Going Straight for Her Children?

Mothers' Desistance after Incarceration

by

Venezia Michalsen

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dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Michael Jacobson, Ph.D.

_____ _____

Date Chair of Examining Committee

Karen Terry, Ph.D.

_____ _____

Date Executive Officer

Michael Jacobson, Ph.D. _____

James Lynch, Ph.D. _____

Natalie Sokoloff, Ph.D. _____

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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by Venezia Michalsen

Advisor: Michael Jacobson, Ph.D.

The process by which individuals stop, or desist from, criminal behavior is an emerging focus of theoretical and research inquiry. Two theories which seek to explain the phenomenon of desistance are life course theory and identity change theory. Life course theory posits that bonds to individuals and institutions contribute to changes in criminal behavior throughout the life course, and identity change theory suggests that an individual will desist when she goes through a prosocial shift in her sense of who she is. Despite the fact that most women involved with the criminal justice system are mothers and must reunify with their children upon release, there has been no discussion of the effects of reunification in any desistance research, nor have these two concepts been addressed in tandem by either life course or identity change theories. In this dissertation, interviews were conducted with 100 formerly incarcerated mothers to expand on the theories behind these concepts of desistance. Women were interviewed about their relationships with their children, changes in their identity and their desistance behaviors. Overall, time spent with children was found to affect desistance more than the presence or absence of official reunification. Extensive contact with the criminal justice system, and associated identity change, were also shown to affect desistance. Other reunification issues, barriers to

successful reentry and desistance, and directions for future research are discussed.

Dedication

In loving memory of my most beloved farmer, Billy Hindinger, one of the first people to keep me warm. His love taught me the importance of family and community, and his lifetime of farming taught me the joys and sorrows of hard work and true dedication. I feel his loss very deeply. I'm with you, still.

In loving memory of James E. Mays, who, with the help of his daughter, reminds me to be duty bound.

In loving memory of a beloved dog named Ruby, who reminded me every time I saw her of the sheer joy of unconditional love.

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I have been a part of the doctoral program in Criminal Justice at the CUNY Graduate Center for many years, and over some dramatic changes in my life, and in the life of the program itself. I started a recent college graduate, and I leave this program a professional. There are many people from the program, and from other academic programs in the CUNY system whom I must thank for the experiences I had as a doctoral student. Thanks to Dr. Jim Levine and Christina Czechowicz, who made me feel welcome as I began in 1998, and continued to be supportive over my entire stay in the program. Thanks to Paul Giovini and all of the administrative support staff who have kept the doctoral program humming over the years. I began my dissertation journey with Dr. Delores Jones-Brown on my committee, and while my topic change moved me

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The work of this project did not begin when I started the interviews. When I felt most lost about what to do, the idea was born with the help of Dr. Dawn Wiest. Thanks to Dawn for taking the time to ask me what I really cared about, and urging me to build me topic after that passion and curiosity. Dawn helped me narrow my topic to reunification with children that day, and moved me forward as she shared her mantra: "the only way out is through". Her statistical expertise and teaching mentality were also invaluable to me at the very end.

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I am blessed to have the love and support of a wonderful circle of friends and family. My husband Jorge and I met when I had first started my Ph.D., and he has supported me from my first classes through this dissertation. I cannot thank him enough for everything he has done to make these past eight years such a fun and exciting adventure. The consistent and passionate support of my parents, Sheila and Marvin, and my sister, Ravenna, has been one of the most important reasons for why I was able to make it through this program. I could not have done it without them. I am also so thankful to my grandparents for their prayers, their pride, and their reminders that, after all, this dissertation was just a paper that had to get done. I also owe many thanks to Dr. Michelle Blanco for her consistent support, pride and care. The support of family and friends is so important in such a long project, and I am thankful for the love and consistent support of Jacques Carten, Allie Cheatham, Helen Cowles-Demorro, Helen Evensen, Alejandra Fernandez, the Fernandez Family, Dr. Marina Franzoni, Dr. Natasha Frost, Dr. Heath Grant, Demetra Georgiou, Laura Gervais and the Ostojic family, the Hindinger Family, Elba Infante, the Lincoln Michalsens, the Lugo Family, Makeda Mays-Green, Dr. Nickie Phillips, Angel Rios, Takema Robinson, Joanna Santa, Alison Satake, Dr. Veronica Schanoes, and the Ammie Family. In particular, I want to thank Aoife West-Villafranca for work dates over Soy Chai and Arepas, and Missy Walker for so many late nights working at Ozzie's. I am also very grateful to Reverend Dr. James Forbes, Jr., Reverend George Manukas and Reverend Dr. Vivian Nixon for reminding me that true faith is about action.

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Chapter 1: Women's Crime and Incarceration

There are many thousands of women in the United States entangled in the criminal justice system: 98,600 women were living in state or federal prisons at the end of 2005, and over a million were under the supervision of probation (956,200) and parole (93,000) during that same year (Harrison & Beck, 2006). In addition, thousands of formerly incarcerated women in the community have completed or avoided community supervision. Whether on parole or not, life in reentry is often difficult, for one must reestablish contact with family, find a place to live and a way to pay for it, and often deal with problematic health and sobriety issues. The criminal justice system of the United States is one of the largest and most overburdened in the world, making successful reentry (and therefore, non-return) pivotal to avoiding further growth of an already unwieldy and expensive system. In addition to the effects of time spent incarcerated on individuals, the effects on family members, particularly children, are also substantial and long lasting. Scholarly attention to the emerging field of reentry studies has often focused on 'what works' for the prevention of recidivism. More recently, academic focus has shifted to the support of 'desistance' (or stopping) from crime. This project seeks to extend the breadth of this knowledge by focusing on women, often neglected for their relatively small numbers, and on the ways in which mothers' relationships with their children and with themselves may support their desistance.

This chapter provides an overview of women's crime, incarceration and reentry. Chapter two discusses the desistance literature, specifically focusing on what has been discovered about women's desistance. Chapter three presents the theoretical basis for desistance research, with a focus on the theories which guide this dissertation: life course theory and the phenomenological approach to the study of desistance. Chapter four describes the methodology of this study, including a discussion of its scope and limitations, and descriptions of the sample of one hundred formerly incarcerated mothers. Chapter five presents the quantitative results from the interviews, and chapter six includes qualitative analyses and discussion of the results and their policy and research implications.

Women's Crime and Incarceration

While women still represent only a very small percentage and number of individuals incarcerated in the United States, the rate of growth for females in prison is more than double that for males (Harrison & Karberg, 2006). Most of this growth is due to the impact of drug policies, since about a third of women in prison are serving a drug-related sentence (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002). In fact, women are incarcerated for drug offenses (29% of women in prison), almost as often as they are for violent (35%), and property (30%) offenses[1] (Harrison & Beck, 2005). In addition, many non-drug-related convictions are reported by women themselves to be associated with their efforts too support their addictions

[1] Public order (5%) and other/unspecified (1%) offenses make up the remaining conviction reasons.

(Belknap, 2001; Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2004; Waterson, 1993). Increases in the number of women incarcerated, however, do not reflect increases in women's crime: imprisonment rates have been increasing disproportionately to arrest rates (Women's Prison Association, 2004). The policies of the war on drugs increased mandatory and longer sentences for drug-related crimes in a way that brought more lower-level offenders, disproportionately female, into the system for longer periods of time.

The punitive policy shift against drug-involved women and their families, disproportionately poor and African-American or Latina, meant that the community sanctions of the past were replaced by prison sentences (Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2004). A small community corrections movement still exists which encourages the supervision of women in their own communities, rather than in expensive and, it is argued, criminogenic prisons. Proponents of such methods denounce in particular the distance of prisons from women's homes and families, which means that women are held in difficult-to-reach facilities, slowly drifting away from any ties they once had.

Contemporary theorists interested in women's crime and punishment have suggested that women's entry into the criminal justice system differs from that of men, and that, therefore, traditional policy responses and criminological theories have limited application to women (Belknap, 2001; Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Pollock, 1999). Women's "pathways" into the system

begin with childhoods of abandonment, abuse and poverty. Substance abuse begins as a coping mechanism, and economic crimes (e.g. prostitution and shoplifting) begin to support continuing addictions. Arrests and incarcerations, therefore, become the official response to what may be seen as behaviors meant to cope with early and continuing disadvantage (Belknap, 2001; Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 1989; Gilfus, 1992; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996).

The particular effects of incarceration on women

It has long been recognized that the punishment started with incarceration extends outside prison walls and beyond sentence time. "Collateral consequences" of a conviction may extend into areas of individual, family and community life, making it harder to secure employment, housing and benefits, reducing earnings and increasing familial discord. While the majority of all reentering individuals, male and female, experience these consequences, women have unique needs upon reentry to society.

Compared to men, women generally have lower educational achievement (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002), less work experience and fewer job skills (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Harlow, 2003); more severe and qualitatively different substance abuse (Belknap, 2003 in Sharp & Muraskin; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Mumola, 1999); more physical (Acoca, 1998; Messina & Grella, 2006), and mental health problems (James & Glaze, 2006);

and more extensive histories of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, in both childhood and adulthood (Belknap, 2001; Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2004; Covington, 2002; Harlow, 1999; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Messina & Grella, 2006; O'Brien, 2002; Owen, 1998). With all of these inter-related and often rather serious strikes against them, these women are already marginalized in the social and economic arenas. Having been incarcerated, women reenter society with the additional burden of stigma (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Petersilia, 2003).

Two-thirds of women in prison have one or more minor children (Mumola, 2000). These mothers are particularly likely to be the caretakers of children before their incarceration (Bruns, 2006; Greenfeld & Snell, 1999; Mumola, 2000). Those mothers who were not live-in caretakers were likely to have already been engaged in a system of visitation (Bruns, 2006). The cycle of removal from and return to the community extends this cycle of disadvantage to the children, families, and communities that women leave behind and return to upon release (Owen, 2004).

Mothers in prison and their children

The incarceration of parents even more disproportionately destabilizes communities by negatively affecting the outcomes of their children. Johnson & Waldfogel's (2002) review of the population of state and federal inmates found that over one million children had at least one parent in state or federal prisons. In contrast to the relatively small body of literature which exists about the

experiences of mothers reentering the community after incarceration, there exists a lively scholarly examination of mothers and their children while the mothers are incarcerated.

The care of the children of incarcerated mothers is far more uncertain than that of children of incarcerated fathers: the families of incarcerated fathers with child custody problems remain “semi-nuclear” and mostly intact in their absence, usually because the vast majority of those children (90%) end up in the care of their mothers (Mumola, 2000). On the other hand, children of incarcerated mothers are only rarely (22% to 28%) cared for by their fathers (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Mumola, 2000), and are often broken up, both from family members and from siblings (Johnston, 1995). Of incarcerated mothers who lived with their children before their incarceration, the vast majority (53%) have those children in the care of their own parents (Golden, 2005; Hale, 1987; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Mumola, 2000), which has been shown to be particularly protective against child custody problems (Johnston, 1995). Another 19% to 25% of children of women prisoners are cared for by other family members (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Mumola, 2000). However, while this majority of mothers have a grandmother, other relative or friend who will care for her children during her incarceration, different studies estimate that between 8% to 10% of children of incarcerated mothers end up in the foster care system, compared with only 1% to 2% of children of incarcerated fathers (Beckerman,

2001; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Johnston, 1991; Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002; McGowan, & Blumenthal, 1978; Mumola, 2000).

Criminal justice-involved women face a number of different types of child custody and placement problems, including difficulty in meeting family reunification requirements (Beckerman, 1994; Johnston, 1995; Kowitz-Margolies & Kraft-Stolar, 2006). Mothers whose children are involved in the child welfare system are at risk for having their parental rights terminated to those children (Genty, 1995; Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002; Raimon, 2001). The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA; P.L. 105-89) mandates termination of parental rights once a child has been in foster care for at least 15 of the past 22 months. States may decide to opt out of the 15 to 18 month requirement when the child is with a relative, but not all states have done so (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2001). As Jacobs (2001) points out, ASFA requirements are difficult enough to meet for single mothers with substance abuse problems in the community. Their incarcerated counterparts, serving an average of 18 months, are even more handicapped in their pursuit of reunification (Beckerman, 1989, 1991, 1998; Genty, 1995, 1998). In particular, women in prison are often not able to connect with reunification services, meaning that communication with and support from social and foster care workers affects access to visits, referrals, assistance with placement in correctional or reentry programs (Beckerman, 1994; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Johnston, 1995).

Beyond problems associated with policy, incarcerated mothers experience a number of difficult emotions about the enforced separation from their children: including anxiety, depression, regret, inadequacy and loss (Block & Potthast, 1998; Radosh, 2002; Richie, 2001; Thompson & Harm, 2000). Further, this disruption often leads to emotional problems for children left behind, from relationships with others, including their own mothers and other authority figures to feelings of grief, guilt, depression and separation anxiety (Bilchik, Seymour, & Kreisher, 2001; Bruns, 2006; Dressel, Porterfield, & Barnhill, 1998; Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, and Kennon, 1999; Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001; Zaplin & Dougherty, 1998). While the implications of incarceration-enforced separation on children are very important, they are beyond the scope of this study. However, the promotion of positive outcomes for incarcerated mothers may mean alleviation of such effects of enforced separation (Block & Potthast, 1998; Carlson, 2001; Magaletta & Herbst, 2001; Tuerk & Loper, 2006).

Women anticipating their release fear a difficult reunion, but usually plan to resume their parenting, and desire preparation for that role during their incarceration (Baunach, 1985; Bruns, King, & Stateler, 2003; Chapman, 1980; Enos, 2001; Fogel & Martin, 1992; ; Greenfeld & Minor-Harper, 1991; Hairston, 1991; Kazura, 2001; Krisberg & Temin, 2001; Koons, Burrow, Morash, & Bynum, 1997; Morton & Williams, 1998; Thompson & Harm, 2000; Young & Smith, 2000). In anticipation of such potential for reunification, a number of researchers (LeFlore & Holsten, 1989; Poehlmann, 2005; Tuerk & Loper, 2006) have

recommended that incarcerated mothers have the opportunity to maintain and develop their parenting skills, particularly in situations in which they may have contact with their children.

Programs for mothers in prison

Social services, including parenting and family reunification programs are not widespread or well-funded in prisons (Clement, 1993; Johnston, 1995). Furthermore, most prison programs were designed with men in mind, and do not address the unique needs of females (Radosh, 2002). Mothers and fathers also report different programming needs: women seem particularly interested in facilitating contact with their children, both from a distance and within prison walls (Kazura, 2001). In addition, incarcerated women's stress is often related to concerns about their children, from living arrangements to safety (Kazura, 2001).

For the most part, existing programs address women's need to maintain relationships with parenting education and prison visiting facilitation. [2] Participation in such programs has shown a number of positive outcomes for mothers, from increased self esteem to improved relationships between mothers and their children (Johnston, 1995; Thompson & Harm, 1995; Thompson & Harm, 2000). On the other hand, lack of contact between incarcerated mothers

[2] For a more comprehensive review of programs which promote mother-child bonding in prison settings, see Braun, 2006.

and their children disrupts the parent-child relationship and diminishes the ability of the mothers to make decisions about their children (Johnston & Gabel, 1995).

Effective parenting requires a complex set of skills and knowledge, including child development and guidance, relationship skills and self-esteem (Thompson & Harm, 2000), that are most often learned through parenting experience. For the population of incarcerated mothers, however, family experiences were often problematic and even traumatic. While every parent or future parent could probably benefit from parenting classes, incarcerated mothers could particularly benefit from parenting education (ACA, 1990; Thompson & Harm, 2000).

The majority (54%) of mothers in state prison never receive visits from their children (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Mumola, 2000). This lack of visitation, however, is not only a problem of nonexistent visitation programs. Children are often unable to visit their incarcerated mothers because of the distance between prisons and children's homes, requiring often expensive transportation and time off of school (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993, Clement, 1993). Bloom & Steinhart (1993) also report that caretakers of children may be unwilling to allow the children to visit their mothers. Visitation programs which facilitate contact between incarcerated mothers and their children have been shown to improve everything from empathy (Thompson & Harm, 2000) to reduced parental stress (Tuerk & Loper, 2006). Such parenting programs not only help to maintain relationships, but also to allow for more successful reunification upon mothers'

release from incarceration (Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen & Kennon, 1999), and seem to decrease recidivism.

Women's Reentry to the Community

The vast majority of people in prison or jail will not be there forever, and will return to the communities from which they were removed. This period of their 'reentry' is very important to whether they will return to incarceration. While women are less likely than men to have consecutive involvements in the criminal justice system, return is likely for the vast majority of women in prison. Nearly two-thirds of women in State prison have a history of prior convictions (Greenfield & Snell, 1999). In a study of prisoners released in 1994, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Langan & Levin, 2002) found that, within three years, 58% of released women had been arrested again, and 39% had returned to prison. Seventeen percent of these were convicted of new crimes, but women were also returned for reasons related to their earlier offense: women's re-convictions are often due to technical parole violations because they fail random drug tests (Chesney-Lind, 1998). The emergence of a literature about reentry has uncovered the complexity and interrelation of the elements of reestablishing one's life, from securing housing and a source of income to maintaining sobriety and restoring relationships with friends, family and children (Richie, 2001). As we have seen, women enter prison with extensive service needs; after absence from the community during incarceration, these needs have not disappeared. Women need an array of programs before, during and after release that address their

wide array of needs (Alemagno, 2001; Morash, Bynum & Koons, 1998; Richie, 2001; Staton, Leukefeld, & Logan, 2001; Staton, Leukefeld, & Webster, 2003), including housing, employment and income, sobriety and family reunification.

Housing

The populations of homeless and formerly incarcerated people are not mutually exclusive. Incarceration and homelessness are interrelated in many ways, from lost leases during incarceration to arrests for offenses endemic to homelessness, like trespassing. In multiple studies of homelessness among released prisoners, Metraux & Culhane (2004, 2006) found that up to a quarter of New York City homeless shelter residents had been incarcerated in a New York State prison or a New York City jail within the previous two years. Of those who had been released from prison, 50% to 60% had entered the shelter system within a month of that release. With comprehensive pre-release planning, such homelessness could be replaced with a seamless transition from prison to transitional or permanent housing (Metraux and Culhane; 2004; Metraux & Culhane, 2006; Osher, Steadman, & Barr, 2003; Petersilia, 2001;Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001).

Among formerly incarcerated people, women are particularly prone to bouts of homelessness. The majority of women in prison had been homeless before their incarceration, and was leaving prison without plans for safe and secure housing (Richie, 2001). In addition, public housing solutions for low-income people, such

as Section Eight, are disappearing, particularly for women with criminal records (Richie, 2001). Accordingly, homeless shelter stays for formerly incarcerated women and men have been found to be correlated with re-arrest (Freudenberg, Wilets, Greene & Richie, 1998; Metraux & Culhane, 2004; Rodriguez & Brown, 2003).

Education, employment and income

As we have seen, incarcerated women's job histories are already quite limited. When they are released, women enter the community not only without the prerequisite experience to secure new employment (Dietrich, 2002), but are further burdened with the stigma associated with their incarceration. Employers often check criminal histories of potential employees during the hiring process (Holzer, Raphael & Stoll, 2003; Stoll, Raphael & Holzer, 2006), a process encouraged by new federal rules about background checks (Kurlychek, Brame & Bushway, 2006). The problem is so severe, in fact, that one study showed that approximately 60% of former prisoners were not employed in the regular labor market one year after release (Travis, Solomon & Waul, 2001). However, even if they are able to secure employment, it is either low-paying, with little opportunity for earnings growth (Western, 2002), or it is not one that they are able to keep for very long (Travis, 2002). Furthermore, poverty, like homelessness, has been found to be related to re-arrest in women (Holtfreder, Reisig & Morash, 2004).

Substance abuse

From the War on Drugs to the association between abuse histories and substance abuse, drugs and incarceration go hand-in-hand for women prisoners. For women leaving prison, which is usually an enforced period of sobriety, maintaining that abstention from drugs and alcohol is a high priority (Karberg & James, 2005). The process of substance abuse recovery often involves intensive work, often in a residential or outpatient programs, shown to be more successful the longer they are (Ashley, Sverdlov & Brady, 2004). Prior research has shown that drug treatment during reentry increases the likelihood of mothers' reunification with their children (Johnston, 1995), sobriety and desistance (Hall, Prendergast, Wellisch, Patten, & Cao, 2004). On the other hand, drug use is associated with recidivism: Belenko (2002) showed that as prior sentences increase, so does the likelihood of regular drug use. However, substance abuse programs for women, particularly those with children, are often unavailable or of low quality (Freudenberg, Daniels, Crum, Perkins & Richie, 2005). Research has suggested that when women are able to enroll in substance abuse treatment, their ability to parent effectively is greatly increased. Sentencing convicted, substance-dependent mothers to community-based, residential drug treatment as an alternative to or a component of services to incarceration is therefore more likely to produce successful outcomes for mothers, children, and society than incarceration alone (Johnston, 1995).

Family relationships and reunification

As we have seen, incarcerated women are likely to have been their children's caretakers prior to their incarceration and expect to resume their caretaking role after their release. In fact, incarcerated women report that they identify strongly with their status as mothers, and express motivation towards reunification with their children on their release from prison (Baker & Carson, 1999; Grella & Greenwell, 2006; Richie, 2001).

For women returning to the community, however, reunification with children is not an easy venture. It is difficult enough to accomplish the tasks required to reunify (either enforced by child welfare authorities or basic necessities), such as maintaining sobriety, securing employment or education, and finding appropriate housing. The additional costs and stress of maintaining reunification can send the whole constellation into a tailspin: from childcare during employment to higher grocery costs, children are difficult for anyone, let alone single poor women struggling to keep their families together in shelters or low cost housing. Upon reentry, women often report that other concerns, such as sobriety, employment and housing, become more prominent, and that reunification may happen once they are more secure with these tasks (Grella & Greenwell, 2006; Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2002).

As we have seen in this chapter, the incarceration of women has been increasing, despite the fact that these women are often arrested and convicted

for low-level, non-violent crimes. Overall, women have a vast array of special needs as they leave incarceration, and for these women, who are often already under-resourced, incarceration is a blow to their lives and the lives of their families. Women's children are particularly affected by their imprisonment, since women are often the primary caretakers of those children before their arrest. While programs exist to facilitate and strengthen mothers' relationships with their children through bars, there is still much to be done, since they work within a framework set up to make them fail: far from families in distance and in cost. In addition, the practical and emotional difficulties inherent in reentry make it so that, despite its priority for the women, reunification with children after incarceration becomes difficult, sometimes almost impossible in reentry.

With so many roadblocks to successful reentry, it is hardly any wonder recidivism rates (though female rates are lower than male rates) are as high as they are. To complement existing research about women's desistance, this research project seeks to document the importance of reunification with children to women's identities and desistance in reentry. We know from other research the early stages of reentry – from the first days to the first year – are critical to offenders' pathways toward recidivism or desistance (Travis, Solomon & Waul, 2001). We have much to learn not only about what works, but also about how to make policy respond to what works, rather than simply what is politically convenient. Focus on this important topic allows movement towards a fuller understanding of what

works for women, and may inform the development of more effective policy and programming for women's successful reentry.

Overview of Following Chapters

Chapter 2: Women and Desistance

This chapter describes the state of knowledge about desistance, focusing in particular on women's desistance.

Chapter 3: Theories of Desistance

Chapter three reviews the theories seeking to explain desistance. For the purposes of this dissertation, life course theory and phenomenological (identity change) theory are selected to guide the methodology. The theoretical model for this dissertation is presented.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter presents the research questions guiding this study of women's desistance, sampling and data collection, confidentiality, and research design, and describes key characteristics of the study sample. The scope and limitations of this project are discussed.

Chapter 5: Results

Quantitative analyses of the interview questions, presented in this chapter, showed mixed results for the impact of reunification with children on identity

change and desistance. Findings indicate that hours spent with children (rather than reunification), presence of a partner and identity changes affect desistance. Employment and attachment to children do not affect desistance in this sample. Hours spent with children (rather than reunification) affect attachment to children. No attachments affect the presence or absence of an identity change. While overall presence of an identity change did not affect desistance, identity changes specifically associated with incarceration were significantly related to desistance. A model inspired by these findings was created and tested, and showed that desistance was significantly related to identity changes associated with incarceration, cumulative contact with the criminal justice system, and hours spent with children.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Next Steps

In this chapter, the quantitative results from chapter five are discussed within the context of the respondents' lives and their words. Implications for future research and for program and policy are discussed.

