just came home and even when you first come home, thank god I had my brother there because my brother is a hustler and so, umm, when I first came home I had that person there to give me that money to go get clothes and give me that first kind of initial get on my feet. I needed a metro card to get to work when I was working for those 3 weeks to get back and forth to work. A lot of people don't have that.

PAROLE

Parole is a fact of life for most people returning from incarceration. As stated previously, parole conditions can create barriers and strains, particularly if the level of supervision is not geared to those at highest risk for re-offending. It was expected that the participants would have much to say about their experience of being on parole.

One of the more surprising findings from these interviews was how many of the young women experienced their Parole officers as being either neutral or supportive. Given the young women's developmental stage, and the received wisdom regarding the often heavy hand of Parole for reentering offenders (Petersilia, 2003) it was assumed that many of the young women would be likely to struggle with the institution writ large, but specifically with the parole officers. What emerged was a more nuanced picture of a transactional relationship between the Officer and Parolee.

The young women who had a positive experience with parole almost all indicated that they recognized their hand in the ease of the relationship: Shondra acknowledged that *as long as I don't fuck up, I'm good—if I do what I gotta do, she stays off my back*. Kylie reported:

hmmm parole. It's pretty cool she doesn't really bother me as long as I report when I have to report and show up for my programs, my groups and individuals and keep my welfare going because Medicaid pays for this (program).

It was originally anticipated that the age and stage of the younger women might work against them—greater stigma, less understanding of who they are what they need, fewer skills to work with this age group. Both male and female POs seemed to equally, in this small sample, genuinely engage their parolees. Bea's PO wrote a long supportive letter for her, even as she was being violated and being sent back to finish her prison time. Another PO helped her parolee find a better drug program that was geared specifically towards women and did not violate her even though she admitted to continued substance use. Of all the participants, Marie and Bea had the most obviously supportive and bonded connection. Marie talks about her PO here:

She real cool! ... So she asked me what she can help me with and I was like I need help, like I need to get my life together. This is all the things I can do, this is all the things I cannot do. The only thing I cannot do is stop smoking. I said, if you give me a pill, I will take medication, I will do what I need to do, but I have to stop smoking. And she's like alright, let's go, outpatient! She sees stuff in me that I don't see so that's why I like her. She don't give up on me.

Bea posited that her PO liked her because she wasn't like all the other parolees that the PO saw day in and day out and that her youth and the real promise of rehabilitation and change was interesting and engaging for the PO:

I'm not like the others he saw. I'm young and I have my future ahead of me. I think he really thought about his daughters or that I could do it, you know, not go back.

Annie had two POs, the first one was not a positive experience, but she talked about feeling supported and believed in by her current PO:

My new parole officer, she's like, how can I put it, you're paroled, I don't have to watch over you, you know what you have to do, so we're not gonna play this, do what you have to do and I know you're gonna do what you have to do because—and she has faith in me, she believes in me. The way she talks and like you can see a sincere person, are you okay, anything new that happened, you can talk to me, whereas I didn't have that with my other parole officer. When a person is interested in what's going on and not just okay, your alright, keep it moving. She asks, what are you doing, how is school, you did, okay, great, that's good. You know?

All of the women identified that as long as they did what they needed to do they were generally able to stay out of problems with their POs. It does not go without saying however, that it is not always easy, particularly for young people whose impulse control is not at its peak, and who may still be struggling with feelings of rebellion and autonomy, to be successful at “doing what they gotta do”. It shows great capacity for reasoning, good decision making and an ability to be proactive. Angie did not have such positive things to say about her parole officer and the experience of being on parole, and identified the problem with a “one-size-fits-all” approach:

The thing that parole didn't get about me at all I was like not a person, like I was just a prototype like this is a person who just came home from prison, and we need to be careful for these that reasons, we have her little folder, and we know she's not a follow the rules kind of person, I was just kind of just another person coming home from prison and in a sense I was, but ... each and every person that sat in that parole office, every time we waited for our parole officer, we had a different issue going on. Like some of us it was like how to like, if you want to put like a title on things, we were unemployed, we were poor, we were people of color, but those the only kind of subject positions, they are kind of like labels, they don't really describe what your everyday experience is like...umm, and I felt like they didn't get that, they didn't get that...they missed out that I was a LOT more capable than they thought I was, and I'm sure they do that to everyone, I'm not just talking about me, like I've had opportunities to do things that show that I'm capable, but other people don't have opportunities, but they ARE just as capable, and that's an issue, you go to parole officers and they tell you go to this dumbass programs, these stupid ass programs that don't really cater to your potential they limit your potential in so many ways.

Program Staff—Listen to Me and Give Me Choice

Involving young people in their own goal setting, creating challenging opportunities and providing a two-way communication infrastructure are all recognized as best practices in working with and engaging hard to reach young adults (Youth Development Institute, 2008). In keeping with the focus of the study, the participants were asked in several ways what they need from the adults in their lives, particularly the adults who are in professional relationships to them—Parole Officers, counselors, program staff. They were additionally asked what they would do if they were staff in a program and a 20 year old woman came in for help returning from prison.

One of the more consistent themes to emerge was the desire for space for their experiences to be heard, to not be told what to do, but also to have the adults be available to truly mentor the young women. It was a theme that for many months was categorized by the author informally as “shut up and listen”. Each participant was asked how they thought adults could do a better job at providing services or meeting their needs as young women. Consistently, the young women responded with the requirement that the adults ask questions and then actually listen. Below are several different responses:

Ask them how they feel and listen. Don't say anything else, just listen. Don't make any judgments or decisions until they say so. Because that's how you can direct somebody by what they say. You can't direct somebody on your opinion. It's your opinion! (Aliya)

If you're coming at me like you're miss know it all and you're coming at me like you're telling me instead of trying to help me, yeah I'm gonna be defensive. Know what I'm saying? (Tracee)

Just show me some options and let me decide, you know, instead of telling me you gotta

do this, you gotta do that, da da da da da. You know, cause its 4 different places telling me something different—gets aggravating. (Kylie)

Aliya, Shondra and Tracee echo one another in their need to be heard first and allowed to make their own decisions about what they need and how to get it. Shondra talked about what worked for her in relation to a staff who was able to hear her individual need and respond to it in a way that she found helpful:

(emphatically) she listened to me! She understood the fact that I wasn't there for drugs. I'm like (name of counselor), I don't care about this drug crap, I don't have a drug issue. She's like (sotto voce) I know...here's what I'm going to do for you. I'm gonna put you in here for 3 months so I can get your parole officer off your back. If you want to stay after that, its on you. I was like..okay! and she was like BUT, you have to be here when I tell you to be here, or else I'm gonna slam you for 6 months.

