

2023

Adult Learning and Motivation of Students Previously Involved in the U.S. Criminal Justice System

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Saudia Krystal Mohammed

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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December 2022

Abstract

Adult Learning and Motivation of Students Previously Involved in the
U.S. Criminal Justice System

by

Saudia Krystal Mohammed

MS, Palm Beach Atlantic University, 2014

BA, Florida Atlantic University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

General Teaching Psychology

Walden University

December 2022

Abstract

Motivation is an important factor in the overall success, achievement potential, and capabilities of students, especially adult learners. For individuals who are currently in the criminal justice system, motivation is a key factor in degree obtainment, research shows. However, there is limited research on adult learners who have previously been involved in the U.S. criminal justice system and the motivational factors that led to their academic reengagement. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of those motivational factors. The theoretical framework that underpinned this study was the transformative learning theory, which centers on how learners make meaning of their experiences. This study was qualitative in nature with a thematic data analysis approach. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit eight students for semi-structured interviews. Findings indicated the presence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, such as a desire for self-betterment and overall care for others, that led to educational reintegration. Findings also indicated the consistent presence of negative factors in participants' lives that led to incarceration. This research may lead to positive social change by providing policy makers and other educational stakeholders with insight into the factors that can be cultivated to prevent criminal re-offense and help decrease the overall recidivism rate.

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Dedication

I dedicate this body of work to my family: my parents; my siblings; my husband; and, most importantly, my little girl. Although you are not here just yet, you were the reason Mommy was able to get it together and graduate! Thank you, guys, for your unwavering support and encouragement along the way! We did it!!!

Acknowledgments

First, I want to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. John Astin. You stepped in at just the right time and provided me with so much guidance. You were so patient and encouraging during this process, and for that, I will forever be grateful. Thank you for always being a listening ear and never hesitating to jump on Zoom with me to answer all of my questions! To my other committee members, Dr. Jay Greiner and Dr. Tracy Mallet, thank you for your feedback and responsiveness during my doctoral journey. I honestly would not have gotten to this point without all of you!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Education has long been considered a cornerstone to self-betterment and a critical tool to combat poverty and inequality (Lawton-Stricklor, 2018). Educational institutions have been thought to provide the necessary tools and skill set to equip students to become productive and successful members of society. The topic of motivation has been at the forefront of educational research because it provides rich information into the profiles of learners and serves as a predictor of educational performance. According to O'Connor (2018), motivation is one of the most important factors in understanding student success, regardless of the age of the learner. Motivation is a key factor as the learning that takes place in the classroom setting is heavily influenced by motivational orientations (Tasgin & Coskun, 2018). Furthermore, the educational journey of each learner is unique.,

Researchers studying the motivation of learners have identified various intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Gom, 2009; Lumsden, 1994). Intrinsic factors include personal goals and personal achievement. Intrinsic motivation has been positively correlated with academic success (Everaert et al., 2017). Extrinsic factors include familial expectations, achievement of desired goals, and monetary benefits. For these reasons, knowledge of motivation is crucial to the understanding of overall student engagement, satisfaction, and levels of achievement (Rothes et al., 2017).

The topic of motivation is more complex when individuals encounter significant obstacles along their journey, such as incarceration. In this study, I sought to gain a better understanding of how students rebounded and reintegrated back into the academic world following experience with the criminal justice system. Although those found guilty of

crimes should be held accountable for their actions, there must be some channel towards rehabilitation for these individuals, and education is often that channel (Ahmed et al., 2019). Education has been found to be a useful tool both inside and outside of correctional facilities for incarcerated and previously incarcerated individuals. Studies indicate that those incarcerated working on their education tend to be involved in less interpersonal disputes and experience less disciplinary issues while those previously incarcerated individuals tend to have greater community involvement through employment status (Bannon, 2014; Brock, 2017). In this chapter, I will provide the background of the study, the problem statement, the overall purpose of the study, and the guiding research questions (RQs). I also discuss the study's theoretical framework and methodology and define key terms. The assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and overall significance of the study are also discussed. This chapter will also include a discussion on the social change implications of this research study and how implementation of programming may be beneficial to combatting recidivism and maintaining attention on educational advancement.

Background

Increase in Criminalization in the United States

In evaluating the correctional system, be it prisons or jails, two threads are found: overcrowding and criminalization, particularly in juvenile behavior. According to Hall (2015), the United States' incarceration rate continuously ranks among the highest of industrialized nations. The sheer volume of inmates in these facilities has become an issue and brought to light more significant problems including inmate/patient care and

correctional programming. Investments have been made into programming changes that would decrease the recidivism rates.

Over the years, there has been an increase in the number of state and federal laws that carry criminal penalties. Various violations lead to jail or prison time. A direct result of these law changes and shifts is overcriminalization and the unnecessary incarceration of citizens. However, the act of overcriminalization is not new.