Chapter 2: Women and Desistance

The field of criminology has focused much of its energy on theories about the onset and frequency of criminal and delinquent behavior. The traditional and most widely used method of exploring continued criminal behavior focuses on recidivism, or the "failure to desist from renewed criminal participation," and the ways it may be decreased (Shover & Thompson, 1992). Criminology in the 1960s focused on rehabilitation and creative work towards treatment during incarceration, and community-based treatment programs instead of incarceration, because penalties were thought to be counter-productive. In 1974, Robert Martinson published an analysis of over 200 evaluations of correctional programs in "What Works? Questions and Answers about Prison Reform". In this document, he suggested that correctional rehabilitation had failed, or that "nothing works" to prevent recidivism, and that official work to help offenders was not the solution. In the wake of this watershed work, scholarly work focused on proving the ineffectiveness of correctional ventures, rather than on discovery of effective interventions. More recently, theoretical focus has moved back towards the creation of "evidence based" corrections (Cullen & Gendreau, 2001). Given this reemerging academic and popular attention, much is being learned about the characteristics of individuals who recidivate and the ways that programs which facilitate factors such as employment, education, and social relationships affect recidivism rates. The knowledge gained from this research has informed the emergent perspective of desistance. This alternative to the study of recidivism

uses research on individuals who have stopped their offending behavior to inform methods in support of this *maintenance* of crime-free behavior.

Recent large-scale, longitudinal studies of offenders show that, despite the fact that short term return rates are very high (Langan & Levine, 2002), over time, most offenders desist (Blokland & Niewwbeerta, 2005; Laub and Sampson, 2003). In fact, Kurlychek, Brame and Bushway (2006) suggested that after as few as seven years, former prisoners become almost indistinguishable from individuals without histories of incarceration. In addition, researchers have learned quite a lot about what encourages the process of desistance, making it likely that such a timeline may be shortened with thoughtful interventions (Pager, 2006).

The study of desistance has so far focused primarily on the experiences of men, (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Rumgay, 2004; Uggen & Krutschnitt, 1998), though research on women is increasing (Baskin & Sommers, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 2002; Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Graham & Bowling, 1995; Holtfreder, Reisig & Morash, 2004; O'Brien, 2001; Reisig, Holtfreder & Morash, 2002; Richie, 2001; Sommers, Baskin and Fagan, 1994; Uggen & Krutschnitt, 1998). Given the fact that gender affects pathways to offending (Carlen, 1988; Daly, 1992; Miller, 1986), research into desistance from offending must likewise address gender differences. The

findings from these studies, contextualized with findings about men's desistance, are listed below.

Employment and income

Much of the research into the link between employment and crime for men concludes that unemployment increases the likelihood of criminal behavior (Farrington, Gallagher, Morley, St. Ledger & West, 1986; Glaser, 1969), and that employment and job stability increase desistance behaviors (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

This connection has had mixed support in research on formerly incarcerated women. Certainly, female rates of offending have been found to correspond with increases in women's financial instability (Heimer, 2000). However, Uggen and Kruttschnitt's research (1998) found mixed support for the connection between employment and recidivism: specifically, that women's work history was not related to self-reported desistance behavior, but was related to official arrest histories. Related to opportunities for employment, Uggen and Kruttschnitt also found significant effects of education on criminal involvement. Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph did not find that job stability increased desistance effects for the men or the women in their 2002 study. Separate from employment (which may not always be gainful enough to affect poverty), Holtfreder, Reisig and Morash (2004) found that, for women, poverty is significantly related to re-arrest and supervision violation, and that state-sponsored support to counteract the

effects of poverty (e.g. child care, public housing and job training) reduces poverty's effect on women's recidivism. While such findings are encouraging in that they indicate a relatively discrete domain that can be addressed by social programming, we must remember that women and their children are disproportionately poor in the United States (Pressman, 2002; Proctor & Dalaker, 2002), and that female offenders are overwhelmingly likely to come from poor, inner-city neighborhoods (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Owen & Bloom, 1995; Richie, 2001).

Effects of marriage and relationships

Substantial research has shown that marriage plays a strong role in encouraging desistance in males (Farrington & West 1995; Gibbens, 1984; Horney, Osgood & Marshall, 1995; Laub, Nagin & Sampson 1998; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006; Shover, 1996; Warr, 1998). In particular, "good" marriages have a cumulative effect on desistance, slowly increasing its preventing effect (Laub, Nagin & Sampson 1998). Likewise, broken marriages have been shown to increase the possibility of offending (Farrington & West 1995; Horney, Osgood & Marshall, 1995).

Covington (2003) argues that typically women's primary motivation is to build a connection to others, and that "to create change in their lives, incarcerated women need to experience relationships that do not repeat their histories of loss, neglect, and abuse" (page 74). Relationships such as those with a marriage

partner may therefore be particularly effective for women's desistance (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002). However, while men's marriages are often to prosocial women (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Leverentz, 2006), female offenders' marriages (and other romantic relationships) are likely to involve domestic violence, making the potential relationship between marriage and desistance particularly complicated for women, and Giordano et al. (2002) found that marriage was deemed important to desistance for only about a quarter of the men and women they interviewed. However, it is important to note that marriage rates in their sample were low, and varied by race. King, Massoglia & Macmillan (2007) found that marriage had lower effects on women's desistance than men's. Likewise, Hill and Crawford (1990) found that being married increased desistance from minor property offenses for black women, but did not for white women. Extending the idea of marriage to relationships, Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) found that women with at least one non-criminal ("straight") friend, and children were more likely to report staying away from criminal behavior (self-reported illegal earnings) than similarly situated men.

Children and desistance

Some desistance literature addressing the role of children in parents' criminal involvement has focused on the birth of a child. This research has shown to that childbearing is strongly related to desistance for young women. In particular, Graham and Bowling (1995) found that the birth of a child had a profound effect on women's sense of who they were, which in turn brought about desistance

behaviors: less drug and alcohol use, less contact with delinquent peers, and stopped criminal offending.

The uncertainty about child placement causes high levels of stress, which can, in some cases, lead to negative behavior in incarcerated women (Covington, 2002; Hale, 1987), who often report that being separated from their children is one of the most difficult things about being incarcerated (Baunach, 1985; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1976). Often, the only source of motivation for women in prison is the connection they have with their children (Covington, 2002). Reunification is important in particular for female offenders for a number of reasons. The majority of these women report that they lived with and were the sole source of support for their children before incarceration: one-third of mothers reported in a national study that they had lived alone with their children in the month prior to their arrest (Mumola, 2000). Accordingly, most expect to take responsibility for their children once they are released (Prendergast, Wellisen & Falkin, 1995; Uggen and Krutschnitt, 1998). Some of the studies which exist characterizing the difficulties faced by women as they return to their communities after incarceration address the idea that children and the possibility of reunification can be a powerful force in reentering women's lives. There are a few studies which address the degree to which parents' reunification with their children after incarceration affect desistance, showing mixed results. These studies seem to suggest a complicated interaction of two factors: bonds with children encourage

desistance, but the stress and practicalities of caring for those children increases recidivism.

Studies of men suggest that bonds to children may be a strong predictor of desistance (Hughes, 1997), although for men, such bonds may be more related to the concept of protecting childhood, rather than bonds to specific children. For women, research has shown that they are particularly likely to focus heavily on their children as catalysts for changes they had made (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002).

Although mothers in prison may have their rights to their children terminated, most inmate mothers will be reunited with their children (Dalley, 2002). Reunification has been shown to be a prominent goal and stressor for incarcerated women anticipating release, who are also concerned with their reentry sobriety, physical and mental health, relationships, education, employment, and housing (Baunach, 1985; Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Richie, 2001). Accordingly, when women are offered adequate support for being a parent, having even a non-custodial relationship with children can be an important stabilizing force in women's lives during reentry (Richie, 2001). Accordingly, other research has found that that reunification, no matter how desired and anticipated, was extremely difficult because of the roadblocks former prisoners face fulfilling the prerequisite requirements, such as employment and

financial stability (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002).

This Dissertation

In summary, research on formerly incarcerated women shows that levels of poverty and positive relationships with others affect desistance. Women's desistance differs from men's in ways that reflect larger social structures: employment effects on desistance are weaker for women in a society where women are paid less for their work and are less able to secure gainful employment upon release. Further, where marriage is shown to be a strong factor in men's desistance, women are often in abusive relationships that may mediate the effects of marriage on desistance. Finally, relationships with children have mixed effects, with bonds encouraging desistance, while the practicalities of caring for children in reentry may have an opposite effect. This dissertation will be a significant contribution to this nascent body of literature because of its specific focus on the importance of children in the lives of their criminal justice-involved mothers.

Despite the fact that children and reunification with children are such high priorities, and potential motivators, for incarcerated mothers, the effects of women's relationships clearly need additional examination. Given that women prioritize their children so highly, and given that the previous research shows that social bonds do influence desistance, it is surprising that there has not been an

examination of the role of reunification with children in women's desistance. The theoretical model of this dissertation project will be presented in chapter three.

Chapter 3: Theories of Desistance

Desistance has not been uniformly conceptualized in the literature. Some theorists (Farral & Bowling, 1999; Shover, 1996) have described desistance as a discrete moment at which a criminal decides to terminate criminal activity. Other scholars, however, describe desistance as a process (Frazier, 1976). Explanations for the reasons desistance occurs also vary, but generally fall within some combination of four paradigms, two of which (sociogenic and phenomenological) will be used in this dissertation:

1. Aging out: Ontogenetic theories;
2. Decision making: Rational choice theories
3. Differential association: Social learning theories
4. Pathways out of crime: Developmental theories
5. Social bonding: Sociogenic theories; and
6. Identity Change: Phenomenological theories.

Aging Out: The ontogenetic perspective

Overwhelmingly, studies of desistance and age find a positive correlation between age and desistance in the aggregate population: criminal behavior generally begins in the early teenage years, peaks in late adolescence or young adulthood, and ends before the person reaches the age of 30 or 40. The relationship between age and crime is considered robust: the pattern emerges in studies with diverse methodologies, though theorists have so far failed to come

to a consensus about this age-crime association (Farrington, 1986; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1995; Maruna, 2001; Moffitt, 1993; Rhodes, 1989; Sullivan, 1989).

The ontogenetic paradigm of desistance suggests that offenders eventually biologically "grow out of" criminal behavior to become responsible adults, and is therefore also known as a theory of "maturational reform." In their landmark studies, the Gluecks suggested in their theory of maturation and crime that the criminal impulse declines after age 25 due entirely to an individual's internal characteristics, from biology and intellect to affect and personality (1940). They completely discounted the idea that desistance might be due to "external environmental transformations," and focused on the complexity they saw in maturation processes (Glueck & Glueck, 1974).

More contemporarily, Gottfredson & Hirschi (1983, 1990) have focused on the universality of the age-crime connection, and discount, therefore, social variables, and the associated programs which work to ameliorate such conditions. Gottfredson & Hirschi disagree with life course theorists by suggesting that life events such as marriage, employment and the military enrollment do not affect desistance, because self-control is learned early in life and, once learned, is highly resistant to change. Desistance in such "career" criminals, say Gottfredson and Hirschi, is "direct" and cannot be explained.

Accordingly, critics of the ontogenetic paradigm hold that this perspective fails to explore sufficiently the meaning of “aging out”. Studies which seek to find a specific biological reason for the connection between age and desistance have come up empty-handed. For example, Farrington (1986) found no connection between age-related decreases in testosterone levels and decreases in criminal behavior. Critiquing the biological inquiry, Dannefer (1984) suggested that they fail to account for the fact that the effect of aging may be due not only to the biological effects, but the social structures which interact with biology throughout one’s life. Likewise, Maruna (2000) suggests that perspectives which focus on the biological aspect of age fail to take into account the other variables associated with aging, such as social transitions and life experiences. Shover and Thompson (1992) suggest that deviance desists with age due to some of the effects of cognitive development, such as loss of interest, degree of payoff, ability to understand and fear of the consequences of a criminal lifestyle, and disenchantment with a criminal lifestyle.

This project follows in the tradition of the many critics of the ontogenetic perspective in that it assumes that the fact of aging out does not explain desistance in itself but must be unpacked. Other approaches to theorizing desistance move towards this unpacking to get to the real effects of age on an individual’s changes in attitude and, eventually, behavior, by examining the effects of social bonds and cognitive changes.

Decision making: Rational choice theories

Rational choice theorists believe that individuals are constantly weighing the costs and benefits of any given action. Desistance, therefore, is based on the decision that the benefits of criminal behavior are outweighed by the costs. Rational choice theorists research the decision-making process that leads to desistance (Gartner & Piliavin, 1988; Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Cornish, 1994; Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986; Nagin & Paternoster, 1993; Paternoster, 1989).

Criticism of the rational choice model suggests that the study of desistance should not focus on the fact that a turning point existed, but on the reason for that decision and the maintenance of behavior change following that turning point (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001).

Differential association: Social learning theories

Differential association theorists suggest that desistance from crime is simply the opposite of initiation into crime, and that, therefore, the initiation theory of differential association applies to desistance in reverse (Akers, 1985; Farrington, 2005; Warr, 1993). Warr (1993), for example, uses data about changes in peer associations over time to show that just as peer variables (e.g. association with delinquent peers and peer loyalty) explain the association between age and crime at onset, they also explain the decline in crime with age. As such, Warr (1998) suggests that the effects of marriage, employment and military enrollment,

so important to life course theorists, are effective at crime reduction because they change individuals' peer associations. For example, when a woman gets married, she may no longer associate with her former (delinquent) friends because of increased time spent with her spouse, automatically reducing time spent on the criminal behavior she used to do with friends.

Pathways out of crime: Developmental theories

Developmental theories of desistance suggest the use of typologies of offenders to better understand criminal careers. Piquero and Moffitt write that there are two types of offenders: adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent offenders, distinguishable by their pathways to crime (Moffitt, 1993, 1994; Piquero & Moffitt, 2005). The difference between these groups of offenders, for Piquero and Moffitt, lies in their pasts, where "contemporary continuity arises if the Life-Course-Persistent person continues to carry into adulthood the same underlying constellation of traits that got him in trouble as a child," (1994) making change impossible for life-course-persistent offenders. Developmental theorists suggest adolescent-limited offenders can be encouraged to desist by life events as they transition to adulthood. Life-course-persistent offenders, on the other hand, are considered unable to desist, despite life events. As such, Farrington (2007) explains that developmental theories view life events as correlates or consequences, rather than causes. Other theorists, such as Patterson & Yoerger (1993) and Loeber & Hay (1997) suggest typologies of offenders distinct in their pathways to crime and types of crime.

For this dissertation, however, these ontogenetic, rational choice, social learning, and developmental theories are not enough. Sociogenic and phenomenological theories work together to better theorize reasons for desistance, and take into account the shortcomings of these other theories. A detailed description of sociogenic (and more specifically life course) theories and phenomenological theories follows.

Social bonds: The sociogenic perspective

The sociogenic theoretical model of crime contends that criminal and deviant behavior are impacted by social interactions with institutions of informal social control, such as employment, marriage, and education. Substantial quantitative research confirms that desistance from crime is correlated with a number of events, including *obtaining stable employment* (Glaser, 1964; Mischkowitz, 1994; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Shover, 1985), *getting married* (Farrington & West, 1995; Gibbens, 1984; Irwin, 1970; Meisenhelder, 1977; Mischkowitz, 1994; Rand, 1987; Rutherford, 1992; Sampson & Laub, 1993; West, 1982; Zoccolillo, Pickles, Quinton & Rutter, 1992), and *completing education* (Farrington, Gallagher, Morley, St. Ledger & West, 1986; Rand, 1987). The sociogenic approach to desistance uses the informal social control theory of social bonds to suggest that ties to individuals and institutions, such as employment or educational programs “provide offenders with a stake in conformity and a reason to go legit” (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Sociogenic theories are also distinguished

from ontogenetic theories in their focus on adult criminal behavior, as opposed to the focus on the juvenile offender.

The field of psychology, and in particular the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth, has spearheaded the study of attachment and bonding. Bowlby (1988) describes attachment behavior as “any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world” (page 27). The importance of such an attachment and long-term bond between mothers and children is well established (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). However, many factors have been shown to interfere with those processes, particularly disruptions in disability or risk status of mother or child, difficulties with understanding social cues, and limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction (Barnard, 1997; Lyons-Ruth & Zeanah, 1993). Significantly, absence of a mother from her child’s life for an extended period during the child's early development can have profound effects on mother-child attachment. For obvious reasons, incarcerated mothers and their young children are an example of this circumstance (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; DeAngelis, 2001; Johnston, 1995; Poehlmann, 2005; Wright & Seymour, 2000).

The study of the importance of social bonding in criminology originated with the work of Travis Hirschi. In *Causes of Delinquency,* published in 1969, Hirschi proposed a control theory which has since become one of the most dominant

theories of criminal and delinquent behavior of the late twentieth century. Hirschi made the original proposal that “delinquent acts result when an individual’s bond to society is weak or broken” (1969). Hirschi, who focused on juvenile behavior, proposed that the social bond is made up of four components: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. The stronger these elements of social bonding with parents, adults, school teachers and peers, the more the individual will conform to society’s standards. The weaker these bonds are, the more likely the individual is to commit delinquent acts. Hirschi’s measures of each component were separate: attachment is measured as attachment to parents, school and peers, involving questions about communication, affection, positive attitudes, and respect for opinions. Commitment is measured by lack of premature engagement in adult activities (such as drinking) and educational aspirations. Involvement includes activities such as working part-time, sports, hobbies and doing homework. Belief is measured by an adolescent’s attitudes towards the law, including respect for the police. On the whole, Hirschi’s social bonding theory has been supported by some research, though the relationship has been shown to be moderate at best (see Maruna, 2001, for a review).

Life course criminology

In their many publications in the field of life course criminology, Sampson and Laub have used Hirschi’s social bonding theory as an organizing principle. Sampson and Laub (2005) reject the idea that criminality (and likewise desistance) is influenced by childhood experiences such as poverty, delinquency

and school failure or individual traits such as low self control or limited skill sets. This differentiates them from developmental theorists like Piquero and Moffitt, for example, who suggest that offenders can be categorized according to such traits and experiences. Rather, Sampson and Laub theorize that life events, such as marriage, employment or joining the military, increases social control and the occurrence of structured routine activities. Therefore, in life course explanations of continuity and change in criminal behaviors, it is not offenders who can be categorized, but their experiences, and desistance can occur for any offender at any time, according to her experiences and ensuing behavior changes.

In order to support their life course theory of criminal persistence and desistance, Sampson and Laub have conducted many research projects examining the transitions embedded in individual lives that relate to adult informal social control. Their research has often been based on data collected by the Gleucks starting in 1939 on two samples (one delinquent, one non-delinquent) of men born between 1922 and 1929, providing an unparalleled longitudinal sample that Laub and Sampson (2003) have been able to follow through the ends of the respondents' lives. In their many works examining life-course trajectories, Sampson and Laub (1990, 1993, 2003) have found that despite early childhood experiences and traits, later life events, specifically marriage/spouses, military experience, and employment, are significantly inversely correlated with criminal and delinquent behavior. They have concluded over the years that such turning points, related to bonds and social capital, facilitate positive changes in behavior, despite

deviant childhood behavior. It is important to note that much criticism (Carr, 2006) of Sampson and Laub's work with the Gluecks' data focuses on the period and cohort effects of such a specific set of individuals, now in their seventies. How, critics argue, can we be sure that what has affected the lives of these men is applicable to desistance in the twenty-first century?

Unfortunately, due to the exclusively male nature of the Gluecks' sample, Laub and Sampson admit (2003) that they cannot make any conclusions about the effects of such transitions on women's behavior. In particular, they admit that 'good marriage effects' may be far more applicable to men than women, since men are far more likely to marry less deviant women than women are to marry less deviant men.

Likewise, Gove (1985) suggested that the connection between age and desistance is influenced by normative transitions such as marriage and others which connect an individual to society in a way impossible during the adolescent and early adult years. While Sampson and Laub write about the effects of social bonds to family, including parenthood, they speak only in passing about the role of attachment to children in their methods, favoring attachment to spouse instead (Sampson & Laub, 1990). This may be due to the fact that their study was mainly about men, where others have shown that children are more important to desistance for women than men. In their study of young people and crime, Graham and Bowling (1995) found that, for females, the greatest influence on

desistance came from having children. All of the female respondents in their sample reported that their children had positively changed their lives, identities, outlook, sense of responsibility and behavior. The study did not find that children had nearly as strong an effect on males, who were far less likely to report that their children affected them in a positive way. Other studies which have sought to test and expand upon Sampson and Laub's conception of life course theory have focused on understanding how employment works to affect desistance. Some of the literature which has emerged to test Sampson and Laub's theories has suggested that the effects of transitions such as marriage and employment may be due more to differential association than to the bonds associated with the transitions. Giordano et al (2003) and Warr (1998) both found that at least some of the desistance effects of marriage may be due to the fact that marriage often decreases an individual's contact with peers, both criminal and non-criminal. Wright and Cullen (2004) found that young adults' interaction with prosocial co-workers was associated with employment's effectiveness in affecting desistance behaviors.

Specifically in the case of marriage, Sampson and Laub (2003) theorize that there are a number of reasons why attachments affect desistance, including significant changes in everyday routines, including changes due to the involvement of new people in one's life. They suggest that marriage influences desistance because of its effects on the everyday routines of an individual. In particular, they indicate that changes in activities may disrupt contact with peers,

who may have a detrimental effect on offenders' behavior. Graham and Bowling's (1995) work strongly supports the idea that one's routines change because of children, with subjects reporting fewer contacts with criminal peers and locations such as bars, which were conducive to subjects' previous criminal behavior.

Other theorists (e.g. Richie, 2001) suggest that the availability of resources may also mediate the effect of bonds on desistance. It might also be imagined that increased contact with other institutions, such as the Family Court system, might exert a new social control in the lives of reentering women attempting to reunify. These items apply in particular ways to the mechanism by which attachments to children may affect desistance. Children are not only an opportunity for social bonding, but may entail a large part of the responsibilities facing individuals returning from prison or jail. Therefore, the bond between returning parent and child must be complemented by other stabilizing factors in order to maintain desistance. Richie (2001) found that reentering mothers faced considerable problems upon reentry, many of them due to the lack of resources, but that when there was financial and other support for their parenting, women's relationships with their children were stabilizing for them. Graham and Bowling's (1995) work also supports the idea that resources are important to the ways in which bonds affect desistance: they cite examples from their interviews where women reported that their need for resources and support increased when they had children.

Life course theorists also admit that it is not the mere existence of a turning point that causes desistance. Laub and Sampson (2003) suggest that one of the ways in which employment and marriage affect desistance is through a change in one's sense of self, particularly a feeling of coming into adulthood. This concept is the focus of the phenomenological perspective on desistance. The analysis of the subjective experience of desistance strengthens the sociogenic and ontogenetic theories of desistance (Farrall & Bowling, 1999; Laub & Sampson, 1993; Maruna, 2001) in its movement towards understanding *why* life events affect behavior over the life course.

Identity change: The phenomenological perspective

Some researchers suggest that no theory of desistance is complete without an understanding of the role that the offender's cognitive changes play in the process. Phenomenological research is based on the idea that the a single environment will affect separate individuals' interpretations, reactions and experiences differently. In such, phenomenological criminology is an attempt to understand criminal decision making through an examination of the offender's self project: the self-image they are hoping to uphold (Toch, 1969), the ends they aim to achieve (Shover, 1996), and their strategies for creating meaning in their lives. Ex-offenders, in order to desist, must therefore develop a coherent, prosocial identity for themselves.

Shover (1983, 1985, 1996) and Gove (1985) both suggest that desistance consists of a set of internal changes. While the language each researcher uses to describe these processes is different, the basic idea is that an individual shifts away from self-absorption towards caring for others within a context of acceptance of more prosocial values. The phenomenological examination of desistance therefore focuses not on an individual's behavior, but on the meaning that the individual attaches to those experiences. In his examination of desistance, Maruna (2000) found much support for the idea that a change in "script" has dramatic effects on the behavior of former prisoners. A large body of qualitative research on desistance and on substance abuse treatment success also supports this idea of a personal change. In fact, 12-step programs literally create twelve steps to a new "recovery identity."

While the studies cited above have treated the sociogenic and phenomenological paradigms as unrelated or independent, a few studies exist which explore the ways in which both processes may play a role in desistance. The combination allows for both the exploration of how social bonds affect criminal behavior *and* the method by which those social bonds affect an individual's identity in such a way that desistance is supported over time. In 1999, Farrall and Bowling used case studies of male juvenile delinquents to suggest an integrated theory of desistance. They suggest that sociogenic and phenomenological perspectives are on their own insufficient to explain desistance, which can only be explained

as the “interplay” of individual cognitive changes and social transitions, such as employment or marriage.