This evidences both the capacity of the program to hear and acknowledge the stated needs of the young woman (I don't need drug treatment) to meet the mandate to ensure ongoing freedom, and to create a clear set of expectations for behavior and the consequences if those expectations are not met. The latter is extremely well understood—prison has very clear and often swift and draconian responses to abrogation of rules. It is also age-appropriate for younger clients, in fact any client, to feel like they have some control over the span and focus of their treatment and therapeutic relationship.

Marie spoke about her difficulty trusting staff and counselors and that she found opening up and getting help a challenge. She heatedly discussed her anger at not having a differentiated experience:

I mean, you can hear me but do you understand me? Like its different if I'm a counselor and somebody talking to me. And then I hate when somebody be like "oh I can imagine how you been, what you been through". No. Don't say that to me. No the fuck you can't. Them words right there, they will piss me off. You can't imagine what I been through!

Your father never raped you freely, know what I'm saying? Like you got this job because you took a test and you passed a test, like you don't know what its like to be in jail. You don't know what that shit isso don't tell me you do cause you don't. and that's my problem with programs and counselors.

Angie summed up the theme here:

And so, my recommendation is that we really listen. And listening is not an easy thing for a lot of people. We say we listen and we don't really listen Its not a method, it's a process... You kind of have to individualize your listening. I hope I don't get that old and like forget what's most important is that people's lives is nuanced and you have to meet people where they are, like you can't "oh, I know I've been there, and so this is what it is", you have to meet people where they are.

Young adults are often aware of their need to be seen as an individual, carried forward from adolescence, and often still hold the keenly honed sense of whether an older adult is truly paying attention, or is simply treating them like a member of a cohort. The phrase “meeting people where they’re at” is a frequent trope used in social service work, particularly harm reduction, but is often bereft of meaning. The young women above identified the critical nature of being able to do just this for them—to see them as individuals, who need to be heard, whose experience is respected, and who are not treated as just another woman who needs to be put through a program whose elements are pre-programmed.

PATTERNS OF REINTEGRATION

Looking for patterns outside of the data themes is an important part of qualitative research. Thus, the themes were looked at from a number of different angles. Several emerged as naturally occurring ‘splits’ of the participant characteristics that merit some discussion, with a recognition that dividing a sample as small as 13 further diminishes the analytic strength. That being said, the following differences will be discussed below: 1) length of time in the community (<one year vs. > one year); 2) age at incarceration, and 3) prison vs. jail time.

Length of time out

The concept of ‘time at liberty’ is important in research related to recidivism and survival in the community. Someone who has only been out of prison or jail for four months has less opportunities for recidivistic activities than someone who has been out for much longer. But for the purposes of this study, time out is considered related to their strategies for success. It did not appear in this small sample that the five young women—Bea, Lisa, Marie, TJ and Aliya—who were out for less than one year presented with significant differences on the main themes discussed above, except that they were less likely as a group to be able to identify strong relationships on the outside, on the whole, that were supportive that were not romantic or professional staff of a program. Several of the women had new relationships with romantic or sexual partners that they described as supportive. The women may have been out too soon to have felt the support or the critical pressure from a Parole Officer, or to make meaningful friendships or instrumental networks. There were no differences in the early reintegration group in their ability to separate from negative family influences, as described by the women. There were no differences in likelihood of employment or enrollment in school. The only significant difference is that they were more likely to be living in a program rather than on their own, with family or loved ones, which is not surprising.

Age at Incarceration

In keeping with a developmental framework, the five women who had gone into prison at a younger age (15-18) were looked at for any different struggles, strengths, concerns or experiences. Of these five (Annie, Lisa, TJ, Angie, and Shondra) three of them had the longest

lengths of stay in. The expressed concerns about the burden of learning how to navigate adult responsibilities as a young woman. While they had all known about budgeting as a young person, the strain of being totally responsible for oneself, particularly for the young women who spent the most time out of society, was a hurdle that was not identified as often by women who were out for longer. Annie said:

because I, I haven't had that training so to speak, and coming out of prison, you gotta get it together fast (claps fist into hand three times quickly) and its like I'm still trying to get it together and it's a disappointment, for me like anyway.

Shondra also struggled with this when she came home, saying:

Umm, I was shocked when I came home. I was very, very shocked...I was trying to learn how to budget my money, because I never had to do that, being that when I went to jail I was 17 years old! So from going from mommy giving you everything to coming home and you have to learn how to budget your money on your own because that's just what you have to do...uh, uh, you know, that's hard. And I don't know what class you can take on that, but I didn't get it! And that was a part of it. Another thing was learning to work every day. Yeah, you work while you're incarcerated, but you only work for a certain amount of time and you go back to doing what you're gonna do. So yeah, you wake up every day and yeah you do this, but, its not like being on the outside. So yeah, they can try to do that to prepare you but it really, really doesn't! it just makes you used to that while you're in there.

Becoming responsible plagues most young adults as they grow up—how to navigate the heavier burdens of full adulthood, whether it is financial, emotional, or parental. For these young women, who went away as teenagers and came out as full adults, the burden may feel especially heavy. The costs of failure may be much higher to them—may mean another loss of liberty, a repeat of incarceration, or a failure of a promise to themselves not to go back. Most young adults don't have that particular Sword of Damocles hanging over their heads as they navigate a new identity as adult.

Prison vs. Jail

The two women, Jennifer and TJ, who spent all of their time in jail had some experiences that were not analogous to the women in prison. They were less likely to talk about peer relationships being strong— primarily because the population in jail is much less stable—but had not dissimilar experiences with some of the professional staff at the jails. For Jennifer, the relationship with the Corrections Officer was a critical support during her 16 months of time on the inside, and helped her to re-think her life trajectory. One earned her GED while in jail, and the other obtained some work experience in the kitchen. The differences in their experiences on the inside notwithstanding, each of them had found some important connections on the outside and most importantly had used the time on the inside to commit to making changes in relation to who they had been prior to their incarceration.

CONCLUSION

The participants, young and disadvantaged by almost any yardstick, provide reminders of the incredibly resilient nature of the spirit and their decisions to use the tools available to change their trajectories. The data allowed for a rich story to emerge about how young women facing tremendous disadvantage, strain and risk, still harbor and amplify their strengths and aspirations. The ability of these particular women to have used time well and to be able to articulate the ways in which they were able to survive and take stock of their lives points to areas for new attention from research and correctional practice. Their navigation of relationships, as framed in no small part by their age and developmental stage, and their desire and ability to make healthy connections is a second area for continued investigation and expansion.