Some desistance literature has focused specifically on the internal changes associated with *women’s* desistance. In their qualitative exploration of female street offenders, one of the few studies to examine women, desistance and identity change, Sommers, Baskin & Fagan (1994) applied the phenomenological approach to women’s desistance behaviors, finding that specific experiences cause women to reevaluate their identities and move toward the construction of a new identity. They found that identity transformation reinforcement worked both ways: as the women began to feel socially accepted and trusted, their determination to desist was strengthened, as were their social and personal identities as non-criminals. Once a new, more prosocial identity had been created, the authors found that women’s strong commitments to their children, new friends, and new educational and vocational skills created new experiences of conventional roles: “in short, the women in the study developed a stake in their new lives that was incompatible with street life” (page 144). Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002) found that women’s transitions were more likely than men’s to involve religion.

This dissertation

This dissertation focuses on two theories explaining desistance: life course theory and the theory of identity change. *Life course theory* posits that criminal

behavior results when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken, and that strong bonds, such as those to one's spouse or employment lead to less criminal behavior (Sampson & Laub, 2005). *Identity change theory* suggests that an individual will desist from criminal behavior as she shifts her understanding of herself from self-absorption to concern for others (Gove, 1985). This dissertation will explore the idea that identity change is the mechanism by which reunification-related social bonds encourage desistance behavior. In line with a number of researchers (Farrall & Bowling, 1999; Giordano, Cernkovich & Holland, 2003; Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Shover, 1996), this study assumes that social bonds' effects on desistance must be understood within the context of the cognitive changes that accompany them, and that the combination strengthens both theories. The work of this dissertation suggests that children particularly affect identity change because, besides changing one's view of one's identity to that of a 'parent', one must also change one's view of oneself as someone who must provide children with support and social capital. In this dissertation, it is suggested that identity change is the most important mechanism by which social bonding affects desistance.

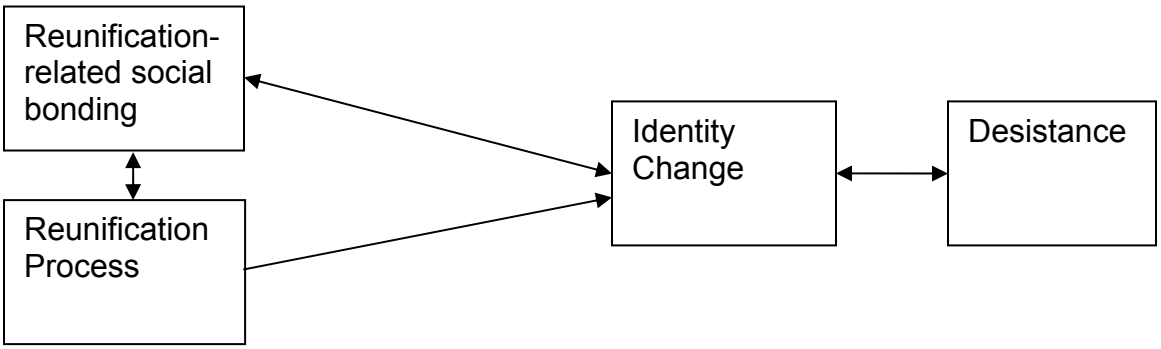
While there are studies which discuss women's identity change and desistance as it relates to children, they all refer to the transition embedded in becoming a parent. Despite the fact that most mothers coming out of prison intend to reunify with their children, however, there are no studies which examine the role of

identity change in the desistance behaviors of women within the context of reunification with their children.

This dissertation is unique because it brings in this potentially very significant piece to social bonding theory – it could be the most important social bond there is for women, yet no one has studied it. This dissertation is also unique because of its focus on the concept of identity change as the mechanism by which attachments are effective at increasing desistance. This line of thought is followed in this project with a theoretical combination of the sociogenic and phenomenological paradigms in an explanation of desistance. This dissertation extends previous work in this area by examining desistance for women within the context of their relationships with their children. Very few studies of desistance discuss the experiences of women, and while some pay passing attention to the importance of children in women's lives, none have focused on the role of reunification in women's desistance. Given the importance of children in women's lives, and the universal experience of reunification for all reentering women, this is surprising. The bond between women and their children is supposed in this study to be stronger for these women than the bonds created through marriage and employment, which are far less common than parenthood in this population. Kazemian (2007) suggests that such an adjustment to the concept of a social bond is important as the structure of society and values changes, particularly since so much of life course theory is based on studies of men born a century ago.

Therefore, this study suggests that reunification is a fundamentally important social bonding experience for mothers coming out of prison. Given the rapidly increasing volume of the female incarcerated population, and the particular effect of women's incarceration on women and their families, exploration of this expected relationship may have policy implications in that it is a potentially significant way that programming might aid women in their pursuit of desistance.

Illustration 3.1: Theoretical Model



The following chapters show how this project tested this theoretical model in interviews with 100 formerly incarcerated mothers. The methodology follows in chapter four, results of the study in chapter five, and a discussion of those results in chapter six.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The preliminary evidence presented by a few researchers (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Graham & Bowling, 1995; Richie, 2001; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998) suggests that a theory of social bonding may be used to hypothesize a connection between the reunification of a returning mother with her children and her desistance behavior. Further, the evidence which is emerging from both the life course theoretical research (e.g. Giordano, Cernkovich & Holland, 2003; Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2003) and independent literature about desistance (e.g. Maruna, 2001) suggests that a cognitive change towards a more prosocial, generative identity may be the most important mechanism by which bonds affect desistance.

This dissertation project will use a combination of life course's conception of social bonding and the phenomenological perspective of identity change to theorize this connection between reunification with children and desistance for a number of reasons. First, the literature suggests that the attachment of a mother to her child or children is a particularly strong one, and this dissertation suggests that that bond is may have similar desistance effects as the bond of an individual and their spouse, which has been shown to have desistance effects in the social bonding literature. Second, and given the existing, though limited and non-theoretical literature on the effect of children on the desistance of both males and females, it is surprising that there have been no studies which examine the role

of reunification, given the fact that all mothers reentering the community after incarceration must face the decision about reunifying with their children. Third, in that reunification with one's children upon reentry might be seen as a rather salient opportunity for an individual to change her perception of herself from that of imprisoned offender to independent parent, it is also surprising that the phenomenological approach to desistance has not been applied to returning mothers. This dissertation intends to fill these gaps by extending theories of desistance to the experiences of mothers leaving the criminal justice system. This project, therefore, builds on the life course theory of attachments and criminal behavior provided by the work of Sampson and Laub, and focuses on the concept of an identity change as the mediator by which bonds cause desistance.

Research hypotheses

The current study seeks to develop a causal model that links work towards reunification with children, social bonding, identity change and desistance behavior.

This research has three main hypotheses. Of mothers with criminal histories:

1. Respondents who reunify with their children after incarceration will have higher social bonding scores than respondents who do not reunify with their children after incarceration.

2. Respondents who have higher social bonding scores will be more likely to describe an identity change associated with desistance and reunification with children than respondents with lower social bonding scores.

3. Respondents who describe an identity change associated with desistance and reunification with children will report less criminal activity at the time of the interview than before their incarceration than respondents who do not describe an identity change associated with desistance and reunification.

Sampling and data collection

From October 2005 to April 2006, 100 formerly incarcerated mothers over 18 were interviewed by the principal investigator. This section will outline how respondents were recruited, interview methods and respondent demographics. Excluded respondents and reasons for their exclusion will also be listed.

Recruitment locations and methods

To find women interested in and eligible for the study, the principal investigator contacted nine service providers in New York City catering to formerly incarcerated women, or populations likely to have incarcerated women among them (e.g. homeless shelters) (see Appendix A for list of contacted providers and the introductory e-mail). Staff at each location were called and e-mailed to explain the purpose of the study, and to ask the provider to either post a flier about the study (see Appendix B) or host a recruitment session, depending on

staff preference. The principal investigator also made an announcement at a meeting of the Coalition of Women Prisoners (a group of individuals, organized by staff of the Women in Prison Project of the Correctional Association of New York, who come together monthly to discuss advocacy opportunities for Criminal Justice involved women) and posted an announcement on their e-mail listserv, attaching the flier.

After the fliers were posted and recruitment sessions set up, interview respondents became involved in the study in three different ways. At the beginning of the study, the principal investigator made presentations to groups of potential respondents about the study, and interested respondents were interviewed after the presentation. Twenty-four respondents were recruited in this way at three different locations. Another 23 respondents were recruited because of their responses to fliers posted at service locations. These respondents either called the principal investigator to set up an interview or spoke to the principal investigator, who was on site at a particular time listed on the flier. Finally, 48 women found out about the study through word of mouth from friends or acquaintances who had been interviewed for the study.

The interviews

The interview with the principal investigator was arranged once a respondent expressed interest in being interviewed. All interviews took place in a private

space, usually an office at the recruitment location. One interview took place at a fast food restaurant suggested by the respondent.

After an introduction, respondents were given the consent form (Appendix C), and the principal investigator explained each item in plain English in case of literacy or comprehension problems. The consent form was then signed by interviewer and respondent. Once the consent process was completed, the interviewer started the digital tape recorder with the respondents' knowledge. Respondents were then given their identification number and reminded that they would only be referred to by that number for the rest of the interview. The interviewer then started asking the questions on the interview instrument (See Appendix D). The instrument used in this study is made up of 61 questions. When questions required reference to Likert scales, respondents were given large laminated copies of those scales (see Appendix D) and the options were read out loud for clarity. Respondents were told that they were free to point on the scale in case of literacy problems. At the end of the instrument, the interviewer stopped the tape recorder, gave the respondent ten dollars in cash for their participation, and were asked to sign a form indicating their receipt of the remuneration (Appendix E). Respondents were also given a list of resources in the community (See Appendix F).

On average, the recording time of the interviews was around 25 minutes.[3] The shortest interview lasted just over ten minutes, and the longest lasted almost 75 minutes.

Confidentiality

At the interviewer's request, service providers were never present during presentations or interviews so that, unless they were told by respondents, staff were unaware who participated in the interviews. Respondents were reminded multiple times during the interviews that their identification number was the only identifying information that would be attached to their replies to ensure that they understood that the interviews were confidential and anonymous.

The consent form and receipts are the only documents which include respondent names and will be destroyed upon completion of this study. Neither form has respondent identification numbers listed on them, making it impossible to match names to interviews. Both are stored separately from all other study materials, in a locked file cabinet in the Principal Investigator's home, to which only the Principal Investigator has access.

Interview instruments contain identification numbers, and are stored in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's home, separately from consent and receipt forms and audio files. These documents are also accessible only by the

[3] Mean: 27 minutes; median: 25 minutes.

Principal Investigator. The SPSS data file with respondent data includes only identification numbers for respondent identification. Interview transcriptions substitute subject numbers wherever a respondent spoke her name, and descriptive labels (e.g. “son”) when she spoke others’ names.

Digital interview audio files are labeled using identification numbers. However, because respondent mentions of their own and others’ names cannot be deleted from the audio files, interview tapes will be destroyed within twelve months after study completion. Interview audio files are stored only on the hard drive of a password protected computer to which only the principal investigator has access.

Excluded respondents

Despite extensive and multiple explanations of eligibility requirements before interviews began, not all respondents who expressed interest in interviews, and with whom interviews were conducted, were eligible. Four respondents were excluded from qualitative and quantitative analysis because of ineligibilities discovered during the interviews. One respondent was excluded because she had no history of involvement in the criminal justice system. Another respondent was excluded because she had never given birth to any children. A third respondent was excluded because she was living in an Alternative to Incarceration program (and was therefore technically incarcerated) at the time of the study. A fourth respondent was excluded because her severe mental illness led the interviewer to question whether or not the daughter she spoke about

existed. In addition, her answers to many of the interview questions were incoherent.[4] While one respondent was eligible for the study, her answers were excluded from quantitative analysis because of an outlying desistance score. Quantitative analyses, therefore, are based on a sample size of 95, and qualitative analyses include the words of 96 women.

Research design

The model of desistance presented in this dissertation suggests an independent variable of reunification, and three dependent variables: social bonding, identity change and, ultimately, desistance. The interview instrument used in this study was developed by combining a set of control variables with four subscales to measure each of the independent and dependent variables. The instrument is included in its entirety in Appendix D. Each of the questions and scales used in the instrument are described in this section.

i. Reunification

There are no other studies which measure the effects of reunification on desistance, attachment and identity change. Therefore, reunification will be measured with a set of questions developed for this dissertation.

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[4] It is important to remember that in other ways, this respondent is a perfect example, no matter her exclusion, of the severity of some of the difficulties faced by reentering women. She was homeless, clearly suffering from mental illness, rejected by those around her, and talking about a history of drug involvement, prostitution and victimization. She talked about her need for very serious drugs, and spoke about how her mental health medications did not help her the way crack-cocaine did. While her exclusion from the study was necessary, her situation must not be forgotten.

Respondents were asked about the number of children they had given birth to, and the ages and genders of those children. Respondents were then asked whether they had reunified with those children after incarceration, and the dates of those reunifications. As a potential proxy for reunification, respondents were also asked about the number of hours they spent with all of their children in an average week at the time of the interview.

ii. Social bonding

One of the most important components of studies of crime and deviance using a life course perspective is the measurement of social bonds. Such analyses have focused not just on the existence of the institution (such as a marriage or a job), but also on the quality of that bond. The primary interest in this analysis is in the effect of adult social bonding variables, consistent with prior work (e.g. Giordano Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; Sampson and Laub 1993), on desistance. The key adult social control variables include measures of job stability, attachment to spouse or partner and attachment to children. Given the scholarly focus on the employment and marriage bonds in desistance, these two bonds will be measured in addition to the key measure of bonding to children. These measures will be included in analysis as a way to control for effects of other attachment variables proven in past studies.

iii. Job stability

The measure of job stability is derived from three questions used by Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph (2002), which are themselves based on questions used by Sampson and Laub (1990). These questions assess whether or not the respondent is currently employed full-time at the time of the interview, the length of time at their current or most recent job, and a self-report of the likelihood that they would either lose or quit their job within the next two years on a five-point Likert scale. Respondents will be categorized as having high job stability if they are currently employed and report a low likelihood of losing or quitting that job.

iv. Attachment to spouse or partner

Two measures of attachment to spouse or partner will be used in this interview. The first was also derived from three questions used by Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph (2002), based on questions used by Sampson and Laub (1990). While the measure from the Giordano study refers only to spouse, the fact that the population of this study is formerly incarcerated women, shown to be less likely to be married than the general population (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999), the measure was changed to an “attachment to spouse or partner” variable. Kazemian (2007) has suggested that, as cultural norms change, so must our studies of the social bonds that may affect behavior.

The five-item scale adapted from Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph (2002) addresses attachment to spouse or partner with a scale including the following five items:

a. I'm closer to my spouse/partner than most people are to theirs,
b. my spouse/partner gives me the right amount of affection,
c. my spouse/partner seems to wish I were a different type of person,
d. my spouse/partner sometimes puts me down in front of other people, and
e. my spouse/partner sometimes won't listen to me or my opinions.

Answers range from one to five (strongly agree to strongly disagree), and the mix of positively and negatively worded items will be recoded for analysis. Participants without a spouse or partner will be coded as zero, and a high score will indicate a high level of attachment.

The second measure of attachment to spouse or partner is the attachment to Spouse subscale of the Parental Stress Index (PSI; Abidin, 1995), adapted to refer to partners as well as spouses. This scale, according to Abidin, "assesses the emotional and physical support provided to facilitate functioning in the parenting role. It also determines the level of conflict in the relationship related to parenting" (Abidin, 1995; page 30). The scale is made up of the following seven items:

a) Since having my last child, I have had less interest in sex,

b) Having a child seems to have increased the number of problems we have with in-laws and relatives,

c) Having children has been much more expensive than I had expected,

d) Since having my children, my spouse or partner has not given me as much help and support as I expected,

e) Having a child has caused me more problems than I expected in my relationship with my spouse or partner,

f) Since having children, my spouse or partner and I don't do as many things together, and

g) Since having children, my spouse or partner and I don't spend as much time together as a family as I expected.

Answers on this scale also range from one to five (strongly agree to strongly disagree), and the a mix of positively and negatively worded items will be recoded for analysis. Participants without a spouse or partner will be coded as zero, and a high score will indicate a high level of attachment.

v. Attachment to children

There is only one study (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002) which addresses the role of attachment to children in desistance. However, the measure of attachment to children in that study was a single item ("I'm closer to my kid(s) than a lot of people my age are to theirs," graded on a Likert scale) is not used in this study because of the availability of other, more detailed, scales.

One of the ways researchers have chosen to study the parenting of women in prison involves use the Parental Attachment subscale of the Parenting Stress Index (PSI; Abidin, 1995) to measure attachment to children. The scale consists of seven questions, and assesses parental motivation and investment in the parental role. For the first four items on the scale, respondents will be asked to select one of their children to refer to as they answer the questions. The first of these questions will be scored on a five point Likert scale ranging from “very easy” to “I usually can’t figure out what the problem is”:

a. How easy is it for you to understand what your child wants or needs?

The following three items are scored on a different five point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”:

b. I expected to have closer and warmer feelings for my child than I do and this bothers me,

c. Sometimes my child does things that bother me just to be mean, and

d. My child knows I am his or her parent and wants me more than other people.

After answering the first four questions, respondents will be asked why they selected the child they referred to in order to rule out any selection bias between respondents. Respondents will then be asked the remaining three questions on the scale. They will be asked to move beyond the child they selected for the first four questions and think more generally. These last four questions will also be

scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.

e. It takes a long time for parents to develop close and warm feelings for their children,

f. The number of children that I have right now is too many, and

g. When I was young, I never felt comfortable holding or taking care of children.

Taken together, these measures capture the quality or strength of an individual’s ties to work, spouse/partner and children.

vi. Identity change

Following the work of Maruna (2000), this study will use a single measure from the McAdams (1993) Life Story Interview to determine whether the respondent experienced an identity change that contributed to her desistance, and the character of that identity change. The text of the question reads:

“In looking back on one’s life, it is often possible to identify certain key ‘turning points’ – episodes through which a person undergoes substantial change. Turning points can occur in many different spheres of a person’s life – in relationships with other people, in work and school, in outside interests, etc. I am especially interested in a turning point in your understanding of yourself. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point. If you feel that your life story contains no turning points, then describe a particular

episode in your life that comes closer than any other to qualifying as a turning point."

The question will be used both as a qualitative item for exploratory analysis, and also as a quantitative item, coded according to content. Probes will be used to determine whether the identity change was related to reunification with children. During the course of the study, two additional questions were added to the interview instrument. The first asked respondents to reflect on the difference in their answers on the two desistance scales (if there was one). The second additional question asked respondents whether they had decided to desist before, and if so, what was different this time that would make them successful.

All answers to the questions about identity change will be quantified using a content analysis instrument developed by the principal investigator for this study.

vii. Desistance

The primary dependent variable in this dissertation is desistance. The measurement of desistance, difficult specifically because it is a *non-event*, is the subject of significant debate (Kazemian, 2007; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein, 2003). Longitudinal models may seem the most obvious first step in showing the causal order of events in the maintenance of crime-free behavior over time, and such a technique was used in many studies by Sampson and Laub. However, theorists such as Nagin (1999)

have argued for a dynamic methodological approach to show the processes and rates of change (which are likely to vary over the life course). Converging with theorists such as Moffitt, such a technique has led to typologies of desisters, with different rates of change. Recent studies have moved towards the measurement of desistance dynamically (Bottoms, Shapland, Costello, Holmes, & Muir, 2004; Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman & Mazerolle, 2001; Bushway, Thornberry & Krohn, 2003; Greenberg, 1975; Fagan, 1989; Haggard, Gumpert, & Grann, 2001; Laub, Nagin & Sampson, 1998; Laub & Sampson, 2001, 2003; Maruna, 2001; LeBlanc, 1993; Loeber & LeBlanc, 1990; Shover, 1983).

For some researchers, desistance is measured as the absence or reduction of offending over a particular period of time, but how can a date be chosen after which individuals can be considered desisters (Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman & Mazerolle, 2001; Laub & Sampson, 2001, 2003; Maruna, 2001; Piquero, Farrington & Blumstein, 2003)? Different researchers have developed as many operationalizations, based on recidivism data, such as the fact that the first year after release from prison is the period when most recidivism occurs, accounting for nearly two-thirds of *all* of the recidivism events in the first three years. Petersilia (2003) has suggested that, if an individual has not committed any new crimes after five years, the probability of returning to crime is quite low. In their research on desistance among women and men, Giordano et. al. (2002) used a “somewhat arbitrary cutoff” of two years. In his research on desistance behavior, Maruna (2000) found that his subjects fell into one of two categories:

individuals who had committed one or two serious crimes, and individuals who had lengthy criminal histories involving repetitive, habitual offending lasting for years. He excluded from his analysis the former group, and then categorized subjects as "desisting" if they reported no criminal or violent behavior, arrests or incarcerations over the last year. He chose this definition because, for the serious, habitual offender, remaining crime-free for a period of over one month while in the community is a significant change in behavior, and one year, therefore, is extremely significant. Sommers, Baskin and Fagan (1994) defined their population of female desisters as women who had at least one official arrest for a violent street crime (robbery, assault, burglary, weapons possession, arson, kidnapping) and to have desisted from all criminal involvement for at least two years prior to the interview. However, other (and sometimes the same) theorists suggest that the concept of desistance defies selection of a time period, because of the need to focus on the *maintenance* of crime-free behavior (Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman & Mazerolle, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998).

For this study, due to resource and time restrictions, a dichotomous desistance variable will be used, reflecting whether respondents are committing fewer crimes at the time of the interview than they were before their most recent incarceration. The selection of self-report data is important in that it is affected by reporting bias, but it avoids the effects of official reactions – police officers, attorneys, judges – to individuals and their behaviors, rather than actual

behavior. As such, this study will measure what Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) call “behavioral desistance,” rather than “official desistance.” In this study, two scales of self-reported criminal behavior will be administered to participants to measure involvement in property and violent crimes, as well as drug and alcohol use. This scale is a modified version of Elliot and Ageton’s (1980) self-report delinquency scale revised for use with adults by Giordano et al (2002). The list of 19 behaviors asks respondents to report their involvement in a range of mostly illegal behaviors, covering drug, property and violent offenses. There are two questions that refer to legal behaviors (drinking alcohol and becoming drunk). For their use of the scale, Giordano et al (2002) deleted items that were inappropriate for adults (e.g. status offenses), and these items will remain excluded in this study. Respondents will be asked to identify how often the respondent engaged in each of the activities on the scale (framed as behaviors that “sometimes get people into trouble”) *before* her most recent incarceration. Respondents may choose one of the following four options: never, sometimes, rarely and often. The scale will then be re-administered for behaviors in which the respondent is engaging in *now* or *these days*.

Each respondent will be given a score on each of the desistance measures, computed by totaling the scores on the entire scale. The “then” scale will be subtracted from the “now” scale to compute a desistance score, which will be reversed so that higher scores will indicate more desistance. It is important to

note that this measurement of desistance does not compare like behaviors to like behaviors, and items will not be weighted for crime severity.

v. Control variables

There are a number of variables which have been used to explain desistance, identity change or attachments. The control variables which have been selected for this study are as follows:

1. **Race and ethnicity**: Women of color are dramatically over-represented in the criminal justice system, and are usually more disadvantaged than their white counterparts (Bloom & Covington, 2003). The instrument includes a question about respondents' race and ethnicity to control for the potential differences between women from different groups.
2. **Income and highest level of education completed**: Given the potential role of resources as a mediating factor by which attachments may affect recidivism, the instrument includes a measure of the financial resources available to the respondent, and the highest level of education she completed.
3. **Number of children**: The number and age of respondents' children are recorded to as a potential measure of a respondent's need for resources to support herself and her family.
4. **Age**: Given the volume of desistance literature which has focused on the effects of age, respondents' age will be recorded.

5. **Substance abuse**: There are many studies which link substance use to an identity change, and because substance use is often a gateway to other crimes and loss of children. This instrument, therefore, includes four questions about respondents' history in substance abuse treatment: have you ever been enrolled in substance abuse treatment; if so, how many times did you complete successfully, how many times did you leave treatment without completing, and are you currently enrolled in treatment. If respondents are currently enrolled in substance abuse treatment, they will be asked to identify the type of treatment they are receiving.
6. **Involvement in systems to regain custody of children**: Not all parents must go through formal systems, such as the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to regain custody of their children. Given the potential role of systems as agents of social control, which may in turn affect desistance, involvement in systems will be determined by asking respondents whether the child welfare system was involved with each of their children.
7. **Criminal justice system involvement**: The questions to determine past involvement are the number of times the respondent has been arrested, on probation, on parole, and incarcerated, the most serious offense for which she was incarcerated, and her most recent incarceration dates and offense. Respondents will also be asked whether they are on probation or parole at the time of the interview.

The study sample

Respondents in this study largely reflect the demographics of formerly incarcerated women. Over a third (37%) of women in state and federal prisons are in their thirties (Harrison & Beck, 2006), making re-entering women, on average, slightly older than that. Twenty-eight percent of respondents in this study were in their thirties, and 40% were in their forties. The average age of interviewed women was 40, with a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 68.