These young women used their time while incarcerated to take stock of themselves and found positive relationships where they could. As a group they were remarkable in their insight to their own hand in what brought them into prison and their ability to make new choices to move towards positive relationships and away from ones that presented a threat to their ongoing freedoms. It is not known if they will all be successful in three years or even three months from their interviews, but their hope and wisdom point the way to some important next questions that will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a further discussion of the findings, lessons learned from the study, areas for further study and explication and the practice implications for social work, correctional and reentry services. The themes that emerged from this study indicate some gaps in the arenas of research, policy and practice. A note to the reader on the recommendations contained herein; the author believes, based on practice, experience working within correctional settings, humane principles and on growing research indicating that women *overall* pose relatively little threat to public safety, even when they recidivate (Deschenes, Owen & Crow, 2007) that incarceration for most women is the wrong intervention to achieve the desired outcomes of increased public safety, rehabilitation, increased social capital and decreased cost to society. That said, the current political and structural realities are that women are and will continue to be put into prisons and jails and thus improved policies and programs are required to make the intolerable situation of incarceration less intolerable.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to analyze dynamically collected data in order to uncover new hypotheses for future examination, verification and exposition. Grounded theory is utilized when there is either a new problem for which there are no sufficient explanatory or applied theory to guide the research, or an existing social condition that current theory had not be adequate to at this time (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). The subject of this inquiry fits the latter—while there has been an increase in the development of theory of women’s offending, more work is needed to promote a robust understanding of women’s desistance in general, and specifically in light of the purpose of this study, young women.

In summary, the main findings discussed above can be considered as three main themes:

- 1) The women in this study utilized the time spent while incarcerated for self-reflection, and to begin a process of change that was contributing towards successful reentry.
- 2) The women in this study were able to make decisions regarding their relationships with other inmates and correctional staff that were more likely to lead to supportive relationships and survival strategies that reflect sophisticated coping skills.
- 3) The women in this study appeared to be making considered and difficult decisions regarding relationships once they returned home, including reaching for support across a broad range of options, jettisoning or limiting relationships with friends, family and romantic partners that were not functional or that were downright dangerous for their wellbeing and continued freedom; and shifting their relationship to their own identities, particularly in relation to their own children for those that were mothers.

These themes are clearly interconnected, particularly the latter two, but have long-ranging implications for how these young women navigated not only their time in but their ability to beat the odds and stay free. The emergence of the quality of the relationships as a central theme for the women's survival and growth is supported by theory and the literature, as discussed in prior sections. But the means by which the relationships appeared to define most of their experiences returning home was somewhat of a surprise given all of the other possible themes and concerns. The ability to reflect on the nature of one's life and life trajectory is not to be taken for granted, nor is the ability to articulate that one has made a series of different choices. The women interviewed in this study are most likely outliers in their levels of strength and self-awareness,

but they provide some important landmarks to follow for other young women. The ways in which the participants navigated their own identities as young women, as (mainly) felons, mothers and as young people with hope for their own future were rich and full of possibility. These ideas and the implications of them are discussed further below and in the following section.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE

As discussed earlier, most criminal justice theory for women has been focused on pathways into incarceration, but theories of desistance and successful reentry for women have been less rigorously studied until recently. Recent studies have indicated risk factors that are immutable such as age, charge, number of priors, substance abuse history, neighborhood, ethnicity (Huebner, DeJong & Cobbina, 2010; Deschenes, Owen & Crow, 2007) and some that are more mutable (e.g. type of correctional intervention (Tripodi et. al, 2011) as an explanatory framework for women's reentry. Recommendations from these studies have focused on enhancing prison programming, adjusting risk instruments to reflect women's lower risk to public safety and for increased research on women, crime and reentry that is comparative between women, rather than comparing men to women.

This study supports previous research indicating the importance of relationships for women's ability to successfully navigate the transition from incarceration to freedom and supports prior research on the social organization of women's prisons, and has some specific findings regarding younger women, particularly in regards to the romantic relationships developed while incarcerated and the relationships to Parole Officers.

Romantic partners and Sexual Identity

While women's involvement in same-gender relationships in prison has been most often framed as 'situational homosexuality' or an adaptation to a lack of available male partners,, others more recently have looked more closely at this phenomenon and posit that for some it is a fundamental identity and for others it may open questions about future identity (Severance, 2004).

Additionally, much of the literature on women's same-gender and sex relationships has not fully explored the impact of incarceration. This study contributes to the literature on how young women use romantic and sexual relationships not only for survival, but to confirm or re-configure their evolving sexual identity, which is in line with their developmental stage.

Parole Officers

As indicated by some of the positive relationships with their officers, the oversight and structure of parole, in the hands of thoughtful staff, presented a stabilizing ballast for some of the women—an external locus of control and a mentor figure. This was not a universal experience, but enough of the participants identified the positive nature of the relationship and an awareness that they had someone in their corner rather than someone who was looking to bust them. It may well be that that the young women present a professional opportunity for the Parole Officers to have a real impact on the lives of their clients given their age and relative short-lived criminal justice careers. They may be far more likely to respond to young women with a sense of hope and supportive help than they might otherwise if they were working with an older client with a long history of “catch and release” from prison. In response to this sense of hope and

engagement, the young women may experience the relationship as more beneficial and responsive to their needs at best, and non-punitive at the least. None of the women stated or implied that they liked being on parole but there were significantly fewer complaints about the constraints of parole than had been anticipated.

The Parole Officer as a support fits in with the body of research that indicates that adult supports are critical pieces for desistance and general life transitions for highly vulnerable young adults (Chung, Little & Steinberg, 2005; Youth Development Institute, 2008). While many providers and advocates and the young women themselves may not frame the role or capacity of Parole in this light, and in fact Parole Departments may legitimately consider relationships that focus on support and connection to be either ancillary or potentially contaminating, it may be well worth reconsidering these relationships in connection to young women as a new approach to not only public safety, but to improved overall social outcomes for the young women. Those participants who felt supported and connected to their POs did not have an a priori assumption that a positive experience was out of the realm of possibility, nor did they seem surprised, embarrassed or otherwise uncomfortable with having positive relationships. This may indicate that an altered approach to younger women, one that focuses on the quality of the relationship and the ability to hear individual needs and allow for there to be some margin of 'failure' before violation, might become not only more efficacious for the parolee, but might have the added benefit of being more satisfying to the PO. One of the gaps in this study is the lack of program staff and PO perspective. An area for further study would be in-depth interviews with staff regarding their understanding of the needs of young women, their assessment of their individual and systemic ability to meet those needs and their recommendations regarding training and services to be able

to have longer term positive outcomes for young women.

Several other issues are worth further discussion in relation to the themes articulated above.

Whether it was a fully conscious effort at self-improvement (e.g. pursuing a GED while locked up) or a survival strategy (e.g. finding positive relationships to avoid prison drama), this small group of women showed that there are ways to utilize time and to claim some ownership of one's experience on the inside. Many of the women talked at some point about their prison bid as a moment in their life that was either inevitable or in some ways saved them from death or of living the life of the older women they saw surrounding them. At first analysis, it appeared as though these young women were bizarrely making a case for the benefits of incapacitation. This flew in the face of their descriptions of their experiences while incarcerated—sexual exploitation and intimidation at the hands of staff and other inmates, fear of inconsistently applied rules, constant noise, interpersonal dramas, isolation from peers, and the general upheaval and misery of being in prison and jail. This cognitive dissonance between the two competing narratives required another look at the data. Through careful reconsideration and going back to listen to the original interviews what began to emerge was more of a story of how these particular young women rejected any notion of having been victimized by circumstances, but rather grasped at a sense of mastery and growth from a situation they had little control over beyond having not done the act that landed them in prison. Not one of them indicated that they had not broken the law, and some, particularly those who had been perpetrators of violence, articulated regret over past actions and attitudes. No one indicated that they thought that prison was something they “*would wish on their worst enemy*” (both Lisa and Annie used this exact language) or referred to going to prison or jail as a choice they would make in the future, the recognition of the *outcome* of the

incarceration—time out of a chaotic life, time to think, opportunity to look through the mirror of time reflected by the older women around them—were spoken about by them in a way that gave them some agency in the way they experienced their incarceration time.

This ability to not see oneself as victimized by circumstances, by women for whom victimization was anywhere from not unfamiliar to frankly routine, suggests tremendous strength and a sense of self-definition and self-governance (Chung, Little & Steinberg, 2005). Further research on what traits or structures allow someone to re-frame the experience to a difficult, unwanted experience from which one can still emerge intact might be useful for being able to build and support programs and institutional structures that can either enhance or grow those strengths and skills.

Rejection of a Future Identity

A few of the participants also indicated that they were not, under any circumstances, going to be in the same position that the 30, 40, 50 year-old women were in—or as Bea put it, “*being old and still not having learned their lesson.*” It may well be that given the age and stage of the participants’ development—forward looking and optimistic, being around older women with whom they did not identify—helped to create or enhance their internal barriers to seeing themselves as life-long participants in the criminal justice cycle. Self-concept and self-governance, defined as a “positive sense of self-worth, ability to behave morally and responsibly on their own; independent and to set and achieve goals” (Chung, Little & Steinberg, 2005, p. 76) is important in young adults’ development. Whether they will be successful at avoiding becoming the older women they did time with is unknown at this point, but the fact that there

was active rejection of identifying with them is an important step towards longer-term freedom. There is currently a gap in how researchers, correctional and reentry programs and personnel can identify and capitalize on these desires—one worth addressing in the future as this rejection of the spoiled future identity (Goffman, 1963) may contribute in specific ways to younger women’s desistance.

Reentry Preparation

The study further contributes to the literature by identifying the need for reentry preparation that has more of a focus on process, including emotional readiness and navigation of identity for reentry and reintegration for young women. Most women returning from prison have years of experience, although not necessarily successfully, with being on their own in the world, paying bills, navigating systems, having sexual and romantic relationships and building families. Many young women, particularly those with longer stays, have to pilot a course not only around those concerns but the additional matter of having transitioned from adolescence to adulthood while on the inside. This transition, with the attendant burdens of a shift in expectations of the external world of what an ‘adult’, young though they are, can and should be able to handle and understand and the potential change in legal status (to age of majority) is specific to younger former prisoners. This transitional piece is absent from both the research and from programming.

IMPLICATIONS

With a research sample of thirteen, implications for research and practice must be nested within the purpose of grounded theory as stated earlier—to generate new hypotheses for further testing

as current theory is not sufficient. The findings described in the previous chapter and the discussion above need to be tested and re-tested in larger studies. It may be that these findings are anomalous and do not stand up to more rigorous methods. It may be that these findings have implications for all women in the criminal justice system and it may be that these findings have application for young men. These are questions that cannot be answered by this developmental study.

Thus, the implications for research and practice outlined below must be viewed in this light—that they are suggested courses that require further inquiry and testing by a cross-section of academic and disciplines—criminologists, psychologists, sociologist and social workers. Social work research as a discipline can seek to not only understand the impact of institutions and structures that create oppression and inequality, but to actively use findings to change those institutions (Strier, 2006). Based on some of the issues raised from this modest study, there might be implications that lead to taxpayer savings and better outcomes for individuals and society. We don't know the characteristics that are mutable that impact better outcomes in reentry and until those are identified more robustly and empirically programs will need to rely on immutable risk characteristics. Further research on the mutable risk factors will allow new evidence-based programs and policy and practice impacts. New theories of change could be generated and tested and higher impact programs then built, tested and scaled. As this was a theory-building project, the research recommendations will be presented first, followed by the practice and policy implications.

Research Recommendations:

Longitudinal research on young women's recidivism and successful reentry.

Although there is increasing attention to women's pathways out of criminal justice involvement, there remains a dearth of attention on younger women, most likely because as a group their numbers are relatively small. However, as being younger is often identified as a risk factor for recidivism, regardless of charge, (Deschenes, Owen & Crow, 2007), research on young women who are of transitional age is needed to determine what factors contribute to and which mitigate risk. Longitudinal studies which look at the trajectories of both delinquent girls and criminal justice involved young adults may provide important information the impact of developmental stage, if there are developmental assets to leverage or deficits to intervene with and to create more accurate risk assessment tools and intervention protocols for this cohort. Given the small sample of this study, further research that drew young women from different facilities, different levels of incarceration, a wider range of geographic and demographic backgrounds would provide a richer platform for generating and testing hypotheses.