The vast majority (71%) of respondents identified themselves as non-Hispanic, African-American. Nationally, state and federal female prisoners are more likely to be white (47%), and less likely to be African American (30%), but about as likely to be Hispanic (16%) (Harrison & Beck, 2006).

Table 4.1: Respondent race and ethnicity

Race	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic	Total
White	4%	5%	10%
Black/African American	4%	71%	75%
Native American	0%	1%	1%
Other – Insisted on Hispanic	13%	0%	13%
Other	0%	2%	2%
Total	21%	79%	100%

Respondents in this study were also likely to be housed in ways that reflect the living situations of members of the larger population of formerly incarcerated women. The majority of respondents (52%) were living in homeless shelters at the time of the interview. Many studies have shown that homelessness is quite

common for women returning to the community from prison (Richie, 2001). On the other hand, almost a quarter (24%) of respondents were living in their own rental housing. Most respondents (84%) lived alone[5].

Table 4.2: Respondent housing status

Type of housing currently living in	
Family/Friends (homeless)	3%
Homeless Shelter	55%
Transitional Housing (e.g. Halfway House)	13%
Temporarily with family/friends (not homeless)	1%
Rent permanent housing	3%
Own permanent housing	3%
Public Housing	1%

Nationwide data show that incarcerated women are typically not highly educated: 44% of women in state prisons had not achieved a high school diploma (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). The respondents in this study had slightly lower educational achievement: almost two-thirds of respondents (65%) reported that they had not earned their high school diploma. Across the United States, women are enrolling in higher education at higher rates than ever before. The women filling college campuses do not, however, often count formerly incarcerated women among their ranks. Fewer than 15% of women in prison have completed some or all of a college education (Harlow, 2003). Respondents in this study were slightly more likely to have achieved such higher education.

[5] Respondents living in homeless shelters all elected to define themselves as living 'alone' despite the presence of an (unselected) roommate.

Table 4.3: Respondent education

Highest level of education achieved	Percent	Cumulative Percent
None	1%	1%
4th grade	1%	2%
5th grade	1%	3%
6th grade	1%	4%
7th grade	4%	8%
8th grade	4%	13%
9th grade	11%	23%
10th grade	21%	44%
11th grade	21%	65%
High school diploma	14%	79%
Some college	14%	93%
Completed associates degree	4%	97%
Completed bachelor's degree (BA)	2%	99%
Completed Ph.D.	1%	100%

In the same way that education and income are related for the general population, formerly incarcerated people suffer from a double curse of low education and stigma that affect their income. Related to such limited educational background, female offenders are, on the whole, poor (Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2004). The respondents in this study are also very low-income. On average, respondents reported a monthly income of $314.00[6], including entitlements like public assistance, food stamps and SSI.[7]

[6] This is the median.

[7] This measure includes the 23% of respondents who reported that they have no income at all.

Table 4.4: Respondent source of income[8]

Source of income	
Food stamps	55%
Public assistance	37%
SSI	20%
Internship or Job	11%
Partner	2%
Unemployment	1%
HASA	5%
DAS (Division of AIDS Services) benefit program	1%
Family	1%

If it has done anything over the past 20 years, the research on women in the criminal justice system has shown that most of these women follow a life trajectory that starts with childhood abuse, leads to running away and substance abuse to cope with the effects of that abuse, and eventually ends in lives of drug offenses and property crimes to support their habits. Aside from their time in prison, these are women who have not had the time and space that many non-incarcerated women have in safe homes, supportive schools and Universities, and engaging employment.

Accordingly, one of the most often cited differences between incarcerated men and women is the dramatic rate at which the women report histories of abuse and trauma. In this study, though women were not asked about their abuse histories, many talked about such experiences. In this study, nine women talked about histories of childhood abuse, often directly associated with their criminal

[8] Categories are not mutually exclusive, since respondents could report more than one source of income.

behavior. Five respondents also reported having experienced a sexual assault. Not all traumatic experiences reported in the interviews, however, involved abuse. Ten respondents spoke about being affected by the (sometimes violent) deaths of loved ones. Five other women spoke about other traumatic experiences, including a fire, a disfiguring car accident and assaults on themselves and others. Eighteen women reported experiences with all types of domestic violence, which was sometimes related to their criminal behavior, such as partners who use threat of force to make women prostitute themselves for money, food and drugs.

Likewise, substance abuse and dependence histories are very common among incarcerated women: nationally, 61% of women in jail meet criteria for drug abuse or dependence, and 39% meet the criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence. Over a third (34%) of women in jail report that they were using drugs at the time of their conviction offense, and 22% reported the use of alcohol. Of those who met the criteria for abuse and dependence, 68% of women in jail reported that they had ever been in treatment for their substance abuse (Karberg & James, 2005).

The women participating in this study were no exception to these national statistics: 80% reported that they had been in substance abuse treatment at some point in their lives. Of these, the majority of whom (58%) were not in

substance abuse treatment at the time of the time of the interview[9], mostly (80%) outpatient programs, though others reported enrollment in other programs, including Methadone Maintenance (9%), Mentally Ill Chemically Addicted (MICA) programs (6%), substance abuse shelter (3%), and Narcotics Anonymous (3%). Respondents were asked, of the times that they had been in substance abuse treatment in the past, how many times they would say that have completed successfully or unsuccessfully. The majority (57%) reported that they had completed such programs successfully at least once, and 37% reported that they had left at least one program before completing.[10] Substance abuse, as we will see in chapter six, is a salient issue in the lives of the respondents interviewed for this study.

As with women involved with the criminal justice system nationwide, many women interviewed for this study reported a history of mental health problems. While women were not directly asked about their mental health, many brought it up in the course of the interview. Other women spoke about different mental health problems, such as anxiety, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which occasionally interfered with their lives. During the interviews, for example, one woman displayed behaviors that, to the interviewer's non-clinical eye, indicated issues with paranoia, and another woman was excluded from the analysis of this study because her mental health problems

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[9] Data are missing for 10 respondents because the question was added late.

[10] These categories are not mutually exclusive, so a single respondent may be duplicated between the two.

interfered directly with the interviewer's ability to conduct the interview. A few of the women said that they see a mental health counselor of some sort. However, one woman worried enough about the stigma associated with mental health issues that she does not seek services, despite a stated need.

In the interviews, a number of women spoke unprompted about suffering from a variety of physical health problems, from cancer, back problems and HIV to strokes, heart attacks and physical handicaps. These women talked about their physical suffering as an affliction that impacted everything in their lives.

For the most part, therefore, the sample is representative of women reentering the community after prison. Given the general representativeness, much can be learned from the study results about the population of reentering women as a whole.

Scope and limitations

This study uses self-report measures of illegal behavior to provide a more accurate source than official arrest records for assessing whether or not the participants were and are involved in illegal behavior. Although the merits of the self-report method have been the subject of much debate, research has shown that self-reported crime and arrest data are reasonably reliable and valid (Hindelang, Hirschi & Weis, 1981, quoted in Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998).

If this study relied only upon official data, the actual incidence of illegal behavior might be underestimated because there would be no way of knowing whether the official information was representative of actual offending behavior. It is also expected that some of the mothers in the sample may be reluctant to report crimes because they will be afraid that it would affect a custody case or their involvement with a service provider. This reluctance will be combated with frequent reminders to subjects that all of their answers are completely confidential and anonymous.

Given the recruitment methods used in this project, it is expected that women receiving services will be over-represented in this sample. This means that the sample will exclude both women who are particularly disenfranchised and, despite a need for services, do not use them, and women who are not in need of services because of particularly successful reentry. While it is unfortunately rare, there are women who return from incarceration and do not need services. These women secure, for example, housing, employment, and relationships and will not be represented here because they do not need the services where respondents were recruited for this study. There is a small chance that such women would find out about this study through word-of-mouth.

Upcoming chapters

In chapter five, the study hypotheses will be tested for statistical significance. In chapter six, hypothesis results will be discussed within the context of qualitative

results from the interviews, and a larger discussion of the policy and research implications of the study results will be presented.

Chapter 5: Results

The overall model

The overall hypothesis of this study is that, for formerly incarcerated mothers, reunification with children will positively affect desistance[11] behaviors, due to intermediate positive effects on attachment to children and changes in respondents' perceptions of who they are (identity change). Also included in the model were the alternate variables, as identified in other life course theories, of attachment to employment and spouse or partner. The entire model, when tested with regression analysis, is marginally significant (ANOVA p=0.08; See Appendix G, Table G.1). Specifically, the presence of a partner, a variable included in the spirit of studies which have consistently found such significant effects of marriage on desistance in men (Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006), shows to be significantly related (p=0.03) to the self-reported desistance of the women in this study. In addition, the identity change variable is also marginally significantly (p=0.06) related to desistance.

On the other hand, the variables of job stability (p=0.96), also significant in studies of men, attachment to children (p=0.80), and reunification with at least one child (p=0.18) do not significantly affect desistance. Adding certain control variables to the model increases the significance of the model; specifically, the

[11] While the original desistance items included two measures of alcohol consumption, these items were excluded from the final desistance variable because they are, after all, legal behaviors.

relationship of the variables to desistance seems to be particularly high for women who do not identify as white, as income increases, for women with fewer children, for older women, for women who have had more cumulative substance abuse treatment stays, and for women who have not had involvement with the child welfare system for any of their children. The other control variables (income and education) do not have any effect on the model. A discussion of the results by each hypothesis follows.

Reunification and social bonding results

The first hypothesis of this dissertation is that respondents who reunify with their children after incarceration will have higher social bonding scores than respondents who do not reunify with their children after incarceration.

Background on women and their children: Number and ages of children

In order to be interviewed for this study, women must have given birth to at least one child. Respondents had given birth to an average of three children[12]. The maximum number of children was twelve (two women). Fifteen percent of respondents (n=14) reported that at least one of their children was deceased: ten of these had one deceased child, three had three deceased children, and one woman had six deceased children.

[12] Median number of children given birth to is 3.0, mean is 3.4

Respondents' children represented a wide variety of ages: respondents' oldest children were an average of 19 years old[13]. On average, respondents were 20 years old when their first child was born[14] and 29 years old when their most recent child was born[15]. Respondents' youngest children were nine years old on average.

Children's living situations during mothers' incarcerations

The majority (65%) of women in prison have minor children in the community. In New York City, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) governs official response to cases of abuse and neglect of children. When a woman is arrested or incarcerated, she can place her children in the informal care of a friend or relative, without involving ACS. However, when women do not have such networks, or when potential caretakers do not have the resources to care for those children, mothers, caretakers or government agents (such as police officers) may engage the services of ACS. In order to secure financial support for that caretaker, mothers may place the child in kinship foster care by signing a voluntary placement agreement.

If the mother has no one with whom she may place her child, the child may be placed in non-kin foster care. Most (90%) of the children of incarcerated men are

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[13] Both mean and median are 19. Data are missing for one respondent, whose only child was deceased at the time of the interview.

[14] Mean: 21, median: 20.

[15] Both mean and median were 29.

in the care of their own mother during the father's incarceration. However, only 28% of the children of incarcerated women are in the care of their father. For women, it is far more likely that the children will be in the care of another family member (79%) or a non-family member (29%) (Mumola, 2000).

In this study, respondents' children lived in many different places during their mothers' incarceration. The most common living situation for respondents' children was with the respondents' mothers – 29% had at least one child living with their own mother, and very few (15%) had at least one child staying with the child's own father.

Table 5.1: Where children lived during mothers' incarcerations

Placement of children	At least one child in living arrangement
Respondent's mother	29%
Nonkin foster care	22%
Child's own father	15%
Respondent's female sibling	10%
Respondent's female family member[16]	8%
Respondents' friend	8%
Multiple foster care placements	8%
Paternal grandparents	7%
Not born at time of respondent's incarceration	7%
Child born during respondent's incarceration	5%
Child's own sibling	4%
Respondent's male sibling	2%
Respondent's grandparents	2%

[16] For example, female cousin, sister-in-law or niece.

Just less than half (46%) of respondents in this study had had no involvement with the child welfare system with any of their children.

Contact with children during incarceration

During a mother's incarceration, the distance between her and her children can have profound effects on the ability of both parties to stay connected to each other during the mother's incarceration. Further, contact between incarcerated mothers and their children has positive effects on mothers' feelings of connectedness, attachment, parental competence and lower parenting stress (Tuerk & Loper, 2006). The willingness or ability of children's caretakers to facilitate contact between the children and their imprisoned mother can also affect levels of contact.

Respondents in this study were asked about the frequency of visits from their children, phone calls to their children (inmates cannot receive calls) and letters to and from their children during their most recent incarceration. The vast majority of respondents had no contact with their children during their incarceration: 63% received no visits from their children, and 60% did not get any letters from their children. In addition, 53% of respondents did not write to their children, and 46% did not call their children[17].

[17] One cannot *receive* calls when one is incarcerated.

For those who did get visits, 20% received visits between multiple times a week to once a month, and for 12%, it was either less than once a month or only once or twice[18]. For those who did receive letters, write to their children and call their children, it was most often once a week.

Respondents often spoke about the complexity of maintaining contact during incarceration. In general, women in prison are incarcerated at great distances from their families: half are over 100 miles away (Gilfus, 1992). In this study, some respondents reported that they had difficulties making calls from a facility (from long lines to time constraints), others maligned the expenses associated with making collect calls[19], and others reported family and friends who did not accept collect calls or even have telephones. For those four respondents who had children who were incarcerated, they could not be in contact, since two people each in different prisons cannot call each other[20]. Writing was often impossible or difficult for those with limited literacy. For a small number of respondents, the lack of contact occurred because their children did not know that their mother was incarcerated. Five respondents spoke about their decision not to tell their children about their incarceration:

> *67: She was down in, um, Maryland. Yes, she really didn't know I was incarcerated, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, she didn't know, yeah, but she probably has a feeling, though, because, she, at that time she was about, maybe, about five years younger, but she probably, when she talked to me, get in touch with me when my mother died*

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[18] 2% missing, 2% not specified how often.

[19] Collect call costs are often higher from prisoners than they are for non-incarcerated customers.

[20] One respondent in particular spoke about this loss of contact.

> *at the time too, she was trying to get in touch with me, she probably, you know, she couldn't get in touch with me while I was incarcerated, yeah, mmhmm.*

Respondents who made this decision reasoned that it was not worth alarming the children. Caretakers and respondents also seemed embarrassed by the respondent's incarceration, and did not want the children likewise embarrassed.

A factor analysis was performed on the contact variables (writing, calling and visiting) and consistency across writing items was found (See Table G.6). A variable for writing was created by combining letters written to and from respondents during their time incarcerated into a single scale. This variable was used as a control variable in analyses investigating attachment.

Reunification with children

A quarter of respondents reported that they had reunified with at least one of their children. When respondents had reunified with more than one of their children at multiple dates, the earliest date of reunification was used. For those respondents who were reunified, most had been reunified for less than a year (62%), or between one to four years (27%) at the time of the interview. A handful of respondents (n=3; 11%) had reunified with their children many years before, and were no longer living with them at the time of the interview. In addition, five women were reunified with children that they had given birth to in prison, and maintained custody of through reentry. All five of these women lived at a

program specifically for formerly incarcerated women and their prison-born children.

Almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents had not reunified with their children at the time of the interview. Of those who were not reunified, 66% were seeking to reunify with at least one of their children.

Termination of parental rights

Contact with children and their caretakers during a woman's incarceration is not only important for interpersonal reasons, but the frequency of such contact can have real effects on the potential for reunification after incarceration. In 1999, New York State adopted the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) signed into federal law in 1997. One of the requirements of ASFA is that permanency for children in the child welfare system must be expedited. Specifically, a petition for a termination of parental rights (TPR) must be finalized for a child who has been in non-kin foster care for 15 of the last 22 months. For children of incarcerated mothers (on average, incarcerated for 12 months [Greenfeld & Snell, 1999], and whose children are often in the system), this makes TPR a real possibility (Smith, 2000; Scoppetta 1999)[21]. Avoiding termination involves a number of

[21] ACS implementation of ASFA includes understanding that termination (and adoption by another) may not be an appropriate goal for children who, among other situations, are in care of an "approved relative", or whose custodial parent "is incarcerated but is scheduled to be released within the next six months and there is a strong likelihood that the child will be able to return home safely within a reasonable time period after the parent is released. Unless justified by extenuating circumstances, this factor should not be invoked more than once." (Scoppetta, 1999).

requirements, which must be completed within the ASFA-imposed 15 to 22 month timeline, from setting up a household, a source of legal income, and addiction recovery to classes such as parenting and counseling and a psychological evaluation (Smith, 2000).

For many of the women in this study, termination of their rights to their children had become very real: 34% of respondents had their parental rights terminated for at least one of their children. Of women who had at least one child terminated, the average[22] number of terminated children is three. While reasons for termination were not requested in the interview, it was clear that some terminations had been initiated by ACS, though many respondents volunteered that they had initiated the proceedings themselves.

Time spent with children

Respondents were asked about the number of hours they spend with their children in an average week, now that they are no longer incarcerated. While some respondents reported that they are almost constantly with their children, others do not see them at all. Across all respondents, they spend an mean of 41 hours and a median of 14 hours per week with at least one of their children. Thirty percent of respondents reported that they spend no time with their children in an average week. For those respondents who spend at least some time with their children in an average week, they spent a mean of 59 and a median of 50

[22] Mean and median.

hours. Those respondents who do live with at least one child spend a median of 116 hours and a mean of 106 hours with their children. Those who do not live with any of their children (but do see them in an average week) spend a median of 24 hours and a mean of 33 hours with their children.

Attachment to children

Respondents' relationships with their children may not be related to their ability to secure reunification or whether they are able to spend time with those children. To measure the quality of respondents' relationships with their children, respondents were asked to pick one of their children, and were instructed that they would be asked about their relationship with that child.

Table 5.2: Reason for choosing child for PSI child attachment subscale

Reason for choosing child	
Special fondness	49%
Reminds me of myself	15%
I know that child the best	15%
Having trouble with that child	11%
Worried about that child	5%
That child needs me the most	3%
Random selection	3%

The questions about respondent attachment to the selected child were derived from a set of seven questions which make up the parent attachment subscale of the Parental Stress Index (Abidin, 1995). The highest possible score on attachment is 35, and the lowest possible score is seven. Respondents' mean

score on the PSI attachment subscale was 20, with a minimum of 13, and a maximum of 27.

Descriptives on individual questions were as follows[23]. The range for each question was one to five, with five being least attached, and 1 being most attached.

Table 5.3: PSI child attachment subscale

PSI Question	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Range
How easy is it for you to understand what your child wants or needs	3.94	4.00	1.17	1-5[24]
It takes a long time for parents to develop close, warm feelings for their children	3.75	4.00	1.37	1-5
I expected to have closer and warmer feelings for my child than I do, and this bothers me	3.37	4.00	1.42	1-5
Sometimes my child does things that bother me just to be mean	3.39	4.00	1.30	1-5
When I was young, I never felt comfortable holding or taking care of children	4.25	5.00	1.04	1-5
My child knows that I am his/her parent and wants me more than s/he wants other people	4.14	5.00	1.23	1-5
The number of children I have right now is too many	4.12	4.00	0.99	1-5
Total PSI score	26.97	27.00	4.35	16-35[25]

[23] One respondent has missing data because her child was deceased at the time of the interview.

[24] The lowest possible score for all seven questions is one, and the highest possible score is five. Higher scores indicate higher attachment.

[25] The lowest possible score is seven, and the highest possible score is 35. Higher scores indicate higher attachment.

These variables were factor analyzed to determine consistency (See Table G.7). Three variables emerged as a consistent measure of warmth felt towards and from children ("long time", "closer and warmer" and "wants me more"). A new variable was created that is the sum of respondents' scores on the three warmth items.

Hypothesis results

The overall model for the first hypothesis (attachment to children affected by reunification, also including scales for contact during incarceration and number of hours spent with children in an average week) is marginally significant (ANOVA p=0.07; See Appendix G, Table G.2). Specifically, the number of hours spent with children (p=0.03) is significantly related attachment to children. However, respondents who had reunified with at least one child after incarceration were not significantly more likely than those who did not to show higher levels of attachment (warmth) towards their children (p=0.24). The addition of some control variables makes the model more significant: reunification and time spent with children affects warmth more strongly for non-white and older women. The control variables of income, number of children, total number of times in substance abuse treatment, involvement with ACS, and education decrease the significance of the model.

Alternate attachment results: Employment and partner

Other researchers have shown for years that men's desistance is related to salient attachments to prosocial societal institutions, such as marriage, the military and employment. This study included interview questions to determine attachment to employment and a spouse or partner in order to allow comparison between such established hypotheses and the hypotheses of this study, related to attachment to children.

The respondents in this study were most often unemployed at the time of the interview. Only 16 (17%) of the women interviewed were employed, seven of whom were employed full time, and nine part-time.

Table 5.4: Respondent current employment data

	Range	Median	Mean
Employed respondents – time in current job	1 day to 23 months[26]	80 days	134 days

When employed respondents were asked about the likelihood that they would lose or quit their current job in the next year, more than half (57%) said that it was "not at all possible" or only "slightly possible". Twenty-nine percent of respondents said that it was "definite" that they would lose or quit their jobs in that time. While employment was discussed as necessary to sustain a livelihood,

[26] Excludes one respondent who would start her job 2 days after the interview.

no respondents spoke about employment as having anything to do with their desistance or, as will be discussed in chapter six, an identity change

The vast majority (71%) of respondents reported that they had never been married. However, over half (52%) said that they were in a relationship with someone they considered a spouse or a partner at the time of the interview . Three of these women reported that their significant other was incarcerated at the time of the interview.

The Parental Stress Index (PSI) measure of attachment to spouse or partner was administered to all respondents who reported that they were in a relationship.

Table 5.5: PSI partner attachment subscale scores

Item	Mean	Median	Std Dev	Range
Since having my child, my spouse/partner has not given me as much help and support as I expected	1.78	2.00	0.94	1-5[27]
Since having my last child, I have had less interest in sex	2.16	2.00	1.24	1-5
Having a child seems to have increased the number of problems we have with in-laws and relatives	2.06	2.00	1.16	1-5
Having children has been much more expensive than I had expected	3.68	4.00	1.33	1-5
Having a child has caused me more problems than I expected in my relationship with my spouse/partner	1.67	2.00	0.72	1-4
Since having a child, my spouse/partner and I don't do as many things together	2.14	2.00	1.16	1-5
Since having a child, my spouse/partner and I don't spend as much time together as a family as I had expected	2.33	2.00	1.27	1-5
Total PSI Score – Attachment to Spouse or Partner	15.87	16.00	3.65	7-22[28]

A single spouse attachment score for all PSI variables was used in model analyses (See Table G.9).

[27] The lowest possible score for all seven questions is one, and the highest possible score is five. Higher scores indicate higher attachment.

[28] The lowest possible score is seven, and the highest possible score is 35. Higher scores indicate higher attachment.

The measurement of attachment to partner used by Sampson and Laub (2003) was also administered to all respondents who reported that they were in a relationship.

Table 5.6: Sampson & Laub partner attachment subscale scores

Item	Mean	Median	Std Dev	Range
My spouse/partner gives me the right amount of affection	3.76	4.00	1.32	1-5[29]
My spouse/partner seems to wish I were a different type of person	3.56	4.00	1.26	1-5
My spouse/partner sometimes puts me down in front of other people	4.24	5.00	1.08	1-5
My spouse/partner sometimes won't listen to me or my opinions	3.34	4.00	1.45	1-5
I am closer to my spouse/partner than most people are to theirs	3.62	4.00	1.26	1-5
Total S&L Score – Attachment to Spouse or Partner	18.52	19.00	4.03	9-25[30]

A factor analysis was performed on the partner attachment items from the scale used by Sampson & Laub (See Table G.8), and consistency was found across all variables except the last ("I am closer to my spouse/partner than most people are to theirs"). A total attachment to spouse or partner variable for the four consistent items was created and used in models involving attachment to

[29] The lowest possible score for all five questions is one, and the highest possible score is five. Higher scores indicate higher attachment.

[30] The lowest possible score is five, and the highest possible score is 25. Higher scores indicate higher attachment.

partner. However, unlike the variable reflecting simply the presence or absence of a spouse or partner, neither the PSI nor the Sampson and Laub scales evidenced as significant in any models.

Social bonding and identity change results

The second hypothesis of this dissertation was that respondents who have higher bonding scores with their children will be more likely to describe an identity change associated with desistance and reunification with children than respondents with lower social bonding scores.

Background on identity changes

Respondents were asked during the interview whether they had ever experienced an identity change, defined as a change in how someone views herself and who she is. The vast majority (95%) of respondents reported that they had experienced such a change.[31] However, the nature of the identity changes varied widely:

[31] One respondent failed to understand the question.