Develop and test further hypotheses on the use of time during incarceration. How women use time effectively, what the hallmarks of effective use are and the literature on desistance and recidivism includes some measures of adjustment to prison, most often measured by how many infractions people had while incarcerated (Heubner, DeJong & Cobbina, 2010; Visher & Travis, 2003.) As young women can be given infractions for any number of reasons, many of which are not necessarily truly disruptive or anti-social (kissing, passing notes, smoking) and the women in this study reported being given infractions based on whether they were liked or not by correctional staff, this measure may not be sufficiently representative of how a young woman actually uses her time while inside. Additionally, young women may be more likely to be given tickets or infractions, based on age-related behavior. By only measuring infractions (i.e. the

absence of positive behavior) researchers may overlook those characteristics and markers of doing time well, which limits the capacity to create structures that enhance and support better use of institutionalized time. In fact, by not attending more fully to the ways in which time is conceptualized by correctional policy makers, officials, staff and inmates, and the underlying assumptions held therein regarding security, control, punishment and rehabilitation, it is unlikely that significant changes to outcomes will be forthcoming. At present, the structure of time within prisons—externally controlled, significantly differential from time as experienced in the ‘free’ world—may be one of the contributing factors to poor outcomes but without more rigorous study this cannot be a definitive conclusion.

Research with correctional and community staff on working with young women. This project was limited by the lack of information from correctional and community supervision officials and community program staff on the particular challenges and strengths of working with younger clients. In order to more fully understand the interaction between the young women and the systems of control with which they interact, research on the professional staff’s experience of younger clients, and their perceptions and expertise in what works and does not for this cohort may provide significant and important information to guide future training and policy recommendations.

Research into the efficacy of substance use prevention and interventions for young women.

Most of the women in the study reported habitual use of marijuana and alcohol, starting at a fairly young age. However, they indicated that most of the substance interventions offered in prison were targeted towards heavier users of crack, heroin, cocaine—drugs that were not

generally abused by younger women. The most robust programming in correctional settings is likely to be substance abuse treatment, due to the high prevalence of substance use and dependency as a contributing factor to crime, but the current models scaled towards older women with longer addictions histories may not provide the best platforms for younger women. Further studies should be conducted on the relationship of trauma and substance use for young women, focused on age and substance of choice and to generate and test targeted prevention and intervention approaches that will work over a lifespan. Opportunities to prevent future drug use or to intervene in habitual marijuana or alcohol use may be currently lost.

Further research on the impact on self-concept, relationships and navigation of sexual identity post-release for young women.

While sexual identity may not appear to be a critical factor for reentry and reintegration for young women, the lack of thorough and thoughtful research on this topic is glaring, given the overrepresentation of LGBTQ women in the criminal justice system and the ubiquity of same-gender/same-sex relationships that occur inside prisons. Outside of categorizing same-sex relationships for women in prison, most literature on LGBTQ issues and prison focus on coercion, mistreatment and rape of male or male-to-female inmates and the issues for lesbians, bisexual, gender-queer and queer young women may be significantly different, particularly given the developmental task of sexual identity formation in late adolescences/young adulthood. Research on the impact of same-sex/same-gender relationships upon reentry, how young women navigate their self-concept as a woman and sexual partner, how a shift or solidification of identity contributes to or impedes successful reentry remain open questions. However, this study indicated that these may be live questions for young women returning and thus should not be overlooked.

Practice Recommendations for Reentry of Transition Age Young Adult Women

The findings, as small as they are, indicate that there is tremendous pool of strength and resiliency available to many young women—assets that may be under-recognized and utilized by practitioners. Some of these strengths are linked to the plasticity of youth, while others are grounded in the Based on the findings, the following practice recommendations will require program development and process and outcome evaluation to determine if these recommendations have a positive impact on young women, and to determine if the theory of change employed in the development of these programs, guided by empirical data as recommended in the prior section can have a practical application to young women and system change.

Develop community-based “time out” experiences for young women. Twenty-five years of mass incarceration policies, particularly those targeted at drug offenders, have garnered very few positive social and individual outcomes and in fact has had a significantly destabilizing impact that disproportionately affects communities of color (Drucker, 2011). Recent analysis of women’s recidivism patterns indicate that women with drug-related charges are more likely to recidivate within three to eight years (Deschenes, Owen, Crow, 2007 and Heubner, DeJong & Cobbina, 2010 respectively), further indicating that imprisonment is not an effective measure of intervention for behavior change particularly for those who pose the lowest risk to society from a violence/victimization standpoint. Assuming that any investment in incarceration infrastructure is unlikely to produce positive change aside from removal of the offender from society, creating interventions that provide reflective opportunities—alone, or in small groups or a combination—

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may be an area for further investigation. It may be that “time out” of chaotic life rhythms in either a voluntary or mandated setting would benefit a larger group of young women. What needs to be determined going forward is what the program elements would entail, how to create conditions that allow for a deep enough level of reflection and real self-accounting. There are models in the spiritual world—meditation retreats, monasteries/nunneries, yoga retreats—that are structured but not targeted toward a specific change goal. There is some growing interest in Vipassana meditation in prison and jail and early evidence that it produces better coping while in prison, increased hope for a better future and decreased substance use at release (Bowen et al., 2006; Perelman et al., 2012). This provides a good model for inside interventions but has yet to be studied with criminal justice populations in community settings, or specifically with young women. This may hold promise for young women, either alone or in combination with some of the relationship focused interventions or recommendations here in.

Blend youth development and trauma-informed practices. Youth development holds some important tenets that are transferrable for transition age young adults, particularly those whose developmental stage may have been impeded by early or persistent trauma. In the past ten years there have been many interventions and evidence based practices on trauma-informed care for women of all ages. Parole and Reentry service providers and young adult service providers who are likely to serve young women coming home from prison may be better able to support permanent reintegration by combining these approaches. More research on a hybrid model or adoption of current trauma-informed models of care and case management for young adult women to then be evaluated may contribute significantly to the field and to young women’s outcomes. Youth development specifically includes finding and hiring staff that like and respect

youth, which aligns with the gender-informed strategies laid out on page 77 of this paper.

Trauma and youth-development approaches require at their base the ability to individualize care, to listen carefully to the client, to partner with the client in deciding courses of treatment and a recognition that someone's context defines their responses. Many practitioners are aware of youth development and trauma, but are not adequately trained to implement interventions that are responsive to those needs. Additionally, the two models have not yet been fully blended outside of a few specific interventions. The development of this approach would add significantly to the field.

Explore relationships as a fundamental part of reentry

Many practitioners make assumptions about the role of families and friends in relation to younger clients. For some, this leads to an automatic bias *towards* family re-connection, for others, against. Neither stance is helpful as was illustrated by the very complex and nuanced relationships these young women were navigating upon their return. As indicated in the findings, the relationships that women build while in prison and upon release can be a source of great support and learning, and can also be a place of risk. Ensuring that assessments are not heterosexist or biased either towards or against family members, including women's networks of support in case and treatment planning, providing opportunities for young women to find older adults to connect to for guidance and support can help support and sustain changes that may have been made while on the inside.

This process can and should include a full examination of restrictions on women who are on

parole from being connected to others who have felonies, particularly other women. The assumption that consorting with other known felons is a risk in the community for continued criminal behavior is untested for women, particularly relationships with other female prior inmates. The struggle women have to rebuild their social networks, or in some cases to build them for the first time, may be in fact more hampered by the insistence that they avoid one another. Social isolation can be a risk factor for recidivism (Heubner, DeJong & Cobbina, 2010), and may also lead some women into relationships with men who may then lead them to criminal behavior or to sexual/physical abuse. It is time to examine the underlying assumptions of this policy, the impact on younger women and what the outcome for individuals and public safety are if the rules were reconsidered in light of women's relational needs and realities.

Train Parole Officers

This study interestingly indicated that the relationship between a young woman and her Parole Officer can be a source of support and guidance. As speculated above, it may also be that Parole Officers find a certain amount of professional satisfaction working with younger women, who may represent a real promise of change. Social workers or advocates can provide training to Parole Officers regarding the types of approaches that are more likely to result in positive outcomes (e.g. providing clear boundaries and directives, being actively interested in the person in front of them, recognizing the changing nature of young adults). Recent research indicates that women with violent charges are *less* likely to recidivate (Deschenes, Owen & Crow, 2007) and therefore, given the high rate of violent crimes seen in even this sample, a better understanding of risk and resilience of this population may have impact on Parole strategies and approaches.

This would allow for a better allocation of resources and a better scaling of the level of intensity

and monitoring required for young women from a public-safety perspective.

Provide groups that address social and emotional needs for their return to freedom.

Reentry service providers often focus on the very practical here and now needs of returning women (see Figure B, page 54). However, young women may benefit significantly from having opportunities with their peers to address feelings of isolation, stigma, relationships with parents, peers and children, and how to be an adult. The longer a young woman has been incarcerated, the more likely it is that she will need some emotional preparation for reentry. Based on the findings from this study, it appears that this space has not yet been created in a structurally significant way. Social workers, particularly those trained in group process, are uniquely positioned to provide the supportive forums for young women to explore and grow. These services may provide opportunities to support young women who are already committed to change and assist with those who are struggling with if or how to turn their lives around.

Practitioners may be able to leverage social-networking platforms and technologies that are likely to be adopted quickly by young adults, providing opportunities for larger networks of distal support. The use of social networking, mobile applications and texting technologies may prove to be a rich vein that appears to be significantly overlooked for this age group. The use of social networks and technology in general is an area that has been under-utilized by social work and criminal justice practitioners. There are lessons to be learned from the public health arena regarding the use and dissemination of these technologies to reach and support hard-to-reach populations. Examination of how to best leverage these technologies for young may provide new avenues for support and transformation at relatively low cost.

Build capacity for social workers

As the front line for most interventions in the social service world, social workers are often seeing clients who are struggling with a multitude of life strains. As social work as a profession has been largely absent from correctional and reentry work, there is not a robust cadre of social workers who understand the needs and experiences of these young women, and how to help navigate the systems they are encountering. Social work education and continuing education should include specific, concrete information on working with previously incarcerated young women, the issues related to age and gender including family strain, developmental impacts of incarceration and the collateral consequences of felony records. Social workers should also be trained to understand the impact of stigma, and evidence-based/evidence-informed interventions that support growth and freedom of young women after reentry. Even as the flow into prison has begun to slow down, the sheer numbers of black and Latina women from lower-socioeconomic strata who have been impacted directly by the policies of over-incarceration demands that social workers be better trained to understand and be prepared to help those who are returning home. Evidence-based practices such as cognitive-behavioral approaches, understanding actuarial risk/needs assessments, having a grounding in gender and developmental theories and understanding the larger socio-political context of over-incarceration would help build capacity in communities to where clients are likely to be returning.

Create age and use-responsive substance interventions

The literature indicates that substance use is a key variable for failed reentry. However, the

findings here indicated that most of the young women who participated either did not report significant substance use histories, or, if they were struggling with use issues, did not find the interventions and programs responsive to their needs. Young women may need same-gendered programs and approaches that target marijuana and trauma-triggered use. The current approaches appear to be very “one-size-fits-all” and to not meet the needs of the young women. By working to create age and use responsive interventions, it creates an opportunity to prevent escalation to serious and persistent substance use, support positive growth and to decrease the likelihood of future child welfare involvement due to substance use.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Like all studies, this research is limited in its scope and reach. The small sample size, as stated prior, makes generalizability a moot point. However, there are other methodological limitations to this research. The geographic homogeneity of the sample, particularly the over-representation of one small neighborhood in Brooklyn, while not surprising given the high rates of incarceration and concentrated disadvantage, most likely skews the sample towards a particular life experience both prior to and during reentry. As stated above, research with national samples of young women would provide a diverse and deep group, which may provide important differential data, especially in light of findings that consistently indicate that youth in and of itself is a risk factor for recidivism for women returning from prison (Deschene, Owen, Crow, 2007). Likewise, the fact of the study being limited to young women returning to New York City limits the information to overwhelmingly urban young women. It is likely that rural and suburban young women, or even young women who hail from smaller urban areas might have other experiences that are relevant and important to this topic.

The lack of follow-up interviews or focus groups was also a significant limitation that did not allow for testing in the field of findings, and for hearing young women's reintegration stories over a longer period of time. Research with longitudinal capacity—that followed young women from the time of release out three to five years—would provide a far richer picture of the strengths and coping skills that were emerged from this research project. Likewise, group processes, where the young women could respond to one another and offer clarifications to the researcher and to one another would yield additional information and viewpoints.