Table 5.7: Respondent reasons given for identity changes

Identity change reason	Number mentioned	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	Mentioned after probe[32]
Children	64% (61)	18%	34%	26%	15%	7%	43%
Incarceration[33]	44% (42)	52%	21%	19%	2%	5%	26%
Drug use/sobriety	37% (35)	51%	23%	14%	9%	3%	3%
Older/Tired	21 (22%)	19%	33%	43%	5%	--	
Faith	14 (15%)	36%	29%	14%	14%	7%	7%
Fear of death[34]	12 (13%)	33%	42%	17%	8%	--	
"It's about me"[35]	13 (14%)	8%	54%	23%	15%	--	
Romantic relationship[36]	11 (12%)	36%	36%	9%	18%	--	
Arrest	7 (7%)	43%	43%	14%	--	--	
Sexuality	5 (5%)	100%	--	--	--	--	

While more respondents reported an identity change related to children, it was often mentioned after a probe, and was rarely mentioned first by those who mentioned it. On the other hand, identity changes related to incarceration and drug use or sobriety were also mentioned by a large number of respondents, but were far more likely to be mentioned first, and were less likely to have been prompted by a probe.

Hypothesis results

The statistical test of this hypothesis yielded no significant results; none of the attachment variables (employment, attachment to partner or attachment to

[32] For those who mentioned it as a reason

[33] Includes "freedom"

[34] Includes health concerns

[35] Includes self esteem boosts

[36] Includes domestic violence

children) affect the presence of an identity change (See Appendix G, Table G.3). This lack of a significant relationship remains when the identity change variable is general, or broken down to more specific identity changes related to incarceration and children. Addition of control variables has no effects on the model: addition of the race, education, number of children, age, total number of stays in substance abuse treatment, involvement in the child welfare system and income variables does not affect the significance of the model.

Identity change and desistance

The third and final hypothesis of this dissertation is that respondents who describe an identity change associated with desistance and reunification with children will report less criminal activity within the past year than respondents who do not describe an identity change associated with desistance and reunification.

Respondents' criminal histories

On average, the women interviewed for this study have extensive involvement in the criminal justice system, with high numbers of arrests and incarcerations, many of which were over a year and had ended within a year of the interview.

Table 5.8 Respondent history of criminal justice system involvement

Question	Median	Mean	Std Dev	Range
Number of times arrested in life	5.00	14.96	23.16	1-150
Number of times on probation in life[37]	0.00	0.54	0.70	0-3
Number of times on parole in life[38]	1.00	0.75;	0.90	0-3
Number of times incarcerated in life	3.00	8.67;	14.08	1-76
Longest incarceration length[39]	1.42 years	2.50 years	3.53 years	1 day to 23.83 years
Length of most recent incarceration	5.5 months	1.84 years	3.49 years	1 day to 23.83 years
Time since end of most recent incarceration to date of interview	8 months	2.66 years	6.33 years	0 days to 35.58 years
Time since end of longest incarceration to date of interview	17 months	4.66 years	7.46 years	8 days to 35.58 years

Criminal behavior

Towards the end of each interview, respondents were asked questions to determine whether or not they were desisting from criminal behavior. The vast majority of respondents (92%) reported that they were engaging in fewer behaviors that could get them into trouble at the time of the interview than before their most recent incarceration and were therefore considered "desisting" for the purposes of this study. A small number of respondents reported that they were engaging in more behaviors at the time of the interview than they had before their most recent incarceration (5%) and a few (3%) reported engaging in the same number of behaviors at the time of the interview as before their most recent incarceration.

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[37] Only one respondent was on probation at the time of the interview.

[38] 20% of respondents were on parole at the time of the interview.

[39] 73% of respondents reported that their most recent incarceration was also their longest.

In the United States in 2005, incarcerated women were sentenced equally for violent (35%), property (30%) and drug offenses (29%) (Harrison & Beck, 2006).

Table 5.9: Types of offenses committed by respondents

Behavior – categorized by potential offense type	Committed at least one before most recent incarceration	Committed at least one after most recent incarceration
Drug	92.6%	26.3%
Property	50.5%	8.4%
Violent	31.6%	3.2%

While the percentages yielded by this study are different from national statistics because respondents were reporting multiple behaviors, it is clear that drug behaviors dominate women's illegal behaviors. In the interviews, most women suggested that drugs were their primary illegal involvement, and that even their property and violent crimes were related to their drug addictions.

Why did you desist?

Once respondents had answered both desistance scales, the interviewer asked about the reasons behind any differences (or lack thereof) between the two scales[40]. Responses to this question were content analyzed into the categories in table 5.10. Most often, respondents suggested that their behavior changes had to do with their children, with their incarceration and substance abuse or sobriety issues following closely after. However, when a combination of the frequency of the responses, the percent of respondents who mentioned the

reason first, and the fact that a probe was present far less often are taken into account, incarceration and substance abuse emerge as more important than children. It must be taken into account that the interviewer probed most respondents about the role of children and incarceration in respondents' desistance because of study hypotheses. When incarceration was mentioned as a reason for desistance, it was much less likely to be after a probe than children. Later in the study, the interviewer began probing about the role of faith in respondents' behavior changes due to responses from earlier interviews, but the probes were not uniform.

Table 5.10: Respondent reasons for desistance[41]

Reason for desistance	Mentioned?	Mentioned first?	If mentioned, was it after interviewer probe?
Children	54%	35%	54%
Incarceration	43%	56%	5%
Substance abuse or sobriety	37%	66%	
Older/Tired	16%	40%	
Wanting more for self and life	14%	31%	
Fear of death	12%	18%	
Faith	12%	27%	18%
"Doing it for me"	9%	33%	
Romantic relationship (includes domestic violence)	3%	33%	
Mental health (emerging problems or resolved problems)	3%	67%	
Knowing self better	3%	100%	
Program	3%	0%	
Arrest	2%	50%	

[40] Data on the "why did you desist" question are missing for one person due to interviewer error.

[41] Five other reasons were mentioned, including consistency, " it feels good to desist", focus, homelessness, and "one time thing", each mentioned by one person.

Hypothesis results

The ANOVA showing the relationship between the dependent variable of desistance and three identity change variables[42] shows that whether or not the respondent experienced an identity change related is significantly related to her reports of desistance (ANOVA p=0.04; See Appendix G, Table G.4). Specifically, when regressed, data show that reports of any identity change (p=0.21), or an identity change related to her children or reunification is not significantly related to reports of desistance (p=0.99). However, identity change related to incarceration is significantly related to desistance (p=0.02). This relationship is mirrored in the qualitative data, for when respondents were asked about the nature of their identity changes, time spent incarcerated was mentioned most often, and was most likely to be mentioned first. Addition of control variables has mixed effects: addition of the race, income, education, number of children, age, and total number of times in substance abuse treatment variables makes the model less significant. However, presence of involvement in the child welfare system involvement makes the model more significant.

Alternate explanation for desistance: incarceration and time with children

Working with the specific significance of the identity change-incarceration variable, a regression was run with variables that might uncover the meaning behind this effect. When the criminal history variable and the length of the

[42] Dichotomous identity change variable, and two specific identity change variables associated with children and incarceration

person's most recent incarceration are taken with the identity-change incarceration variable, and the number of hours spent with children, their collective effects on self-report desistance are extremely significant (ANOVA p=0.00; See Appendix G, Table G.5).

The addition of control variables (race, income, education, number of children, age, total number of times in substance abuse treatment, and involvement in the child welfare system) to the model does not show those variables to be significant components of the model.

In addition to quantitative results, however, the interviews yielded very rich qualitative data about how the women experience their relationships, themselves, and their criminal behavior (or lack thereof). In chapter six, these quantitative findings will be enhanced by respondents' own words in a discussion of what these findings indicate about women's desistance.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Next steps

In chapter five, we found mixed results for the hypotheses outlined in chapter four. This chapter presents a discussion of those results, and contextualizes them with respondents' own words. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the shortcomings of the current study, recommendations for future research, and implications of these findings for policy and programs.

Reunification and social bonding

Chapter five showed that, while reunification with children is not related to attachment to children, a proxy variable of hours spent with children in an average week does positively affects mothers' attachment to those children. In that attachment theory suggests that the amount of contact between mothers and children is the essential component of successful attachment, this is not a surprising finding. Each of the components of this hypothesis will be discussed in this section.

Attachment between mothers and their children

The quantitative results of the hypothesis testing showed that respondents' general levels of attachment to their children were high. Qualitatively, respondents' love for and pride in their children was one of the most common themes of the interviews. Twenty-nine respondents spoke specifically about the importance of their love of their children to their lives, and fifteen respondents

made it clear that they are very proud of their children's lives. Respondents glowed about their children's college education, jobs, marriages, and their grandchildren:

> *26: I see her every day. Every day. At the school. She's in school, she's doing good, she go to church, you know, she's a A[-student], you know, she's a gifted child, you know, as I said, cause she's very smart, she plays the organ, you know, so, my aunt and my sister and them try to keep her, you know, busy, you know, when she come home she go to the library, you see, work on computers, you know, do her homework, she's a very smart child and I love her for that.*

Specifically, nine respondents talked about their love in the context of their reunification, while those who had not yet reunified often spoke about their love for their children within the context of their hopes for reunification:

> *86: I want to get [my son] back! I want to be with my kids, I love my kids. Even though I messed up, I'm still, I try to do my best for them, you know, cause I'm not messing up today, I'm doing much better than I was, it's just me being in the shelters, making it kind of hard, you know, cause I don't have nowhere else for them to go.*

Other respondents' love was spoken about in the context of their loss of parental rights. For these respondents, two of whom have had all of their children terminated, and one of whom has had three of her four children terminated, it was clear that the legal imposition of a termination (or imminent termination) only put the mothers' love into sharper, more painful relief:

> *92: Well, I was gonna, after I get settled in what I'm doing, I was gonna go to the, um, agency that my three children were adopted through, and see if I could get the workers to contact they, they adopted family, and see if maybe we can meet somewhere or something, even though it might not take place, they might not be willing to do that, which I'm ok with that, you know what I mean?*

The attachment scale used in this study reflects both the warmth that the respondents have for their children and the warmth that the respondents think their children have for them. Twenty-two respondents spoke about the love that their children have for them:

> *8: Because [my son is] my little husband! He's like, he, it's like, if I go somewhere, right, if I'm not there to pick him up at the bus, he'll be like, 'mommy, where was you? I miss you. You wasn't there for me.' And sometimes he would, like, have the teachers call me, just to tell me he loves me, and you know, that's why he's so special to me.*

Three respondents whose rights had been terminated to their children spoke about being moved when their children, who had been adopted by others, were working to maintain contact or were expected to seek out contact.

Given the clear qualitative themes of love for children throughout these interviews, it becomes more clear why reunification with children is not as significant as hours spent with children when it comes to attachment. First of all, reunification may have occurred at any time since a respondents' release from incarceration, and therefore would not necessarily affect respondents' current attachment to their children. The time respondents reported spending with their children, on the other hand, referred to current contact with children, and would be more likely to be related to current feelings of attachment.

In addition, a number of qualitative themes emerged to indicate that reunification, in fact, was often *avoided* because of respondents' love for their children. In fact, almost a third of respondents said that they thought that their children might even

be better off not living with them. For some respondents, it was a more general concern for relationship stability, since many children had been with their caretakers for many years. Respondents sometimes even thought that the relationship between the child and the caretaker was better than the relationship between the respondent and the child:

> *52: No, no. I just don't want to undo all the good my mother has done. That's the basic thing. She's raising her, I have [unintelligible], she's a good little girl, and sometimes I sit in that shelter when all the other girls are sleeping, and cry, because I say to myself, would she have turned out to be such a good kid had I had her?*

The majority of these respondents, however, reasoned that their children should stay with others because of practical concerns, such as housing, schooling disruption or respondent's substance abuse or HIV infection. This often translated into a discussion of why it is important for the respondent to focus on her own needs before working towards reunification:

> *4: So, it would be best that I wait until I get my own apartment so that we can be together and there won't have to be any, you know, causing any kind of trauma, you know, um, children don't like to be separated from their parents, to come back and then be separated from them again, you know, um, some children, I mean, my children are strong, but I wouldn't want to put that kind of pressure on my children, you know.*

These concerns spanned many different areas of respondents' lives: for most women who are released into the community after incarceration, there are many areas of their lives which need attention, from housing and a livelihood to family reunification and complying with parole mandates. For many of the women who spoke about their reentry struggles, housing was a primary concern. As we know from chapter four, many (15%) incarcerated women nationally report

homelessness in the year before their arrest (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2000, cited Women's Prison Association, 2003). Many formerly incarcerated people rely on emergency shelters: as much as a quarter of shelter residents in New York City reported incarceration in the past two years (Metraux & Culhane, 2006). Incarceration histories create obstacles to obtaining housing, and homelessness and unstable housing situations, in turn, affect women's ability to get jobs, reunite with their families and secure benefits. Respondents spoke about the importance of having "a place":

> *42: I still get depressed a lot, because, you know, I don't have my own place, but in time I know it's gonna come. I just have to keep doing the things that I'm doing to make myself better.*

Some of these women spoke about losing their accommodations when they ended up incarcerated and the rent was not paid:

> *71: So just a lady cop, she didn't handcuff me, she walked me, and she said, listen, find someone to get your baby, but make sure you let them know you ain't coming home, you violated [community supervision], you ain't coming back. That shit hurt me. Hurt me good. I lost my apartment and everything, I had Section Eight apartment, I lost it, yeah, I lost, and then I came home and I started using and it was (claps hands) goodbye. I haven't been in my own place since that time. That was the last time I had my name on a lease.*

While homeless people suffer with many medical problems, substance abuse is the most frequently occurring of these problems (Skinner, 2005). Some of the women interviewed connected their drug use with their loss of housing, while others talked about lack of income affecting their ability to pay rent.

> *49: I lost my apartment. Yes, [my children] was going to school and I was working, but then my back went out. I have a deteriorating disc disease, and diabetic neuropathy, so I have nerve damage on my right side, so I couldn't work no more.*

In order to maintain housing, one woman spoke about remaining in an undesirable romantic relationship. One woman, living in a shelter she hated for its conditions and its reminder of past traumatic experiences, talked about her desperation to find housing as potentially leading her to future illegal behavior.

In order to reunify with children involved with the foster care system, parents must secure housing adequate for all anticipated residents. Some women interviewed talked about the ways in which their housing situations barred them from working towards other goals, such *as* reunification. Permanent housing also seemed to represent a level of independence that was desirable to some of the women interviewed:

> *84: I would, yeah, I mean, I would, the thought of it, the thought of selling drugs came to my mind because I need fast money, cause I want my own place, and that's, and the fast money is in drugs, and I know where to sell it at… I am interested in stopping [criminal behavior], but I'm more interested in my own place, and people stop telling me about my drugs, and the shelter, and tell me where I can get apartment at, I might come out better, because the drugs, a drug program's not going to be the move…It's not what I want… I look at people who got places, don't even care about it. Look at people who got apartments, and don't even want them (crying heavily), and I want one so bad, I can taste it, and I can't get one. I look around me and people got places, don't even stay there. They don't even care about it. I go, I go to Fort Greene [Brooklyn], all those empty apartments, all them crack apartments, they ain't even care, but they got apartments. (long pause). All I want is my own apartment. (long pause). That's all I want, all I want, I don't want nothing else. (long pause, breathing heavily, sniffling). I'd rather ride the train every day before I stay at the shelter, I want my own apartment.*

Housing, however, was not the only practical problem facing the women as they worked to reestablish their lives after incarceration and potentially reunify with

their children. Earning enough money to take care of many responsibilities in an expensive city like New York was also discussed by a number of respondents:

> *67: One, yeah, [I live in] a one bedroom [apartment], yeah, uh huh, yeah, I pay the utilities too, that's, that's what's killing me, and that's what I was talking to my, uh, worker about, because you know, when I got the apartment they told, I thought the utilities was included, you know, and then when I got there I found out I had to come up with my electricity, you know, and gas and all that stuff, it's like my, it's like, it comes to like almost $500 a month, and, and, and that takes, all, all, all, all my [disability benefit]! Because behind that I have, I have to pay, I have to get my, um, my card, MetroCard [subway fare] from the month, you know, when, when whenever I can afford it, and sometimes I can't afford to get it. I have to get my hair done, I have to get my laundry done, and I love the, you know, the toiletries and other things, you know, you know, it's not, clothes, like I don't even have enough! It's not enough at all! I tell them it's not enough, you know, you know, it's that, what, what am I to do, you know?*

Some of these talked about their dissatisfaction with their public assistance or disability earnings. For those without jobs, finding a job was perceived as difficult, and others spoke about jobs that do not pay enough to live, particularly for women with children to support.

> *44: I'm finding it so hard now, man. I'm finding it very hard, and, I'm, I gotta, I'm living for living wages from New York, right? I'm running a rally for one of those things, right, so I can't take no fucking McDonald's job with four kids [unintelligible], is you fucking crazy?! I be working just to go to fucking work. That's, that's, that's backwards thinking. Living wages for New York right now in the year 2006 should be $15. Because, mind you, rent stabilization is not for a woman or a man that's making $15,000 a year. If you making that type of money, you working $15,000 twice, two different types of job to pay a $30,000 salary, and actually, you're not making the $30,000 salary, because you have to pay taxes, that you busting your ass for two different types of jobs, but New York, do the study, do the investigating! Come on!*

Beyond the basics, women expressing frustration with the difficulties of reentry also talked about trouble re-acclimating to a grand public transportation system,

being embarrassed by the emergence of one's criminal record in unexpected places, such as the DMV, coping with domestic violence, and maintaining sobriety.

This widespread frustration with the difficulties of successfully reestablishing oneself upon reentry indicates that reunification may often be contraindicated for women in troubled housing, economic, and interpersonal situations. Women in the difficult life situations often dictated in reentry may, therefore, seek not to reunify particularly because of their love for their children, but will still take time to be with their children.

Women who reported no time with their children

Of the women who reported that they do not see their children in an average week, many said that they had lost track of their children over time. Four respondents attributed this lack of contact to their own emotional difficulties with having contact with children for whom they had lost custody or parental rights. Despite the fact that visits were not only their only contact with their children, but were one concrete way to work towards reunification, these respondents said that the pain of the contact was too much for them:

> *29: Oh, ok, yeah, so I'm trying to find housing and, um, I'm hoping and I'm praying that, you know, that the system will release the children to me.*
> *VM: Where are they now?*
> *29: They're, well, actually, I don't know where they're at, you know, cause I had stopped the visits because it was hurting me too much, so I, I can't even go visit them, so, um…*

While women were not specifically asked about the ways in which ACS became involved in the lives of their children, a number of women reported that they had invited ACS or other caretakers into their lives because they realized that their substance abuse and criminal behavior were interfering with their ability to mother. These women said that they wanted their children taken from them because they felt unable to care for them.

Children and reunification are difficult

Mothering is a difficult job for any woman. Beyond the love between respondents and their children, women also spoke about the difficulties inherent in keeping and maintaining relationships with their children. Most of the women in this study said that the time they spent incarcerated or otherwise away from their children (e.g. in the street or drugging) was something that they regret, and that time was often also described as one of the hardest parts of their incarceration. Twenty-one respondents spoke specifically about their regret what they lost due to their priorities at the time:

> *54: I went to jail twice for [fighting]! I'm not, them years I lost out of my kids' life, I can't get that back.*

Now that they are back in the community, some of the women interviewed are interested in spending time with their children to make up for the lost time and ill-effects due to their incarceration and street-life behaviors up to their children:

> *30: (Sighs). I guess, um, I missed whatever they were, you know, before in life, I missed it, so I try to, um, catch up with the little bits that's what's going on now, and be in their life, what's happening in their life now, and, school, and girlfriends for my son, and, and, his*

> *problems, and his ordeals that he's going through, his changes, and, you know.*

As a part of this conversation, many respondents spoke about their desire to be role models to their children:

> *16: … I was mean, I was rough, I was hanging out in the streets. And, and basically I was a rebellious child, so, as I got older and I was pregnant, it changed my whole perception of life. Now you have somebody looking up to you, now you have someone that you need to teach morals and values, and about life itself, so now you have to make sure you have your stuff correct, your morals and values correct before you could teach your child anything.*

This desire to be a role model often led to desistance, because respondents were worried that their children would mimic their "bad" behavior:

> *72: I want him to look at me as a role model, as his mother also, as a good mother, you know, not everybody can be a mother. You can be a parent, but you can't always be a mother, you know, big difference. So that's what made me really change, too. Even though I had him after I came out of jail, but it's still, it motivates me to do good and stay outside, you know, cause of my son, and because of me.*

Beyond being role models, many respondents spoke about simply wanting to build relationships with their children. Some of these respondents expected to have difficulty doing so, because difficult or nonexistent relationships:

> *45: My older two of the kids, I was at her house Christmas, and she really gave it to me. And I was crying, I was ready to leave, come back to New York. She wouldn't let me go, because I'm the type that I run from things, I'm like, I don't wanna feel, I don't wanna deal with that. So, then, the middle one, the 23 year old one, she finally forgave me, and said she just not, she doesn't want to be the cause of me relapsing again, going back out there using drugs, you know, I made a mistake, it's over and done with, let's start now from where we at now, so she said I forgive you mommy, and you know, so that's what I'm saying here recently, now this, the last one, hasn't gotten to that point yet.*

No matter whether relationships were troubled or not, some respondents[43] spoke about how parenting is difficult, particularly after periods of separation. Specifically, some respondents[44] spoke about the ways in which reunification meant that one had to get to know one's children again:

> *78: Well, in the beginning it was kind of hard because I didn't know him well and I had to knew how he really was, it wasn't the same as like every weekend it was fun time, but it wasn't being a full time mom, so when I had him I went through changes, he went through changes, you know, getting used to my rules, my regulations, and, he was getting a little disrespectful, thinking that he could get at his way all the time because I always spoiled him every other weekend, so we had a little problem like that but now, we have a good relationship, we're very close, um, he's very attached to me.*

The study of the effects of parental incarceration on children has shown that such enforced parental absence has many different effects on children, from infants to adult children (Johnston, 1995). While such effects are perhaps one of the most important and lasting effects of the nation's punitiveness, they are beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, these results will only examine the mothers' perceptions of the effects of their incarceration on their children. Nineteen respondents spoke about their children's troubles, which were often mental health problems, from suicide attempts and aggression to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and other unspecified mental health problems:

> *1: Because I don't know how to deal with it. It's like, I don't… If you don't know anything about ADHD, you wouldn't know how to handle this. So, that's just basically it. Not knowing… when he's going to act out. Because one minute he can be ok, and the next minute he's high to the sky. One minute he could be laying down watching a movie, next minute he's all over the place, I mean, like here,*

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[43] Nine respondents, six of whom had not been reunified with their children.

[44] Nine respondents, five of whom had reunified with their children.

> *there, there, there, here. So, it's just like, not knowing, or how to deal with it. That's the hardest.*

Other respondents talked about their children's problems with substance abuse and physical health. Many of these issues, beyond being troublesome for the children, also made respondents' reentry lives more difficult:

> *3: I had a part time job I liked doing, like I said, I like helping people, and I was doing outreach for breast cancer, I was working with YWCA, and I felt like things was going good for me, and then, when I got my son, and about two months later, it was like, he started showing signs of his aggression and different things, and I didn't know that certain, he was supposed to been on certain medications, and then when they released him to me, they didn't give me all his medications, so, he start, you know, going downhill slowly, and I have to sleep with my bedroom door closed, you know, cause he would threaten to stab me in my sleep, you know, different things, so…*

These respondents also often said that they worry that these problems mean that their children are following in their steps:

> *24: My [ten year old daughter]. She is… the only one that doesn't, that's the ten year old again, that's the only one in, out of all the children, who is a loner, like I was growing up. And so, that's the one that I'm mostly scared for that I don't want to turn out to be like me. Like I turned out to be, like my mom, who also was an addict, um, and who died in '87 because of her drug use. For me to die because of my drug use, and I don't want my daughter to turn out to be like me.*

In fact, five respondents spoke about the fact that at least one of their children had been incarcerated themselves.