While the young women's voices and experiences were the central focus of this inquiry, future studies would benefit from the inclusion of interviews and observations of correctional, parole and service staff regarding their experiences and challenges working with younger women. This additional vector of data would undoubtedly give rise to a series of new questions and information. Gathering data from older workers might shed light on further areas of strength as perceived by them and on training needs or areas of confusion or concern. Knowing these issues might then be used to better prepare younger women to encounter and work more effectively with the professionals they will inevitably come into contact with upon release. Even in the face of these limitations, which are not insignificant, this study provides an beginning for further investigation of the needs and strengths of a cohort of young women who, in general while having been convicted of a crime serious enough to do some serious time, still offer real hope for themselves as contributors to society.

CONCLUSION

The reader may remember that while pathways into crime and delinquency have been illuminated by years of wide-ranging research, the path out, as well as a road to prevention, remain more dimly lit. This modest study contributes a small circle of light in the social welfare body of literature. As part of a larger approach to prevention, social workers who have been well-trained in the youth development and evidence from social science literature may be able to help build the capacity of communities and organizations to address the risk factors faced by young women. There may be significant opportunity to intelligently build roads to institutions that are better suited to support and nurture pro-social citizens through a focus on social and emotional development, particularly of girls and young women from communities of high disadvantage. Girls and young women who evidence aggression and violence are often shunned or blamed, and few programs are currently able to adequately address the behavior while supporting the whole girl. Being able to do both effectively, using trauma-informed approaches and cutting edge interventions, may move young women who are likely to be incarcerated onto the track of self-sufficiency and positive contribution. It is who these young women desperately want to be and did not have the assistance early enough to avoid their time behind bars.

Over the last twenty-five years, several streams of scholarship and advocacy have come together to form a nexus through which to look at the lives and needs of young women coming home from incarceration. Feminist criminology, youth development, developmental psychology, reentry and desistance studies have all contributed significantly to a new way of thinking about these young women. The contribution of brain development science towards questions of culpability of young offenders, differential analyses of women and their unique needs, a

recognition of the importance of early release planning and stratified post-release supervision have impacted criminal justice policies, programmatic approaches and improved the outlook for success after years of dismal outcomes of the penal system.

Fifty years after publication Goffman's writing on total institutions (1961) continues to hold true. Penal institutions remain, at their core, destructive, de-humanizing, and ultimately wholly unsuited to provide a platform from which anyone, particularly young women, can be expected to emerge in a better place to move into society's stream. Other researchers, most recently Deschenes, Owen & Crow (2007) have articulated keenly that women offenders in general tend to present a fairly low risk to society from a public safety perspective, particularly as it relates to rates of re-offending and the types of crimes women tend to be re-arrested or re-incarcerated for. Therefore, criminal justice approaches that do not rely on incarcerative responses to women's offending must be pursued.

This is a fundamental principle, supported by empirical evidence, that social work as a profession has an opportunity to lift and bring forward. Social work in the recent past as a profession and in the classroom has been relatively silent in relation to criminal justice and reentry policies in the United States.

The young women who cross over into adult jails and prisons may have broken laws, harmed people, created public disorder or contributed to the disadvantage of their neighborhoods. But they can be, as illustrated by the thirteen participants in this study, powerful and inspirational forces in their own lives, the lives of their families and the lives of their communities. The young

women whose voices were heard through this study indicate that there is much in them worth fighting for, and that they harbor significant capacity and desire for change and transformation. In the face of tremendous burden, they made clear that as young women of color, they were not going to simply continue down the road of criminal involvement and reliance on the same systems that had so badly failed most of their mothers. They made the road towards their own reintegration, often with very little institutional support. The young women who participated in this research study offer a glimpse into opportunities that can be leveraged in the effort to roll back punitive and disproportionately harsh responses to young female law-breaking.

Community-anchored responses that model and support positive family, romantic and instrumental relationship networks may offer promise for not only rehabilitation but perhaps for prevention. Addressing the chaos of community and personal trauma through reflective and quiet spaces may be a pathway toward wholeness that has not been institutionally and systematically supported.

Social work must seek to inform processes for social change even as it attends to the needs on the ground. While this study cannot answer macro-level policy questions given the limitations, the findings support the vision that young women hold much hope and promise for change, and that imprisonment, while an easy answer for society, ends up costing society more in resources and social capital. The investment in growing a system that fails consistently and profoundly to produce good outcomes, even as the participants in this study were able to evidence growth *in spite* of terrible conditions, is a policy of folly. A folly that costs lives, shatters families and contributes nothing to the overall good. The current fiscal crises faced by innumerable states, the mounting and clear evidence that incarceration has iatrogenic effects and fails profoundly by

nearly any measure to provide a benefit to society outside of incapacitation, and social workers' commitment to anti-oppressive practices makes this an opportune time for the profession to look critically systems that are inherently inhumane and to push for not simple reform, but radical transformation towards preventive, humane and robust interventions based on the empirical evidence that is abundantly available.

Appendix A: Consent Form

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**THE
GRADUATE
CENTER**
CITY UNIVERSITY
OF NEW YORK

CUNY UI - Institutional Review Board

Approval Date: February 23, 2012
Expiration Date: February 22, 2013
Coordinator Initials: SL

CONSENT FORM

My name is Nina Aledort and I am student in the Social Welfare Ph.D. Program at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY). I am the Principal Investigator of this project, "young women's reentry experiences from prison" This is a research study of young women who have spent some time in prison or jail and are back in the community. The study will describe the experiences of young women, **who returned to their communities after incarceration at the age of 18-25**. I would like permission to interview you about your experiences. This interview will include questions about your history of arrests and incarcerations, your life before you went to prison, your preparation for release, relationships with your family, friends and romantic and sexual partners, your health and mental health concerns, and your expectations about the future.

This interview will take from one to two hours. You will get \$20 at the end of our conversation. With your permission, I would like to audiotape this interview so I can record the details accurately. The tapes will only be heard by me and my advisor, Gerald Mallon, DSW and a transcription service.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential, and will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only I, and my advisor, will have access.

I will do everything I can to keep others from learning about your participation in the research. To further help protect your privacy, we have obtained a Confidentiality Certificate from the Department of Health and Human Services.

With this Certificate, we cannot be forced (for example by subpoena) to disclose information that may identify you in any federal, state, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings.

A Confidentiality Certificate does not stop you or a member of your family from choosing to share information about yourself or your involvement in this research. If an insurer or employer learns about your participation, and you consent to have them receive research information, then I may not use the Certificate to withhold this information. This means that you must also protect your own privacy.

A Certificate of Confidentiality does not represent an endorsement of this research by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) or the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Finally, if you inform me that you intend to harm yourself or another, I may share that information with either 911 or another professional without your consent.

**CU
NY**

PARTICIPATION:

At any time you can refuse to answer any questions or end this interview. It is completely voluntary, and nothing bad will happen if you choose to stop or want to withdraw consent, and no services will not be given to you if you refuse or withdraw.

The risk involved in this study, is that you may feel some embarrassment about your past, or you may feel some discomfort, anxiety or sadness at the questions being asked, or in answering the questions. At the end of the interview I will provide a list of places you can go or call in case you need or want any support. The benefits of your participation are that you may feel good having an opportunity to talk about coming home from prison, your life now and your hopes for the future. You may also feel good that you have participated in a research project that may help other young women have an easier time coming home in the future. I will be talking to around 20 other young women.

I may publish results of the study, but names or any identifying characteristics will not be used. If you would like a copy of the study, I will send it to you once it is done.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me via voice or text at (646) 389-0279 or at reentryresearch@gmail.com or my advisor, and co-PI Gerald P. Mallon at (212) 452-7043 or gmallon@hunter.cuny.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact the Hunter College Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) Office at [212 650-3053](tel:212-650-3053) or irb@hunter.cuny.edu. Thank you for your participation in the study. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

I agree to have this interview audio-taped please [circle one]:

Yes No

Participant's signature Date _____
Investigator's signature Date

Researcher looking to interview young women who have come home from incarceration (jail/prison)



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- * If you are 18-25 (or are 26 and came home in the last year)
- * Female
- * Came home in the last 3-36 months from prison OR spent 8 months or more in jail
- * Willing to be interviewed for up to 2 hours

Call/text Nina Aledort, PhD candidate, CUNY Graduate Center
(646) 389-0279 or email reentryresearch@gmail.com

You will be compensated \$20 for your time and effort. Interviews will happen either in the program you are attending, or at a place you are comfortable

Text/Call (646) 389-0279	Text/Call (646) 389-0279	Text/Call (646) 389-0279	Text/Call (646) 389-0279	Text/Call (646) 389-0279
email	email	email	email	email
reentryresearch@gmail.com	reentryresearch@gmail.com	reentryresearch@gmail.com	reentryresearch@gmail.com	reentryresearch@gmail.com

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Recruit Location/Method: _____ Participant Number: _____

Interview Location: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for participating in this study. This interview is expected to take approximately 70 minutes. The only identifying information recorded on this interview instrument will be your subject number. I am going to ask you some questions about yourself, your family and relationships, what coming home from prison has been like for you, and questions about your health, work and education experiences. I will also be asking you about some of your activities since you've come home, and your experiences with the criminal justice system. Please remember that you are free to refuse to answer any questions without penalty. I will give you \$20 in cash and a resource list at the end of this interview.

Screening

These first three questions will confirm that you are eligible to participate in this study.

1. What is your gender? Male **Ineligible. Thank and exclude.**
 Female

2. What is your date of birth? ____/____/____ (age _____)
If under 18 or over 26 **Ineligible.** Thank and exclude.

3. Have you been incarcerated in prison in the three years?
 Yes If so, when were you released? (if not 3 months prior or 36 months post release **thank and exclude**) _____
 No Ineligible. Thank and exclude.

The next questions will give me sense of your background and your legal history. You can choose to not answer any question you want to.

How would you describe yourself? (race/ethnicity)

Tell me a little bit about your first arrests, detention or incarceration-(age, where, how long, how many times?)

What was your life like before you were last incarcerated? (living situation, school/work, last grade, relationships/children)

Tell me about your last incarceration (charge, how long sentence, where, what kind of classes or programs did you take, any reentry prep?)

What is your life like now that you are out of prison (where living, with whom, working, school, on parole, children, relationships)

Tell me about the first day you were released from prison—(what did you do? Who did you connect with? Where did you go? How about the first week? How did it compare to what you thought it would be like?)

What are most proud of since you've come home? What helped you achieve that?

Where have you struggled the most? What would help you to overcome that?

The next questions focus on how being a young woman might impact your reentry process:

How do you think your age impacts on your experience coming home? (How are you treated?

Do you know other women your age going through the same thing? Would that be helpful?)

How do you think being a young woman affects how the people you interact with (POs, counselors, trainers, social workers, etc.) treat you or expect from you?

If you hadn't gone to prison when you did, what do you think your life would be like right now?

What would you need to get to that place (or avoid if they think they would be dead, on drugs, etc.)

How do you think having been in prison as a young person has affected how you think about yourself? How about other people? (Prompt—do you feel stigmatized/shame, do you think it's okay, is it something you tell people, what happens when they find out?)

Thank you. The next questions are about work, school relationships and health

What has been the role of your family in your coming home? (ask how they define family)—who has been supportive and helpful? Were you connected with your family when you were incarcerated? How did you think your family was going to be when you got home?

How about other people in your life (Prompt—relationship to these people—family, counselors, doctors, friends, partners, POs, children, ACS, teachers, etc.) Who have you been able to ask for help? Who has not been helpful?

(If she has children) can you talk a bit about being a mother and coming home? What role does being a mom play in your staying out? What kind of help and support are you getting to help keep you with your children or see them? How do you think being (state age) plays a role here?

Many women have been involved in relationships where they have been harmed by their boyfriends or girlfriends or husbands or partners have you had relationships that have been a problem either before or after prison? How has that affected your reentry?

Some women form intimate, romantic or sexual relationships with other women while in prison. Can you tell me about what relationships you had if any with the other women? How do you think that has had an impact on your returning home?

Many women who spent time in prison have some health problems, including drugs and alcohol and spending some time in a psychiatric hospital. Can you tell me a little bit about if you have had any of these issues? If yes, have you ever wanted someone to help you? What have your

experiences been in getting this help? How do you think being (state participant's age) plays a role in this?

Tell me about your experiences either going to school or working since you've been home?
(Prompt: have you tried to go to school or find work? Are there barriers?)

Thank you so much. The last two questions are about making change for yourself, and about people who are here to help you make changes.

If you were able to tell the service providers what they should do differently for young women coming home from prison, what would that be? How about your PO? Family members?

If you were a counselor at a program and a 20 year old woman walked in who was just coming home from a prison bid, what would she need? What would you do? What wouldn't you do?

On a scale of 1-10, 1 being that you are very certain that you will, how likely are you to go back to prison or jail?

I would like to be able to share the results of this study with you when I am finished if you would like. What is the best way for me to stay in touch with you? Thank you so much for your help with this project and for your time

Those are the last questions I have. Are there any questions you want to ask me?

I wish you the best of luck in your continuing journey.

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