Many respondents blamed many of their children's problems (emotional, scholastic) specifically on their own incarceration, drug involvement and absence due to criminal behavior:

> *82: Um, I went to jail in June, and I came back in November. From the time school started in September to November, my oldest and my middle girl, they both suffered in school behind it. I saw the difference in their schooling, my kids go to private school, um, and they're straight A students, and my son started cutting [classes], even now we're having, my son and I are going through a little crisis with that, I have to have him, he's in therapy now, um, he was, the two of them, my two oldest ones, they, uh, their school was affected by my, now, I don't know, it could be just coincidence, and maybe it was just the time and they decided to go to school, or was it really because of my being incarcerated? I believe that that's what it had to do with. There's never been a first day of school that I wasn't there. There's never been. There's never been a Halloween that I wasn't there. And I missed these things. You know, October 13th is my oldest daughter, we call it our Women's Day, that's the day she started her menstrual, three years ago. And every October 13th, that's women's day for us. Women's Day came and gone, and I'm sitting in Rose M. Singer House!*

Often, respondents said that they have interpersonal problems with their children because of that absence, including fears of abandonment and tense relationships:

> *86: Yeah, so she got a lot of anger cause, oh, I'm not with my mommy, I'm down here. And I'm, she know I love her, but that's not enough for her right now, she needs to be with me, and that's what I'm really working on to do to get her back up here, and get a stable setting for her, you know, after school, anything that can help her and me get together, I'ma do it.*

Systems involvement

Eleven respondents spoke about involvement with the child welfare system as something to be avoided. Respondents spoke about frustration with case managers and what was perceived to be an ineffective system, particularly for people with multiple systems involvement, much like the homelessness system and Criminal Justice supervision.

One respondent also spoke about signing her rights away to family members she trusted once she knew her children were at risk so that they could avoid ACS involvement:

> *84: It wasn't a BCW [Bureau of Child Welfare] case, cause I didn't, I didn't let it get like that, I just went down to the Family Court with my mother and got before the judge and asked him if, would he let my mother take them, take my kids so my kids could be ok, cause, like, right now I have a drug problem, and he said, whenever I get myself together, which it never happened, I could always have them back, but now they grown, they on they own now anyway, but they was never taken away from me.*

While respondents some spoke about such a decision as a good one because of the avoided systems involvement, others also found loss of custody or terminations of parental rights difficult to handle emotionally:

> *52: Um, that infamous phone call my mother made telling me, uh, that she needs me to give up my parental rights, because there was some government money that my daughter was eligible for only if I gave up my rights. And that was, like (laughs), she wanted me to make that decision right then and there on the phone. I just dropped the phone. I was like wow! I'd definitely consider that a turning point. …I felt like, just an incubator. I felt like I had her and that was it. My girlfriends raised their children. I didn't.*

For those who did not avoid ACS involvement, the moment of removal was remembered as a traumatic moment. Nine respondents in particular spoke angrily and emotionally about the intervention and about the loss of their children more generally:

> *45: Yeah. When she said rights terminated, I just felt I, I lost everything, I mean I, I had already lost them when they snatched them from me, took them from me, you know what I'm saying, those are my kids, I had those babies, and they was all I had because a lot of my peoples is dead, so, you snatch them, that was my world, you just took that! What I'ma, what I'ma fight for, you took my babies. So I just continued using drugs. I didn't even think.*

In anticipation of reunification with these children, respondents had to fulfill a number of requirements, from housing and substance abuse to parenting class certificates. Because of the expedited permanency guidelines of ASFA, proving contact and plans for reunification is particularly important for incarcerated people, who are at a disadvantage when it comes to visiting their children. Incarcerated people are often encouraged by advocates to keep proof of their contacts and attempts to contact their children, such as copies of letters, and logs of contacts to ACS workers, to advocate on their own behalf if a termination action is initiated. Some of these requirements were put in place by caretakers, even when ACS was not involved, who did not want to return respondents' children if she had not, for example, proven her sobriety, or found a secure place to live. Other respondents with ACS involvement were required by the Judge on their case to complete particular requirements. Some respondents spoke about anticipating such requirements, even while they were inside: five respondents even took parenting classes, sometimes multiple times, in anticipation of such requirement.

Involvement with ACS was not only difficult because of the technical aspects of removal and return, but also because of difficult experiences with the caretakers themselves. Nine women spoke specifically about what they considered to be abusive experiences that their children had in their living arrangements during the respondent's incarceration. Experiences ranged from general labels of "maltreatment" and a caretaker who "talked smart" to one woman's children, to

two women who said that their children were sexually abused by caretakers. For some respondents, such abuse was a concrete reason for hem to desist, or for their children encourage their desistance. Seven other respondents spoke not about abuse of their children in care, but about the difficulties that they had, and often continue to have, with their children's caretakers, kin or non-kin. Sometimes such problems involve disagreements about parenting choices and conflicts, which lead, for example, to one respondent being afraid to challenge her mother (her children's caretaker), and another respondent who was upset about the relationship troubles she was having with her daughter due to her daughter's closer relationship with her caretaker (her grandmother). For another woman, her drive to mother her children, and her children's desire to be with her was conflicting not only with the caretaker, but with the respondent's lack of resources:

> *38: It's hard! Because some part of me want to go, go, go, go, go, and, it's true what they said, because when I go, go, go, go, go, it conflicts with my aunt's discipline. Not really conflicts, it's like a threat to her. And, when I look at the whole situation, it really is not necessary, because I'm not ready to have them. I haven't got a pot to piss in, or window to throw it out, so I keep my space. I, I, I stay back. I wanted to go front before, until I spoke with my counselor, and they told me. And then my aunt, I'm with conflict with her also, cause it's like, the kids is leaning to me.*

In other situations, difficulties with the caretaker extended to make the respondent feel out of control of her children's lives. One respondent felt as though the baby's father (and caretaker) was using his control over her contact with her son as a way to manipulate her. Another respondent described her despondency about increasing loss of control due to the caretaker:

> *33: Yeah, and I, and I try to talk to the foster parent, it's like she brush me off, so I haven't called in a while. Every time I try, I call her, I talk to her for a little while, I ask her how the, how [my son] is, that's his name, [my son], how [my son] is doing, and so and so and so, and you know, and it's been so many times that I want to call and go to Queens to see him, but she brushes me off when I'm on the phone with her so, I don't even be bothered, so, I, you know. If it was a way that I can get him back, I, I, I would. (sighs). I feel bad that I gave up my rights (crying).*

Not all respondents spoke negatively about their and their children's experience with kin and non-kin care. Six women spoke about the fact that their children had had good experiences in the care of others during her incarceration, or that they were pleased with their relationship with the caretaker. Some of these respondents spoke about their ability to be involved in their children's lives despite the custody situation. Others spoke more generally about their gratitude for the caretakers of their children.

In sum, qualitative and quantitative results of this study show the overwhelming finding that respondents and their children have great love for one another, regardless of custody status. The practicalities of reentry make reunification difficult, and sometimes, in the opinion of the mothers, ill-advised. For those who do reunify, there are difficulties, but it seems that they do not interfere with attachment, as attachment increases with time spent with children, which, in turn, corresponds with co-habitation.

Attachment to employment

Respondents in this study were very unlikely to be employed. While findings from other studies (Laub & Sampson, 2003) who show that employment is significantly associated with desistance. Results from this study show no effect of employment on desistance. Additionally, employment was never mentioned in the interviews as associated with criminal or desisting behavior, or identity changes. It is possible that for these women, dealing with myriad barriers, employment is something from which they feel alienated, and given their low educational achievement, something unlikely to be meaningful or gainful.

Partner attachment

In chapter five, we found that the presence of a partner in respondents' lives is significantly related to her desistance. Levels of attachment to that partner, on the other hand, did not evidence as related to desistance, nor were they related to the presence or character of women's identity changes. Neither the PSI subscale, which measures attachment to partner within the context of parenting, nor the Sampson and Laub subscale, more specifically about the romantic relationship, emerged as significant.

Qualitatively, only a handful of women chose to speak about their romantic relationship beyond the attachment scales, and continued about the how important their romantic relationship is to them, both personally (e.g. strength) and instrumentally (e.g. housing, desistance):

> *2: Ok. In all my life, the men I've been with disappointed, either they beat me, or treat me bad… This one, when I met him, I had a, before I met him, I had a whole of, um, stuff. I felt fat, I was old, so I said, oh to hell with men… And I just stayed in the house, I have a lot of, um, self doubt. Now I have a lot of self worth.*

In fact, histories of domestic violence victimization were common among respondents. Nineteen respondents[45] spoke about such histories, most often perpetrated by a romantic partner. These experiences were often related to criminal behavior and other life disruptions:

> *30: Because when I went, um, when I came out of prison, I came out, and I was starting school and all that, and I was doing great, and, and when I got into with my, this spouse, this guy that I was with, and he started, um, and he was abusive to me, it took five years. I left the school, I couldn't do this, I was always in my house, I was always with black and blues, and I, I, and I couldn't get up, I couldn't get out of that circle, and, but, when he got incarcerated, I started building my self esteem up.*

One respondent reported that she was in a relationship at the time of the interview with a man who was forcing her to engage in prostitution to pay for food. Overall, however, bonding levels to partners were relatively high.

Social bonding and identity change

In chapter five, we found that attachments to employment, children and partners did not significantly affect whether or not respondents experienced an identity change generally, or more specifically related to children or incarceration. However, experiences of identity changes were widespread: 95% of women interviewed reported that they had experienced an identity change. Despite high

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[45] All discussions of domestic violence began unprompted by the interviewer, so incidence may be much higher.

levels of attachment to children, and discussions of the importance of such love, women's identity changes were more likely to be related to subjective experiences of offending and official responses to their offending. Women's identity changes emerged in response to time spent incarcerated, exhaustion with 'street life' and drug use, and fears of death associated with such a lifestyle.

Identity change and desistance

One of the most salient findings in this project is that the vast majority of the women interviewed reported that they were committing fewer offenses at the time of the interview than they were before their most recent incarceration. In chapter five, we saw that the presence or absence of an identity change was not significantly related to desistance. However, the desistance scores of women who reported identity changes related to the time they spent incarcerated were much lower than those who did not. The qualitative data from the interviews showed widespread discussions about this topic: most women had very strong feelings about the time they spent incarcerated or participating in illegal behaviors, and seemed determined to change their behaviors accordingly. More specifically, this was reflected in women's words about their time incarcerated, which expressed conflicting feelings about time lost, but invaluable time spent getting to know oneself, no matter how terrible the location.

Avoiding incarceration and "the life"

Findings with men (Shover, 1996) have found that fear of additional incarceration increased with age. Similarly, a large number of the women interviewed for this study spoke specifically about the time they spent incarcerated as something that they did not want ever to repeat, particularly because future returns might mean longer sentences.

> *29: I ain't, what the, what I wanna go back to jail for?! (laughs) Anything, anything that I gotta have, you know, I'm gonna pay for it, you know, I don't have, I don't see myself robbing nobody, you know, come on now, I'm beyond that. (laughs). I'm too big to be running (laughs). I ain't robbing nobody, I ain't stealing, I ain't going, you know, back then you could go to stores and steal, you know? No stealing, no stealing, you know, nothing, you know what I'm saying? No. It's, it's not worth it. It's not worth going to jail behind.*

For some of these women, the desire not to go back to incarceration was linked simply to the fact that their experiences in prison or jail were terrible. From specific experiences of missing services and health problems to a more general feeling of unease and fear, these respondents spoke with great distaste of their time spent incarcerated. A recent national report from the Vera Institute of Justice (Gibbons & Katzenbach, 2006) investigated safety and abuse in United States prisons. While the report did not separate out the experiences of incarcerated women, the authors did discuss their findings of prevalent violence and illness, substandard health care, high-security segregation policies that cause violence and contribute to recidivism, and difficult work conditions for correctional facility staff. Respondents' reflections on their time spent

incarcerated often reflected the aversion one might expect to experiences in such a location:

> *15: Cause I'm not going back. And I would walk up to the [police officer] that looks like he's trigger happy, just walk up to him [if I were re-arrested].*
> *VM: So it's very important to you to not go back inside.*
> *15: Yes. I was trying to think of what you would say... You don't wish your worst enemy in there.*

More specifically, some women disliked feeling the loss of freedom and control associated with incarceration:

> *53: It made me appreciate my freedom more, more, I mean I was in jail for selling drugs. I would rather go pack a bag of food to make money, instead of going out there and sell drugs again… Every night I went to bed knowing that I was locked in, that I couldn't get out, and I had to be told when I could get a visit, and what I could have, what I couldn't have, being controlled, my life, I didn't have control over my own life, so, that made me not want to go back to jail. Not having control of my own life. I mean, I mean, if you've ever been to jail, you would know, you have to eat what they give you to eat, you have to do what they say do, or you, you end up going in a bin, the box.*

In fact, reflecting some research on homeless shelter residents (Williams, 1996), some women in this study said that they avoid staying in shelters or substance abuse treatment and other programs because the loss of control in those situations remind them of their experiences of incarceration, even if it means staying in the street.

One woman experienced positive relationships with Correctional Officers (C.O.s), whom she saw as helpful and supportive:

> *69: A lot of people, officers, was like [Respondent] you're getting to old for this, come on now, we're all leaving, you know, you've gotta better yourself, you know, come on, what are you gonna do, you're*

> *wanna retire in jail? There's no retirement plan for criminals, and you really need to get your life together, and, I have a lot of good people in my life, and, that changes you, you know?*
> *Venezia Michalsen: So you feel like the C.O.s were supportive of you?*
> *69: Much supportive. I raised them, I been going to jail all my life.*
> *VM: So these are people that you feel, it sounds kind of like a surrogate family.*
> *69: Yeah (laughs) a surrogate family, you're right.*
> *VM: And just the C.O.s, or also people that you were inside with?*
> *69: Other people, yeah, a lot of people, nurses, a lot of people.*

However, for a larger number of women, the correctional officers were singled out as exploitative and a large part of the feelings of loss of control. In 1999, Amnesty International published a report about violations of the human rights of women in American correctional facilities. That report documented sexual abuse of women under custody by correctional staff. Most states have laws prohibiting any sexual relations between staff and inmates, although men are able to staff correctional facilities for women.

> *53: The male C.O.s? They have sex with the women in jail, and who do you tell? You tell they partner? They partner? They tell them. Accidents happen in the shower. Who did it, who knows? Right, so. Who protects you when you're in jail? The women. No one. See, outside, I mean, the system don't know. Who protect the women when they're locked up? Nobody… Who could do something? There's no one to do anything. I mean, my homegirl came home with a baby by the C.O.*

For one woman, a collateral consequence of her incarceration was the embarrassment she experienced both in prison and in her reentry, from encounters with old friends to the mocking words of her children's friends. Stigma against ex-prisoners can have a powerful effect on a person's attempts to reintegrate after incarceration. Employers and landlords have been shown to avoid employing or housing ex-prisoners (Travis, Solomon & Waul, 2001), and

legislation exists to restrict public assistance (Greenberg, 1999), employment (Chao, 2001), and public housing (Legal Action Center, 2004) for former prisoners.

Other women explained that their dislike for the time they spent incarcerated had to do with the fact that they saw prison as a revolving door. On a national level, women released from prison have been shown to be less likely than their male counterparts to be rearrested, re-convicted, re-sentenced to prison for a new crime and returned to prison with or without a new prison sentence. However, women's probabilities for re-involvement in the system are not insignificant. In 2002, the Bureau of Justice Statistics examined the recidivism of prisoners released in 1994 (Langan & Levin, 2002). In the three years following their release from prison, 58% of women were re-arrested, 40% re-convicted, 17% re-sentenced to prison for a new crime, and 39% returned to prison with or without a new prison sentence (often for supervision violations). In a recidivism study based on New York State recidivism, 29% of women were returned to custody within three years (Chapman & Fisher, 2002). Similar to trends on a national level, many women entering prison in New York State were re-admissions: 30% of admissions were parole violators (Kellman, 2001). For the women in this study who talked about this "revolving door" phenomenon, seeing the same people cycle in and out of the streets and the system, and seeing or fearing the same for themselves, made them angry, afraid and disgusted.

> *72: What happened to make me change? Oh, jail. And being incarcerated. Seeing different people come in and out, you know,*

> *like a revolving door, like, I don't want to be that person. I don't want to come back. I wanna do good. And I've also had older people sit down and talk to me and whatever, and, you know, when you first get to jail you like, iew why she telling me this, you here, how can you tell me any different? But now I see they don't want me to make the same mistakes, you know, that they did. I'm still young, so, I still have a chance. So, basically, jail made me change, cause I didn't want to go back through that. And, you know, it's just like I said, just seeing people coming in and out, in and out, like, like, they, you know, institutionalized. I didn't want to be institutionalized, so I had to get myself together, I had to snap out of it.*

In fact, because of these negative experiences, many women spoke about the fact that they no longer viewed their drug or other illegal behavior as "worth it":

> *93: And like, and a lot of things I missed, I missed in [my children's] life, and a lot of things I missed of my own life, you know, I can't, I can't do nothing about it now, I can't make up for it (voice shaking), but while I'm here now, I can deal with what I have today, you know, and be satisfied. You know? I'm just glad and grateful.*

Women spoke of lost possibilities for themselves:

> *72: I also wasted two and a half years of my life where I could have been doing something, I could have been working, I coulda, you know, I coulda had my education, I coulda been in college, you know, coulda been finished college, I coulda had my own house, I coulda had a car, but you know, I look back at that stuff too, that stuff right there also helped me with today, because I want my own, I want to have money, I love money, I love shopping, I love it, you know what I'm saying? And, being that I don't, I'm not where I'm supposed to be or want to be, I can't do that real often, you know, I have to budget my money, I have to go on the clearance rack, you know?*

But also lost time with children or potentially damaged relationships with children as not "worth it":

> *14: …I can't afford to lose [my son].*
> *VM: Mmhmm. What does, what does he mean to you that you can't afford to lose him?*
> *14: Words can't even describe cause it's a feeling. See, you're making me cry! Cause that's how much he means to me, that*

> *words can't describe it. I mean, he get on my nerves, but it's ok to get on my nerves, when I wake up, good morning, mommy! Good morning! Good morning! I said good morning! (laughs). It's just, even when he goes away for the weekends, I'm just sick. He's… I breathe for him. Without him, I don't know where I'd be.*

In fact, some women connected the lost time with children to their fear of a new involvement in the criminal justice system. The vast majority (90%) children of incarcerated fathers stay with their mothers. The children of incarcerated mothers, on the other hand, are most often cared for by other family members, and are almost three times as likely to be cared for non-family members (Mumola, 2000). For some respondents, concerns for their children's care or for the potential damage a new prison stay might do to their relationships with their children.

> *26: I'm trying to better myself, being that I'm out here now, and I don't wanna go back to jail. You know, I want to see my daughter get grown, and, I want to see her grandkids. I don't want to go to jail or die or both, yeah, I would miss it, yeah, cause I love my daughter a lot. You know, that's the only child I have, and how I got her was like a blessing to me, you know, to have her, you know, so I'm trying to, I'm trying to make a better, I'm trying to better myself now.*

Beyond their determination to stay away from incarceration, women spoke about being tired of the lives that got them to prison in the first place, most often disdaining drug use and the crime associated with it.

Older and tired of the life

As the women in this study sat, talking about the time 'lost' due to cycles of incarceration, the numbed feelings induced by substance abuse, nights spent alone and afraid in shelters, and strained or broken relationships with the people

they love, they often looked tired and sad. While there were certainly exceptions, the rule was that women showed the effects of lives spent using drugs and making a life and a living on the streets. These effects were not only evident to an outsider, like an interviewer: the women themselves often spoke of being "sick and tired of being sick and tired" of the "street life" and time spent incarcerated, a condition often realized at the most recent incarceration.

> *94: To get high like I did is a twenty-four hour job. I mean, if I slept at all, I was in the stores boosting, stealing, copping the drugs. You know. Just the thought process is enough to kill someone: how you gonna get your next one, the conniving, it's just constant. I'm just tired. I can't do it. I don't have it in me… Just tired. I did it for a long time - twenty-five years. Amazing. I think back; I was insane, crazy. Insane… I think back - how'd you even last that long? I used to like to do that, I liked to steal - I used to enjoy all that. No, not any more. No, no, no, no, no.*

Certainly, there is no effect on desistance as strong as that of age, and talk of getting older and, therefore, tired of the 'street' lifestyle often returned to getting older. Other researchers have found that both men and women report increasing fear of incarceration as they grow older, and lose the attraction to life in the "fast lane" (Baskin and Sommers 1998; Giordano, Cernkovitch and Rudolph 2002; Sampson & Laub, 2003; Shover, 1996, 1985; Sommers, Baskin and Fagan 1994).

This aging was often linked to being wiser and more mature:

> *71: Um, I'm older (laughs). I'm older. That's the only difference I see right now.*
> *VM: And being older, what does that mean to you?*
> *71: Wiser. Wiser. More tired. And then I have way more experience, where the, all the other three, I could put them together, you know, just, I'm not giving up until I get it right, that's all, and I'm still alive. And well, and healthy, and God woke me up*

> *for a reason. And I'm still here. And it's got to be for something more that what I've been doing. So, I think that's it.*

For a couple of respondents, growing older specifically indicated that they should have certain things, or have reached certain goals. Researchers have discussed such a combination of tiring of the life, and finding conventional life goals more attractiveness, and their role in identity-change associated desistance (Giordano, Cernkovitch and Rudolph 2002; Sommers, Baskin and Fagan 1994; Waldorf, Reinarman and Murphy 1991):

> *38: I want change. I'm tired. I think I'm really tired. I'm getting older, too. At my age, I should have my apartment, I should be in a proper job, and taking care of my kids! I'm not doing any of the above. It's kind of ridiculous.*

Being 'sick and tired', however, was not always related by respondents to their age. For four respondents, hitting a perceived "rock bottom" was what spurred them to decide to desist:

> *82: Oh God. I was using, I had the kids. My lights had turned off, there was no food in the house, my son, my children were looking at me like, Now what mom? And it just came to a point where it was like okay you know what? this is enough, enough is enough. I decided to get clean then at that point, August 23rd and I haven't turned back since.*

Accordingly, a number of women expressed their fear of death. Some of these women spoke very specifically about how illegal behaviors had risked their lives and the lives of others:

> *83: It was not fun for those officers to make me get down on my hands and knees, while he had a gun drawn on me just because I had a stem, uh, uh, you know, a pipe. Come on! Imagine if I would have had a gun what would have happened! Next time it's gonna be worse, I just got this feeling. Yeah, I just got this feeling that it's not gonna be good. This time I wore city greens, next time I might wear state greens, you know, or maybe I might not wear any*

> *greens, maybe I might be in Greenhaven, Green Earth, or whatever that cemetery is, you know? I don't want to know, cause it's only jail, institutions and death. I got no more options!*

While others spoke more generally about a fear of potential future death, given past behaviors:

> *93: I wanna be clean, healthy, and live a clean life, you know, I wanna live, you know? Maybe I don't have much, but I know I'm alive today.*
> *VM: So you associate your behaviors from before with death, it sounds like?*
> *R: Yeah, yeah. Because if I do it again, this time it will be death, because they say you've got three choices, incarcerated, um, crazy house, or death. So this is my last option.*

The bleak nature of these women's experiences with the "street life" and time spent incarcerated clearly contributed to their reported commitment to desistance. However, for some women there were more positive aspects of their incarceration that also affected their plans to desist.

Incarceration has its good points too

Not all women interviewed for this study saw the time they spent incarceration as a completely negative experience. Almost a quarter of the women interviewed spoke about positive aspects of the time they spent incarcerated. The largest number of these said that the time they spent incarcerated gave them time for thought and time to get to know and love themselves:

> *15: Uh huh. It was on Riker's Island, 1988, and the door locked behind me, and then, and then you got this band on your wrist. Not the band that says you gave birth, but a band with some numbers, and that's your new name, and… it's truth time. Ok, I'm not mother, I'm not lover, I'm not wife, I'm not the peacemaker, cause you always have to stop the kids from fighting. I'm not the nurse, oh*

> *come here, let mommy fix your boo boo. All titles are just, just erased, and you're just left with yourself.*

And it helped them know who they wanted to be when they got out:

> *64: It gave me time to, it gave me years to think, clean out my system, get all that stuff out my system, and come back to normal. Clear my mind up, and all the things I have done in my life, and at that time I had a choice, either I was gonna turn it around when I came back to New York [City], or keep going on the same road I was on. And I didn't want to keep on any same road, so I figured I'd turn it around. It all starts when you get off the bus, or wherever you, terminal you get off when you come off from upstate, what you gonna do at that particular time. And I chose to do the right thing instead of coming back out here, picking up, getting high, robbing, you know, stuff like that.*

However, for more women, incarceration was seen more instrumentally, as the only way to escape "the life" of crime and the streets:

> *78: I prayed. I used to pray that I would get busted, and I think, I intentionally got busted because I wanted to go to jail, I wanted to stop, and there was no way for me to stop for my own, I couldn't do it through programs, I couldn't do it through detox, I couldn't do it on my own, so I figured if I went to jail, you know, I would stop… And I'm very grateful to jail that changed my life, even though it's not a good place to be, but it changed my life around.*

Most women in prison have histories of substance abuse: a national study of women in state prisons showed that 84% reported using drugs at some point in their lives and 74% reporting regular use before their incarceration (Mumola, 1999). The numbers in New York are similar, with 66% of women reporting drug use within six months of their incarceration (Stately, 2002). For a couple of the women in this study, the time they spent locked up was specifically a way to sobriety:

> *64: It gave me time to, it gave me years to think, clean out my system, get all that stuff out my system, and come back to normal. Clear my mind up, and all the things I have done in my life, and at*

> *that time I had a choice, either I was gonna turn it around when I came back to New York, or keep going on the same road I was on. And I didn't want to keep on any same road, so I figured I'd turn it around. It all starts when you get off the bus, or wherever you, terminal you get off when you come off from upstate, what you gonna do at that particular time. And I chose to do the right thing instead of coming back out here, picking up, getting high, robbing, you know, stuff like that.*

Prison did not act only as a mechanism for sobriety, but also as an opportunity for other processes. One woman felt strongly that she benefited from participating in a college program while incarcerated, another woman found therapy in prison, and a third woman engaged in tutoring other prisoners:

> *96: I wish that, I almost wish they would have sent me to prison back then, cause I don't think I'd be sitting here right now, talking about coming out of prison again, you know?*
> *VM: Because you think that prison…*
> *96: It would have changed me, yeah. I don't think the county, the county didn't have programs to offer, and, you know, it was, you're just sitting around doing nothing all day, and, whereas the state they'd actually give you programs to do… R: It's helpful as in, you know, making you… change yourself, you know, and how to become a better parent, how to get your GED if you don't have your GED, I tutored LEAP students, which was the education program for nursery mothers, in the afternoon I would tutor, and some of the students came in on 6th grade levels ending up getting their GEDs and that's a great sense of accomplishment, to be able to do that and go home and have an education behind you to get a good job, you know what I'm saying?*

This time allowed women to focus on themselves, and realize that, in the words of one respondent, "happiness is an inside job". Certainly we have found from this project that women's children are beloved to them, and important to their desistance. However, women made it clear, too, that no matter how much they love their children, they have realized that they must love themselves and pay attention to their basic needs before they are able to do anything for anyone else.

A third of the women interviewed spoke about their lives in this way. In fact, for of these women, the oft-spoken phrase "it's about me" emerged when the interviewer asked the respondents about the role of their children in their desistance. Many women specifically negated this hypothesis, saying that going sober or desisting for their children (or anyone else) was doomed to failure, and that the only way to be successful (in desistance, sobriety, housing, employment, and even reunification!) was to focus on oneself[46]:

> *76: It was a lot different. Um, I tried to quit, but I quit for, I tried to quit for everybody else but for myself. That's been the difference, like, before I wanted to quit cause I wanted to make my mom happy, or I wanted to quit for my kids, or I wanted to quit for, for anybody else, for the probation officer, or, just, everybody but myself, you know, I don't have to, I don't have to make any excuses today, I wanna quit for myself.*

Women often spoke about problems with self esteem, and many spoke about the personal work they had done and were doing to improve their self esteem and move to a place of self love:

> *91: Yeah. And love myself today! Today I love myself, yesterday I didn't (laughs).*
> *VM: And that affected whether or not you were doing those things?*
> *91: Yeah, I think it had a big affection on it, cause I didn't care, I mean, I was doing them because I didn't care for myself, you know, I didn't care whether I lived or died, and today I do.*

In all, the terrible experiences women described in their interviews led them to a place where they had decided to change towards improved relationships with

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[46] It is important, however, to question whether this is language pushed by service providers, especially since the women in this study were recruited at service locations. The language used by some women echoes language often used in Narcotics Anonymous and substance abuse treatment programs (e.g. "doing what I've gotta do", "one day at a time", "step by step", and "life on life's terms")

themselves and their children. Identity change initiated by incarceration came from negative experiences with the positive effects of self discovery and, ultimately, of desistance.

Overall model and other conclusions

The link between children and desistance

We have now seen that time spent with children and the ensuing attachment did not significantly affect the presence or absence of respondents' identity changes. However, the results show that hours spent with children and levels of attachment to children did have a direct effect on respondents' self reported desistance.

Qualitatively, love between respondents and their children was often linked to desistance: from children who were supportive as the woman struggled through reentry to children whose unconditional love (as it was often described) showed them to be reliable, and loving support system for women who had been rejected by others:

> *38: The bigger one, she always wants, if I'm in hell, she wants to join me in hell… She always wants to come. If I go to Rikers, she wanted to come. I go in the street, always she want to come. Anywhere, she wants to come.*

The relationship between children (and reunification or lack thereof) and respondents' desistance (or lack thereof) was discussed at many different points during the interviews. Sometimes respondents brought the topic up themselves when the interviewer asked about reunification, other respondents brought up

their children as they talked about their identity changes. Finally, after administration of the desistance scales, respondents sometimes talked about their children when they reflected on the differences between the before and after scales. Over a quarter of respondents said that their children had some role in their desistance behaviors:

> *17: This is my turning point as far as where I am with my total life. I just went from everything negative to positive. I just went from using drugs from a long time - eighteen years of my life. This four months since [my daughter] has been born has been the longest time I've had clean in eighteen years on my own and I - she's the only reason. And it's scary, but it's happening. And it's hard but it's happening, and [my daughter] is just my motivation every day, every, every single day.*

Some of these respondents worry that going back to criminal behavior (and often, therefore, incarceration or death) would mean that the children would have no one to care for them, or that reunification would be impossible:

> *1: He stops me from doing a lot of things. I mean, if I didn't have my son, I probably wouldn't even be sitting here. Because I don't like the struggle. I'm not used to struggling, and I'm not used to going without. Um, not only if I didn't have him, but if I didn't have a son period. Because even if he was alive and I didn't have him, I still wouldn't do the things that I knew would jeopardize me from getting him back. So if I didn't have a son at all, I wouldn't be sitting here. I know I would be out there selling drugs, getting high, doing the things I was doing before, I know that. See, I can't do that, because now I have a life that needs me, I have a life that looks up to me. I have a life that depends on me, and I'm not going to let him down the way I was let down. Nuh uh.*

For other respondents, simply having the child meant a sense of beauty, stability, structure and busy-ness for the respondent that acted to prevent criminal or trouble behavior:

> *VM: So you feel that getting them back changed your life?*
> *90: Yes. If not I probably would be dead or sitting in jail right now.*

> *VM: What do you think about getting them back helped you stay out of trouble?*
> *90: It gave me something to do. You know. We would go out to the park. Any time I was working, I would take them to Coney Island and let them be children - which I was never - I didn't have no playtime. I had to grow up quick.*

For some respondents, love for their children was linked to their own desistance or criminal behavior:

> *12: There were days that I wanted to kill myself. I tried to commit suicide three times. And, when I got out of it and realized what I did, the first thing I thought about was my children and how much I loved them (small break in voice), and what would happen to them if I died, or something happened to my mother or my sister or somebody… even though the family she's with is good, I still had to wonder, well what would happen to her. And when… so, like I wanted to hurt myself or do something really, really serious, take a dum dum chance, like maybe robbing a bank or something, 'cause, I had thoughts of that too, I thought about my kids and when I felt like giving up, it was the thought of my kids that kept me going. It was… all, I always loved my kids. My kids make me want to live. When I didn't love myself, I still loved my kids, and people say that you can't love someone without loving yourself, that's a damn lie (laugh) because I didn't love myself but I loved my kids.*

On the other hand, a few respondents said explicitly that their children did not have a role in their desistance behaviors:

> *40: Kids are a validation, like, like motorcycles and cars, and, those are symbols. Now, if you were to take the car, the person would be unhappy. Because they think that they need the car to be happy, so they don't feel whole. It's like women. We think we need a man to be whole. No. They can only enhance your happiness. They can't make you happy. Happiness is an inside job. It really is.*

However, this way of thinking was rare among respondents. While children were mentioned by the highest number of respondents as reasons for desistance, other reasons, such as incarceration and sobriety were also mentioned by a large number of respondents, and were far more likely to be mentioned first.

In their study female offenders' experiences with termination of parental rights, Grella and Greenwell (2006) found that women who had had their rights to their children terminated differed from their non-TPR counterparts in a number of ways. In particular, she found that female offenders who had lost their parental rights had higher levels of childhood problems, including abuse, and (potentially related) limited resources and stability. They suggest that this may be associated with higher levels of public assistance shown for mothers living with their children in another study of substance abusers (Zlotnick, Robertson & Tam, 2003), or with higher levels of motivation for stability for mothers who need to provide for the children they live with (Bogart, Stevens, Hill & Estrada, 2005).

The link between feelings about incarceration and desistance

As we saw in chapter five, the findings of this study point to the idea that desistance comes after extensive involvement in the criminal justice system,. Further, time spent incarcerated in particular plays a significant role in women's desire not to go back, and in turn, self reports of desistance behavior. The women interviewed for this study discussed a number of reasons why their time in the criminal justice system affected their desistance, or at the very least, their desire to desist.

What is it about time spent incarcerated that affects women's desire to change? For some it was the level to which the experience was humiliating, negative,

exploitative, and restrictive. This led these respondents to abhor the idea of going back to prison or jail, and to decide that they would desist in order never to go back to being prisoners, particularly because repeat offenses would mean potentially longer sentences. For others, while incarceration was not an experience they wanted to repeat, it allowed them experiences that they had not otherwise had, from getting to know themselves to escaping lives of crime, abuse and drug use on the streets. While time spent incarcerated seems to be related to desistance, it is likely that it is due to time spent sober, getting to know oneself through time alone, under a roof and fed, no matter how unpleasant.

New directions

While some respondents spoke about the "street life" and drug use as something they enjoyed and sometimes missed, a third of respondents made very negative value judgements about their behaviors, either specifically, or in their language. Respondents spoke about doing "bad things" that they had "no business" doing, and about wanting to move towards "proper" behavior, living "the right way", and being a "good" and "better" person:

> *8: The only thing that changed about me is that I stopped getting high, and so it's now, I'm changed to a better person. I'm not doing them negative things, like running the streets, selling myself or doing other little things that, you know, I'm not proud of, I don't even like talking about, and, you know, the things that I put myself in, and the things that did happen to me that almost got me killed. You know, I changed, and I love the way that I changed, too, I changed to a better person.*

A few respondents spoke about the ways in which their new focus on "doing the right thing" felt good to them, even though it was challenging both emotionally and economically:

> *6: and then I realized that [my daughter] is in the picture and it's just like, gosh, I know that she has got to be worth a lot more to me than, than these little bills that I get that, that they're gonna get spent up, money comes and it goes, and then what I'm gonna have, and have to run from the police, hide, do these state bids, lose more time with them, her and I are gonna go like this. And instead of gaining love for me, she's gonna gain hatred. We're gonna lose our relationship. And all for what? And I don't have anything to account for all the thousands and hundreds of thousands that I've done and got. Nothing, everything's gone. Cause I'm here in the shelter, having to start from scratch with basically nothing, and have to get it all back again, but it feels good to come to this the right way, oh I don't mind, at all.*

A number of respondents turned this good feeling into a desire to get more out of life than the "negative" lives and behaviors from earlier in their lives. They often spoke about rather traditional, "American Dream" goals, like a home, a college education and a career. These women seemed to be looking for a greater purpose, and meaning in their lives that would keep them from returning to their old lives:

> *88: While I was just sitting in prison, like my third year in prison. With my first two years, I'm coming back out to sell drugs, I don't care what anybody says! In my third year it like, really hit me that, look at where I'm at for the last two years of my life. And this is taken away from my kids, from my parents, from me, and it's not where I want to be anymore, and I just want to change, I want a different life, I want to walk a different road, I want bigger and better things in my life than smoking crack and selling drugs.*

Some respondents spoke about how this focus for them meant starting a new life as a "good person" and, specifically, a productive citizen:

> *33: even though I relapsed, and I'm still tried, this is why the second set of questions came out better than the first ones. Because it's, it's not my life no more. I wanna be a good member of society, I wanna, I wanna be, you know, a woman and a mother that I know that I need to be, and I know that I could be. You know? Without drugs. Without doing negative behaviors, and, you know, it's, it's time for me to change.*

These decisions to be a "better person" often turned to discussions of the importance of faith in respondents' lives. In fact, almost a third of respondents spoke, sometimes at great length, about how important their faith is to them, and how it improves their lives, and supports their desire to stay on the "right track". This new or renewed focus on spirituality was often focused on respondents' belief that the fact that they are alive meant that God had given them another chance:

> *45: Because I thanked God for letting me, not, dying. And letting me get the second chance again where my life, I've got a purpose to live for today where, it was, I just, I didn't give a fuck before. It was just, I wanted to be high and that was, that was at the end of it. Nothing else came in between or after or nothing. Just use. That's all.*

Research on the effectiveness of religious programming in prison is limited, and due to diverse methodologies, not amenable to generalizations about effectiveness (Sumter, 2006). Clear, Hardyman, Stout, Lucken & Dammer (2000) suggest that that religious programming for people in prison is a humanizing force that helps individuals cope with the overwhelming nature of their lives in prison.

Respondents took these new chances as ways to use their focus on spirituality to support their work towards a positive lifestyle, and staying away from drugs and prison:

> *4: And I can't speak for anybody else, but I know what works for me, you know, and when I strayed away, it… a lot of things just started happening, you know, and now that I'm back in church, you know, and I'm staying focused, and I'm keeping my sights on God and faith, I'm seeing things positive happening again for me in my life. And I'm at a stage now that I can't let that go. (laughs) Ha! You know, I'm happy, I'm at peace, I'm content, you know? Um, I'm seeing things, um, happening for me that I've lost, you know, I mean, once you have something real good, and you use it, it's not easy to get it back. You know? And so when you get that second opportunity to get it back, I don't know about anybody else, but I know for me, I'm not letting it go. You know what I'm saying? I'm just, I'm just, I'm stronger, you know, my spirit is stronger.*

Such narratives were inspiring to the interviewer, and often to the respondents themselves, most of whom made it clear that they were devoted to desistance, and the pathways they thought were most likely to keep them clean and out of prison.

Overall discussion

In the United States, women with financial means and without significant trauma histories can get jobs, go to school, and have homes and rooms of their own in which to get to know who they are. These women have support systems that can help them through addictions, difficult relationships or childrearing. For poor minority women in this country, one suspects that prison cells have become their safest places, where they can take the time to know themselves and what they want, to deal with abusive histories, and to detox from drugs and alcohol.

While the results of this study may indicate to some that the punitive character or the time alone allowed by incarceration make prison an effective and logical response to criminal behavior. However, national recidivism statistics say otherwise, as do other studies which show that poverty increases recidivism (Holtfreder Reisig & Morash, 2006): in the long run, especially for drug offenders, incarceration increases recidivism (Spohn & Holleran, 2002). The realities of life outside prison – from homelessness to joblessness and poverty make it so that many of the respondents in this study, no matter their devotion to desistance, will probably end up back in prison. Some women said that their previous offenses had been due to what they saw as economic necessity, from making ends meet to satisfying their children's desires:

> *91: Well, my kids before, they had a role in me making money, because they always, ma I need sneakers, ma I need pants, ma, so me as a single mother, I had no choice but to sell drugs, and take drugs, transport drugs to support my household, my kids. You know, for me not to lose, you know, to have food in the house to feed them, to buy them they $100 pair of sneakers, they pair of jeans, they FuBu's, whatever they want.*

Given the economic poverty of the women at the time of the interview and the statistics about employment and income after incarceration, it is likely not to get better, and old solutions may reemerge as recidivism.

The practical implications of these findings are obvious: for the females of all ages most likely to be incarcerated, such safe, self-reflective time must be available *before* prison and jail become the solution, and a prison cell becomes a

woman's "room of one's own." Incarceration is, for the most part, the wrong choice both for taxpayers and lawmakers (Jacobson, 2005), and for the women themselves.

For women who do end up incarcerated, decisions to desist must be supported. For all women, relationships with others, particularly children and partners, must be facilitated in support of desistance. Reentry practicalities, such as housing, income, job training and health and mental health treatment, must be provided in a way that lets women become self-sufficient for themselves and their families.

Future research

There are many implications of this study for future research, some generated due to methodological shortcomings, and others due to new ideas stemming from the interviews.

The operationalization of desistance used in this study is problematic for a number of reasons, including the fact that it is neither longitudinal nor dynamic, and because the time covered varied widely between respondents whose last incarceration could have ended that day, or many years before. The fact that the vast majority of respondents reported desistance also meant very little variability in the sample. Future studies should be far more rigorous in their pursuit of true recidivism statistics.

In that respondents were recruited using service provider connections, women receiving services are over-represented. Future studies should attempt to engage women excluded by this methodology: reentering women who return home to sufficient resources, or who have achieved sufficient resources upon reentry, and those who need services, but remain on the streets.

As women spoke about their involvement in the child welfare system, it became clear that such involvement began both because it was enforced (children were removed at mothers' arrests) and because of voluntary placement by mothers who saw their addictions and other behaviors negatively affecting their children. Ideally, research such as this would account for reasons for removal.

In that women's experiences with incarceration were often very extreme, future research should investigate the effects of particular facilities, especially the difference between jails and prisons, on women's experiences. The women in this study spoke particularly negatively of their experiences at Riker's Island jail, but not as negatively about their experiences at Bedford Hills, one of the four upstate prison facilities for women in New York State.

While it is important to add to the relatively small body of research that addresses women's experiences with criminal behavior and the criminal justice system, some researchers have suggested that mixed gender studies may be particularly effective at informing gender specific policies (Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2004).

Although men do not care for children at the same rates as women, their inclusion in a study such as this can only increase our knowledge about both male and female parents' desistance.

When this project was conceived, the concept of reunification seemed quite simple: either a respondent was living with her children, or she was not. As interviews were conducted, however, it became apparent that 'living together' was not necessarily respondents' definition of reunification. Four respondents made it clear that, although they were not living with their children, they considered themselves 'reunified' with their children:

> *VM: Ok. And have you reunified [with your children]?*
> *4: Oh, I, I'm constantly with my children. In fact, I spoke to my daughter last night. My children are quite aware of who their mother is, you know, um, I'm always in contact with my children, um, and being that I'm here, I, you know, can't see them all the time, but I see them on holidays, their birthdays, you know, I'm in touch with my children.*

While the interviewer rephrased the question in these interviews to speak about reunification as cohabitation, it is clear that for future studies, reunification may be explored in terms of a respondent's perception of the relationship she has with her children. This is one of the reasons that the "hours spent with children" variable was used as a proxy for reunification.

Lastly, the identity change question included in this study worked very well as an open-ended, exploratory item. However, for future studies, more accurate responses may be achieved if the item is included both as an open-ended item

and, later, as a quantitative item where individuals would give yes or no responses to a list of commonly listed reasons. Further, this study did not record the *direction* of the association (encourages or discourages desistance), so such a clarification is necessary.

Program and policy recommendations

While the research into desistance is growing, practical applications of the findings are not as plentiful. Some researchers (Farrall & Maruna, 2004; Rumgay, 2004) discuss implications for rehabilitation programs. There are many programming and policy recommendations that my be drawn from the results of this study, despite its shortcomings.

Many of the women in this study found the time they spent incarcerated useful because it helped them get to know themselves, due to an abundance of time, and, usually, sobriety. Programs and policies must be developed that will allow women such safe, sober time to know themselves without the inordinate costs to women, families and communities inflicted by imprisonment policies.

If women must be incarcerated, their relationships with their children must be facilitated in order to maintain and develop attachments that will improve outcomes for both women and their children. Contact, from letters and calls to visits, should be made easier by prison programming and children's programming outside. Further, when women are released, women's practical

situations and desires must be addressed and considered as plans for their children are drawn up.

Appendix A: E-mail to potential study locations and a list of those locations

Center for Community Alternatives
The Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES)
Providence House (Queens and Brooklyn locations)
Osborne Association
Fortune Society
Women's Prison Association (WPA) – Sarah Powell Huntington House, BCO and Reentry Services locations
Hour Children
Palladia, Inc.
SOBRO

Dear [name]:

I am working on a Ph.D. at the CUNY Graduate Center, and the final part of my degree involves writing my dissertation. For my dissertation, I am examining the connection between reunification with children (or the lack thereof) and a successful re-entry for women.

To test my hypothesis (which is that re-entering women who get their children back are less likely to get into trouble again), I am doing 100 interviews with formerly incarcerated mothers.

To be interviewed, the women do not have to be reunified with their children, or even intending to reunify with their children. The only important parts are that they 1. are at least 18 years old; 2. have given birth to at least one child; and 3. have been incarcerated in jail or prison (it doesn't matter how long or when).

I am recruiting the women from many different places, and I am hopeful that Osborne can be one of my recruitment sites, however it works out best. Each interview lasts about 25 minutes, and each woman will get $10 for completing the interview. It is tape recorded, and I have taken strict care to protect interviewee's confidentiality and anonymity, and my procedures have been approved by the ethics boards at CUNY.

In the interview, I ask women about their relationships with their children, about their relationship with a spouse or partner (if they have one) and about their contact with the criminal justice system. If you have any questions about the interview, please let me know.

When I go to a site, I generally make a presentation to a women's group, though, as we discussed, we can discuss different ways that I can recruit one-by-one or in groups. I explain the project, but do not, obviously, attend the group itself. If I did the interviews onsite, I would need a private room (usually an empty office)

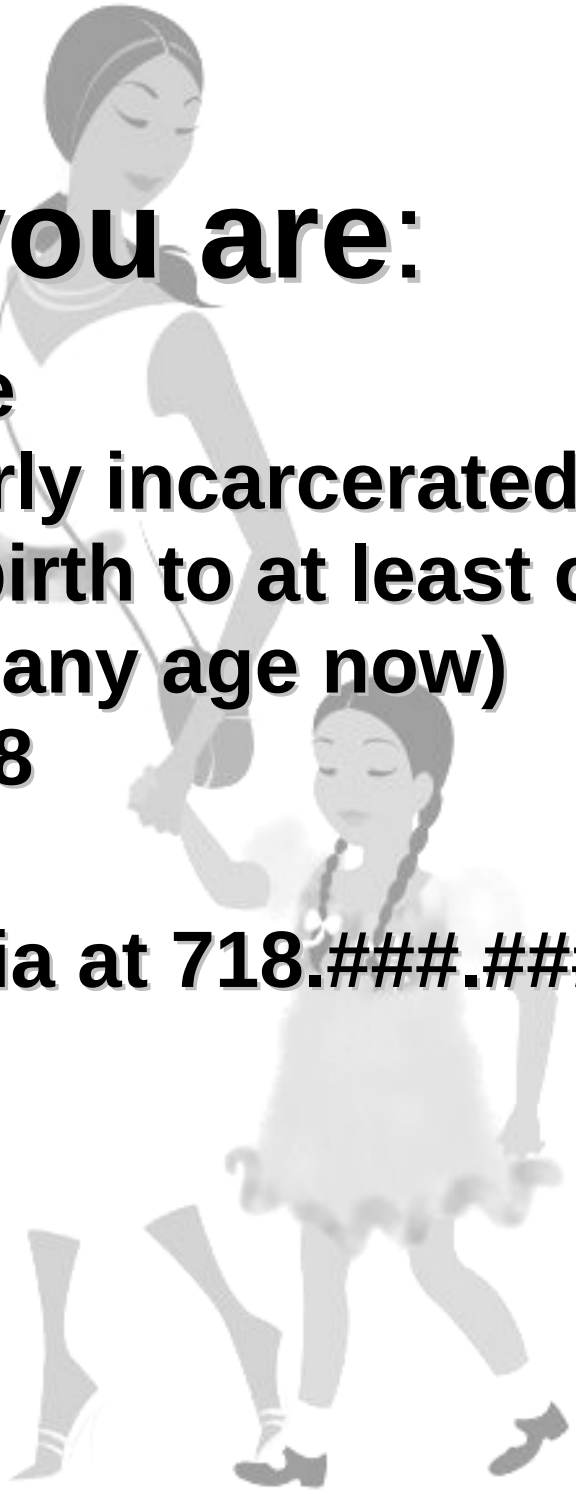
where I could do interviews. The interviews would either follow the group, or I would come back another day(s). I generally do one after the other until I have interviewed all interested women. The women I interview are usually very interested both in the topic of the interview, and also in the compensation.

Thank you so much for talking to me about my project, [name]. I hope you'll let me know if you have any questions. I can be reached either by e-mail or on my cell phone at xxx.xxx.xxxx.

Thanks again!
Venezia

Appendix B: Study fliers

Earn $10 for a 30 minute interview!

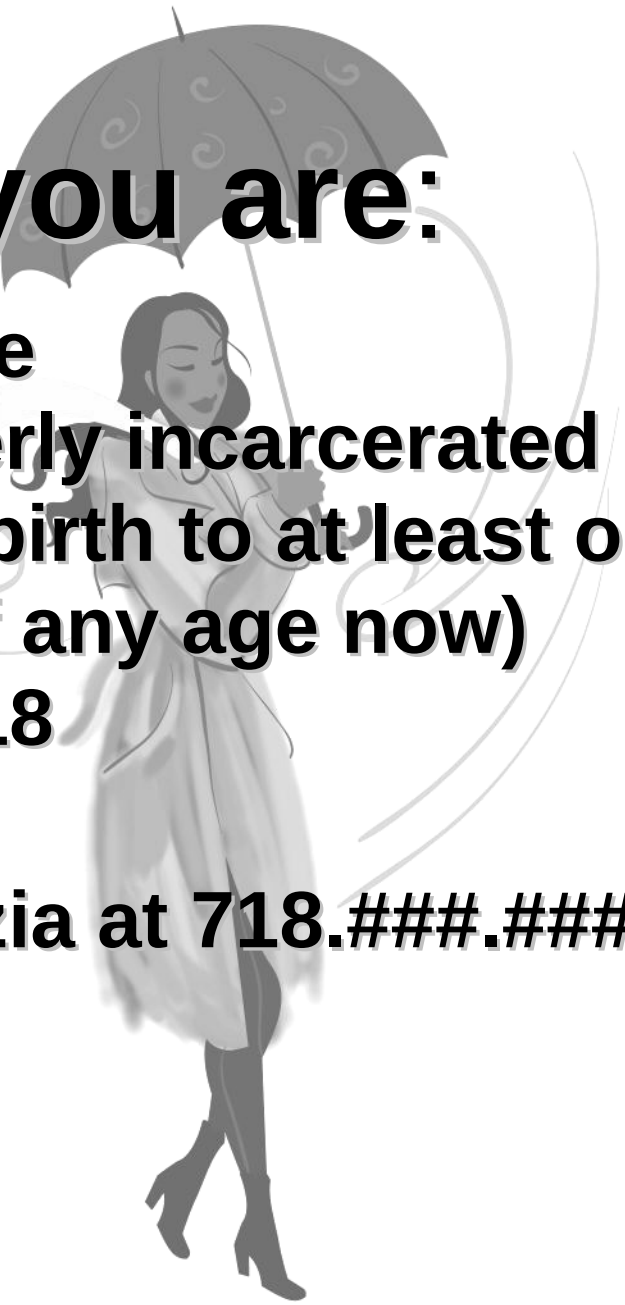


If you are:

- ✶ **Female**
- ✶ **Formerly incarcerated**
- ✶ **Gave birth to at least one child (of any age now)**
- ✶ **Over 18**

Call Venezia at 718.###.####

Earn $10 for a 30 minute interview!



If you are:

- **Female**
- **Formerly incarcerated**
- **Gave birth to at least one child (of any age now)**
- **Over 18**

Call Venezia at 718.###.####

Appendix C: Consent form

I, _____, understand that this study is being conducted to explore the ways in which reunification with children affects the women returning home from prison. This consent form provides information about the study. If I agree to take part in the research study, I will be asked to sign this consent form. This process is known as informed consent because it ensures that I know what I will be doing in the research study before I agree to be involved. The study is being conducted by a Ph.D. candidate at the CUNY Doctoral Program in Criminal Justice. The Principal Investigator is Venezia Michalsen. If I have any questions or require further explanations of the study, I may contact Ms. Michalsen at ###.###.####. If I have any other concerns or complaints about the study I can call Dr. Michael Jacobson, the faculty advisor for the study, at ###.###.####. If I have questions about protection of subjects in this study, I may call the John Jay College Institutional Review Board at 212.237.8364

In addition, I understand that:

□ My participation in this study is voluntary: I am free to choose whether or not I will take part in the study, and my participation or decision not to participate will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled;

□ I am at least 18 years of age;

□ I will be meeting with an interviewer today for an interview that will last about 25 minutes and will consist of a set of questions about who I am, about my relationships with my children and my spouse, about my job, and about my criminal behavior;

□ My name will not be used on the interview instrument or in any reports;

□ Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed for accuracy, and selected quotes from the interviews will be reported in the study, and some of the quotations may be things that I said during my participation in the interview. I understand that anything I say will not have my name attached to it;

□ I am free to stop participating in the study at any time or to refuse to answer any questions I do not wish to answer without penalty or prejudice;

□ All tapes and original transcripts and consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will only be available to the principal investigator, and at completion of the study, any papers with my identifying information (e.g. my name) will be shredded and that the only identifying mark on my paperwork will be a number;

□ Upon completion of the interview I will be given a list of resources available to help me through any issues that may arise as a consequence of participating in this study;

□ I will be given $10.00 (ten dollars) in exchange for my participation in the study;

□ I am entitled to answers to any inquiries concerning the goals of this research. I am also entitled to a summary of the results of the research and an explanation of whom to contact for answers to questions about the research and my rights;

□ All my questions about participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction; and

□ I understand the interviewer will break this confidentiality agreement only if it is necessary to prevent a crime or respond to a criminal complaint.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____
Printed Name: _____

_____	_____	_____
Printed Interviewer Name	Interviewer Signature	Date

Recruit Location: _____ Number _____
Interview Location: _____ Date:_____
Interviewer:_____

Appendix D: Respondent interview

Thank you for participating in this study. This interview is expected to take approximately 20 minutes. Please remember that the only identifying information recorded on this interview instrument will be your subject number. The questions I will ask you on this instrument are some basic questions about who you are, about your relationships with your spouse/partner and your children, and about your work experience. I will also be asking you about some of your activities over the past year, 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 $10 in cash and a resource list at the end of this interview.

Screening

These first four 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?

   ____/____/____→ If under 18, ineligible. Thank and exclude.
3. Have you ever been incarcerated in prison and/or jail?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No → Ineligible. Thank and exclude.
4. Have you ever given birth to any children?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No → Ineligible. Thank and exclude.

Control Variables

The next few questions are basic questions about who you are.

5. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? _____

6. Are you currently employed? Is it part time or full time?
   ☐ Yes, full time
   ☐ Yes, part time
   ☐ No

7. What date did you start this job?
   _____/_____/_____

8. What is the likelihood that you will either lose or quit your job within the next two years?
   1=not at all possible; 2=slightly possible; 3=neither possible nor impossible;
   4=strongly possible; 5=definite _____

Recruit Location: _____ Number _____
Interview Location: _____ Date:_____
Interviewer:_____

9. What is the yearly income in your household? _____

10. How many people live in your household (including yourself)?
    Adults: _____
    Children: _____ (probe: how many are yours? _____)

11. In what type of housing do you currently live? (check one)
    ☐ Correctional facility
    ☐ The streets (homeless)
    ☐ Family/friends' place (homeless)
    ☐ Homeless shelter
    ☐ Residential treatment program
    ☐ Emergency housing (e.g. YMCA)
    ☐ Transitional housing (e.g. halfway house)
    ☐ Temp. staying with family/friends (not homeless)
    ☐ My own permanent housing (rent)
    ☐ My own permanent housing (own)
    ☐ Other (specify):_____

12. How do you identify your race? (check all that apply)
    ☐ White
    ☐ Black/African American
    ☐ Asian
    ☐ Native American
    ☐ Pacific Islander
    ☐ Other: _____

13. Do you identify yourself as Hispanic? (check one)
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ No

14. Have you ever been enrolled in substance abuse treatment? How many times did you complete successfully, and how many times did you leave without completing?
    ☐ Yes, completed successfully (Number of times: _____)
    ☐ Yes, did not complete successfully (Number of times: _____)
    ☐ Have never been enrolled in substance abuse treatment.
    ☐ Currently enrolled in substance abuse treatment (type: _____)

Reunification – Open ended questions

The next set of questions is about your children, your children's lives while you were incarcerated, and your experiences with them after your incarceration.

15. How many children have you given birth to? _____

16. What are the current ages and genders of each of these children? Please go in order from oldest to youngest. If a child is deceased, you may simply say "deceased". _____

Recruit Location: _____ Number _____
Interview Location: _____ Date:_____
Interviewer:_____

17. Where and with whom did your children stay while you were incarcerated? Please indicate which children.
    ☐ Non-Kin (with whom? Which children?)

    ☐ Kin (with whom? Which children?)

18. Was the foster care system involved with your children's placement? This includes involvement of the Administration of Children's Services (ACS) and/or foster care homes.
    ☐ Yes (tell me about this involvement: _____)
    ☐ No

19. What kind of contact did you have with your children while you were incarcerated? **Probe:** letters, visits, phone calls, how far were children from prison, problems with caregivers bringing children to prison, etc..

20. Have you reunified with any or all of your children?
    ☐ Yes, all
    ☐ Yes, but only some. How many? _____
    ☐ No, don't want to.
    ☐ No, but still seeking.
    ☐ No, my parental rights have been terminated (TPR)

21. If yes, what are the dates of your reunification(s)? Probe: which child(ren)?

22. Tell me about the process by which you reunified with your children or are trying to reunify with your children. **Probe:** what were the requirements? Did you have to attend parenting classes, anger management, drug treatment, court appointments? How did these go? Visitation? What was hard to do?

23. Are you seeking to reunify with your other children (if there are left over)?
    ☐ Yes, all
    ☐ Yes, but only some. How many? _____
    ☐ No

Recruit Location: _____ Number _____
Interview Location: _____ Date:_____
Interviewer:_____

24. If you have not yet reunified with your children, what actions have you taken in the past month and **in the past month** to reunify with your children? (probe: parenting classes, anger management, court appointments, mandated substance abuse treatment, contact with children)

Social Bonding – Children

This next set of questions is about your relationships with your children. For the questions that refer to a specific child, I'd like you to pick one of your children, and refer to that child when answering these questions. Which child did you pick (age and gender will identify)?

Child picked: _____

Please answer the following question with one of the numbers on this scale (PSI):
1=very easy 2=easy 3=somewhat difficult 4=it is very hard 5=I usually can't figure out what the problem is

25. How easy is it for you to understand what your child wants or needs?_____

Please answer questions 26-33 using this scale:
1=strongly agree 2=agree 3=not sure 4=disagree 5=strongly disagree

26. I expected to have closer and warmer feelings for my child than I do and this bothers me. _____

27. Sometimes my child does things that bother me just to be mean. _____

28. My child knows I am his or her parent and wants me more than other people._____

30. Compared to the other children, tell me about the child you picked. Why did you pick this one?

Please continue using that scale, but answer generally instead of referring to the single child.

31. It takes a long time for parents to develop close, warm feelings for their children._____

32. The number of children that I have right now is too many. _____

33. When I was young, I never felt comfortable holding or taking care of children._____

34. Please tell me the number of hours you spend with all of your children in an average week. _____ (Note: don't say "not counting sleeping")

Social Bonding – Spouse/Partner (S&L)

35. What is your legal marital status?

Recruit Location: _____ Number _____
Interview Location: _____ Date:_____
Interviewer:_____

☐ Never Married ☐ Separated
☐ Married ☐ Divorced
☐ Living with Partner ☐ Widowed

The next set of questions is about your relationship with someone that you consider your partner of spouse.

36. Are you in a relationship with someone that you consider to be your partner or spouse?
    ☐ Yes (who is this person? _____)
    ☐ No

Please answer questions 37-41 using this scale:
1=strongly agree 2=agree 3=not sure 4=disagree 5=strongly disagree

37. My spouse/partner gives me the right amount of affection: _____
38. My spouse/partner seems to wish I were a different type of person: _____
39. My spouse/partner sometimes puts me down in front of other people: _____
40. My spouse/partner sometimes won't listen to me or my opinions: _____
41. I'm closer to my spouse/partner than most people are to theirs: _____

Social Bonding – Spouse/Partner (PSI)

42. Since having my last child, I have had less interest in sex. _____
43. Having a child seems to have increased the number of problems we have with in-laws and relatives. _____
44. Having children has been much more expensive than I had expected. _____
45. Since having my child, my spouse/partner has not given me as much help and support as I expected. _____
46. Having a child has caused me more problems that I expected in my relationship with my spouse/partner _____
47. Since having a child, my spouse/partner and I don't do as many things together _____
48. Since having a child, my spouse/partner and I don't spend as much time together as a family as I had expected. _____

Recruit Location: _____ Number _____
Interview Location: _____ Date:_____
Interviewer:_____

Identity Change
This next question has to do with turning points in your life.

49. In looking back on one's life, it is often possible to identify certain key "turning points" -- episodes through which a person undergoes substantial change. Turning points can occur in many different spheres of a person's life -- in relationships with other people, in work and school, in outside interests, etc. I am especially interested in a turning point in your understanding of yourself. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point. If you feel that your life story contains no turning points, then describe a particular episode in your life that comes closer than any other to qualifying as a turning point. **After complete answer, probe for a connection between identity change and reunification, and reunification and desistance.**

Desistance
The final set of questions has to do with illegal behaviors and contact with the criminal justice system.

50. How many times have you been arrested in your life? _____

51. How many times have you been on probation? _____

52. How many times have you been on parole? _____

53. Including the most recent time, how many times have you been incarcerated in jail or in prison? _____

54. What is the most serious offense you were incarcerated for? _____

55. What was your longest incarceration? ____/____/____ to ____/____/____

56. What are the dates of your most recent incarceration? ____/____/____ to ____/____/____

57. What was the offense?_____

58. What facility or facilities did you stay in? _____

Recruit Location: _____ Number _____
Interview Location: _____ Date:_____
Interviewer: _____

59. And finally, many people sometimes do things that are against the law or which would get them into trouble if they were caught. These next questions are about some of these things. Thinking about yourself, how often would you say you did these things before your most recent incarceration. [Once you've asked that, go to the following]. Now, tell me how often would you say you do these things now, after being incarcerated.

1=never 2=rarely 3=sometimes 4=often

Before most recent incarceration:

a. _____Damaged or destroyed property on purpose.
b. _____Carried a hidden weapon other than a plain pocket knife.
c. _____Used marijuana.
d. _____Stolen (or tried to steal) something worth less than $5.
e. _____Attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting him or her.
f. _____Broken into a vehicle or building to steal something or just to look around.
g. _____Sold marijuana.
h. _____Sold hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and LSD.
i. _____Gotten involved in gang fights.
j. _____Stolen (or tried to steal) something worth more than $50.
k. _____Stolen (or tried to steal) a motor vehicle, such as a car or motorcycle.
l. _____Gotten drunk once in a while.
m. _____Had (or tried to have) sexual relations with someone against their will.
n. _____Used force or threat of force to get money or other things.
o. _____Been paid to have sex with someone.
p. _____Used drugs to get high (not because you were sick), other than marijuana.
q. _____Drank alcohol.
r. _____Used (or tried to use) credit cards without the owner's permission or passed a bad check (intentionally overdrafting).
s. _____Embezzled; that is, used money or funds entrusted in your care for purposes other than intended.

Now, after most recent incarceration:

a. _____Damaged or destroyed property on purpose.

b. _____Carried a hidden weapon other than a plain pocket knife.
c. _____Used marijuana.
d. _____Stolen (or tried to steal) something worth less than $5.
e. _____Attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting him or her.
f. _____Broken into a vehicle or building to steal something or just to look around.
g. _____Sold marijuana.
h. _____Sold hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and LSD.
i. _____Gotten involved in gang fights.
j. _____Stolen (or tried to steal) something worth more than $50.
k. _____Stolen (or tried to steal) a motor vehicle, such as a car or motorcycle.
l. _____Gotten drunk once in a while.
m. _____Had (or tried to have) sexual relations with someone against their will.
n. _____Used force or threat of force to get money or other things.

Recruit Location: _____ Number _____
Interview Location: _____ Date:_____
Interviewer: _____

o. _____Been paid to have sex with someone.
p. _____Used drugs to get high (not because you were sick), other than marijuana.
q. _____Drank alcohol.
r. _____Used (or tried to use) credit cards without the owner's permission or passed a bad check (intentionally overdrafting).
s. _____Embezzled; that is, used money or funds entrusted in your care for purposes other than intended.

60. I noticed that there has been a change/was not a change. Do you think that there's a connection between that change/lack thereof and your reunification with your children/seeking reunification/not seeking reunification? Tell me about that.

61. If it is connected, what is the difference between the reunification/seeking/not seeking this time and previous reunifications or the births of your children?

Thank you very much for participating in this study. Your answers to these questions will help to advance the way that research understands what it is like for women after incarceration. I will now give you $10 in return for your participation. Please sign a receipt. I will also give you a resource list of organizations that serve women who have been in prison or jail. Thank you again for your help.

Interviewer section for impressions immediately after interview:

Appendix E: Receipt

I certify that I have received ten dollars in exchange for my participation in the "Reunification and Desistance" study.

Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix F: Resource list

Domestic Abuse
Park Slope Safe Homes Project: 718.788.6947

Education Services
Episcopal Social Services/The College Initiative: 212.826.5608
WPA Steps to Independence: 718.637.6800

Employment Services
Center for Urban Community Services: 212.471.0744
Hope Program: 718.852.9307
WPA Steps to Independence: 718.637.6800

Family Services
Clinton Family Crisis Nursery: 212.765.0603
Single Parent Resource Center: 212.951.7030

Health Care Services
Brooklyn Pre-Natal Care: 718.270.8273
Elm Care Health Organization: 877.324.6363
Health Care Pharmacy Services: 917.864.0350

HIV/AIDS
Center for Children and Families: 718.262.9128
Center for Community Alternatives: 212.691.2369
WPA Re-entry Services Unit : 718.637.6800

Housing
Fifth Avenue Committee: 718.857.2990
Partnership for the Homeless: 212.645.3444
WPA Steps to Independence: 718.637.6800

Legal Advice
Brooklyn Legal Services: 718.257.5546
HIV Law Project: 212.577.3001
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem: 212.876.5500

Life Skills Support
Community Voicemail: 718.637.6800
WPA Steps to Independence: 718.637.6800

Mental Health Counseling
Brooklyn Heights Counseling Center: 718.935.9313
FEGS: 212.366.8289
The Center for Marital and Family Services, Inc: 212.826.1035

Substance Abuse Treatment
Bowery Residents Committee: 24-hr Chemical Dependency Crisis Center: 212.533.5700
Bridge Back to Life/Villa: 718.680.2910
Casaworks for Families: 718.839.1173

Appendix G: Analyses

Table G.1: Multiple regression: Dependent variable of desistance.

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	695.543	5	139.109	2.072	.077[a]
	Residual	5705.754	85	67.127		
	Total	6401.297	90			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Reunified with at least one child?, Did respondent experience an identity change?, Dichotomous partner attach variable (zero means no partner), Dichotomous employed variable, Warmth towards children- corrected so higher score indicates higher warmth

b. Dependent Variable: Desistance - no alcohol variables. Recoded so that higher score means more desistance.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.860	5.049		.170	.865		
	Dichotomous employed variable	.123	2.289	.006	.054	.957	.971	1.029
	Dichotomous partner attach variable (zero means no partner)	3.819	1.767	.228	2.161	.033	.946	1.057
	Warmth towards children- corrected so higher score indicates higher warmth	-.086	.337	-.027	-.254	.800	.930	1.076
	Did respondent experience an identity change?	7.154	3.789	.194	1.888	.062	.990	1.010
	Reunified with at least one child?	2.653	1.940	.141	1.368	.175	.984	1.017

a. Dependent Variable: Desistance - no alcohol variables. Recoded so that higher score means more desistance.

Table G.2: Multiple regression: Dependent variable of attachment to children.

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.660	2	18.330	2.685	.074[a]
	Residual	621.212	91	6.827		
	Total	657.872	93			

a. Predictors: (Constant), How many hours you spend with all of your children in an average week, Reunified with at least one child?

b. Dependent Variable: Warmth towards children- corrected so higher score indicates higher warmth

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	10.801	.355		30.411	.000		
	Reunified with at least one child?	-1.011	.850	-.171	-1.189	.238	.502	1.992
	How many hours you spend with all of your children in an average week	.018	.008	.323	2.248	.027	.502	1.992

a. Dependent Variable: Warmth towards children- corrected so higher score indicates higher warmth

Table G.3: Multiple regression: Dependent variable of identity change.

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.040	3	.013	.247	.863[a]
	Residual	4.685	87	.054		
	Total	4.725	90			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Warmth towards children- corrected so higher score indicates higher warmth, Dichotomous employed variable, Dichotomous partner attach variable (zero means no partner)

b. Dependent Variable: Did respondent experience an identity change?

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.880	.107		8.197	.000		
	Dichotomous employed variable	-.016	.064	-.027	-.249	.804	.982	1.018
	Dichotomous partner attach variable (zero means no partner)	-.027	.050	-.059	-.538	.592	.951	1.051
	Warmth towards children-corrected so higher score indicates higher warmth	.007	.010	.084	.759	.450	.936	1.068

a. Dependent Variable: Did respondent experience an identity change?

Table G.4: Multiple regression: Dependent variable of desistance.

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	596.823	3	198.941	2.949	.037[a]
	Residual	6070.581	90	67.451		
	Total	6667.404	93			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Did respondent experience an identity change?, Dichotomous identity change - incarceration variable, Dichotomous identity change - children variable

b. Dependent Variable: ddiffnoalcr

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.800	3.673		.762	.448		
	Dichotomous identity change - incarceration variable	4.040	1.744	.238	2.317	.023	.955	1.048
	Dichotomous identity change - children variable	-.014	1.875	-.001	-.007	.994	.896	1.116
	Did respondent experience an identity change?	5.146	4.069	.137	1.265	.209	.861	1.162

a. Dependent Variable: ddiffnoalcr

Table G.5: Multiple regression: Dependent variable of desistance.

ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1567.344	4	391.836	7.723	.000[a]
	Residual	3906.461	77	50.733		
	Total	5473.805	81			

a. Predictors: (Constant), How many hours you spend with all of your children in an average week, Dichotomous identity change - incarceration variable, Criminal History - Additive scale of arrested, incarcerated and paroled, Total time of most recent incarceration - in days

b. Dependent Variable: Desistance - no alcohol variables. Recoded so that higher score means more desistance.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.002	1.336		2.247	.028		
	Dichotomous identity change - incarceration variable	4.226	1.624	.257	2.602	.011	.952	1.050
	Criminal History - Additive scale of arrested, incarcerated and paroled	.045	.021	.211	2.164	.034	.977	1.024
	Total time of most recent incarceration - in days	.001	.001	.197	2.006	.048	.959	1.042
	How many hours you spend with all of your children in an average week	.056	.017	.314	3.255	.002	.995	1.005

a. Dependent Variable: Desistance - no alcohol variables. Recoded so that higher score means more desistance.

Table G.6: Factor analysis: Contact with children during incarceration variables.

Component Matrix[a]

	Component	
	1	2
How often did children visit during Respondent's incarceration?	.537	-.364
How often did Respondent write to children during her incarceration?	.720	.335
How often did children write to Respondent during her incarceration?	.860	-.070
How often did Respondent call children during her incarceration?	.016	.883

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 2 components extracted.

Table G.7: Factor analysis: PSI attachment to children variables.

Component Matrix[a]

	Component		
	1	2	3
How easy is it for you to figure out what your child wants or needs	-.427	.488	-.244
I expected to have closer and warmer feelings for my child than I do and this bothers me	.591	-.299	.218
Sometimes my child does things that bother me just to be mean	.421	.392	.691
My child knows that I am his or her parent and wants me more than other people	-.336	.669	.338
It takes a long time for parents to develop close, warm feelings for their children	.669	.245	.021
The number of children I have right now is too many	.617	.178	-.428
When I was young, I never felt comfortable holding or taking care of children	.338	.507	-.475

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 3 components extracted.

Table G.8: Factor analysis: Sampson & Laub partner attachment scale.

Component Matrix[a]

	Component	
	1	2
S&L spouse variable 1 (gives me the right amount of affection)	.645	.622
S&L spouse variable 2 (spouse or partner wishes I were a different type of person)	.609	.377
S&L spouse variable 3 (puts me down in front of others)	.625	-.677
S&L spouse variable 4 (won't listen to me or my opinions)	.791	-.457
S&L spouse variable 5 (closer than most people)	.449	.343

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 2 components extracted.

Table G.9: Factor analysis: PSI spouse/partner attachment scale.

Component Matrix[a]

	Component		
	1	2	3
Since having my last child, I have had less interest in sex	-.301	.647	.266
Having a child seems to have increased the number of problems we have with in-laws and relatives	-.177	.833	-.008
Having children has been much more expensive than I had expected	.097	-.332	.770
Since having my child, my spouse/partner has not given me as much help and support as I expected	.418	.178	.625
Having a child has caused me more problems than I expected in my relationship with my spouse/partner	.756	.217	.167
Since having a child, my spouse/partner and I don't do as many things together	.845	.217	-.302
Since having a child, my spouse/partner and I don't spend as much time together as a family as I had expected	.868	-.054	-.149

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 3 components extracted.

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