According to Mungan (2017), broadening the reach of criminal law has led to more and more people being wrongfully labeled as “criminals.” Simply having a criminal record can trigger the occurrence of stigmatization that can be difficult to overcome. Having a felony record or previous criminal charge can make it difficult to find gainful employment. The inability to find a job can lead individuals to resort to crimes to make a living, which in turn creates a vicious cycle, as the incarceration rates are so heightened in the United States (Blazer & Hernandez, 2018).

Juvenile crime rates in the United States have decreased, but there is still a perpetuation in the criminalization of juvenile behavior. For instance, in an effort to help provide appropriate oversight and rule enforcement, U.S. school leaders have begun to more regularly use school resource officers (SROs). SROs are law enforcement officers assigned to a school setting. SROs are tasked with helping to reduce juvenile delinquency by conducting routine inspections, leading investigations, and serving as a liaison between schools and police departments (Parker et al., 2014). The SRO is a position that was meant to see and be seen, simultaneously. According to Parker et al. (2014), SROs have been responsible for a recent uptick in juvenile arrests for actions that did not seem

fitting of the behavior the student was engaging in. This has been referred to in the literature as the criminalization of student behavior (Parker et al., 2014). Issues that may have once been seen as strictly behavioral, warranting some form of corrective action, are now being viewed as criminal, leading to an arrest for petty theft, disruptive behavior, and insubordination (May et al., 2018).

Education and Corrections

Education may play a role in preventing juvenile recidivism as it has been shown to reduce poverty, unemployment rates, and rates of criminal re-offense. According to Hall (2015), students gain the most from obtaining an education while incarcerated. However, according to Bannon (2014) approximately 40% of those serving time at the federal, state, or community supervision level do not possess a high school diploma or general education diploma (GED). In this context, education can serve as a channel for the rehabilitation of those found guilty of crimes (Ahmed et al., 2019). Education has been found to benefit the learner across different environments. .

Educational programs in the correctional setting are aimed at helping learners with their social skills, vocational skills, emotion regulation, life skills, and substance abuse prevention (Vacca, 2004). The programs offered may vary based on the correctional setting, populations they accommodate, and location of the facilities. Learners may be inclined to participate in such programming as a contingency of their sentencing or a desire for self-improvement and greater employment opportunities following release. Overall success in these programs is determined by the level of

investment that the individual puts forth and the motivation behind their efforts (Ahmed et al, 2019, Berridge & Goebel, 2013).

Previously researchers have concluded that educational programs incorporated into corrections programming are negatively correlated with recidivism (Hall, 2015). Recidivism, in the correctional context, is the process by which offenders tend to reoffend and find themselves back in the legal system. A number of contributing factors are affiliated with increased recidivism rates such as socioeconomic standing, race, educational level, and quality and number of reentry services.

Multiple researchers have sought to determine whether education truly does affect recidivism rates (Manger, et al., 2013; Vacca, 2004; Roth & Manger, 2014). The findings have been near identical indicating that education and recidivism rates are negatively correlated (Hall, 2015). In a study published in the early 2000s, researchers found that prisoners who attended educational programs while incarcerated are less likely to go back to prison upon their release (Vacca, 2004).

Evidence supports that education helps in the rehabilitation process of inmates, namely by leading to gainful employment upon release. From a quantitative perspective, for every \$962 spent on education while a learner is incarcerated, the criminal justice system will save approximately \$5,400 per inmate (Hall, 2015). The numbers support the need for educational interventions and programming in the correctional setting.

Continued educational opportunities help to prevent and decrease overall recidivism by providing a more meaningful existence following release. Meeting educational goals can lead to improved financial standing, the ability to apply learned technical skills, and

decreased dependency on government assistance programs (Manger et al., 2013; Vacca, 2004). Essentially there is an inverse relationship between crime and recidivism rates.

Education in Nontraditional Settings

According to Wilhite and Bullock (2012), an estimated 20% of students with identified behavioral and emotional disorders are being educated in alternative settings in the United States. These same students are identified as lacking both social and behavioral competencies, making functionality in a traditional classroom setting difficult. Results from this study indicated that students were motivated by a number of factors including a desire to learn as a means of achieving greater goals in life, making their family and loved one proud, and the opportunity to spend times with friends.

Although not all nontraditional students are successful, some are motivated enough to meet and even exceed their educational goals. In a recent study conducted with learners between 16 and 18 years old, researchers interviewed students to better understand their success in an alternative provision educational program (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). Alternative provision programs serve learners who have an illness or some other form of academic exclusion or who have failed in the mainstream academic setting and as a result would not receive a sufficient education (Hamilton & Morgan, 2018). The study indicated that students who were able to successfully complete the program avoided having little to no education and having to abruptly enter the workforce. Some of the emergent themes related to motivation that Hamilton and Morgan (2018) identified were student autonomy, student-staff emotional connection, and a positive learning environment. Their findings indicate that students who feel in control of their educational

destinies tend to make better decisions and have more positive follow-through outcomes with regard to task completion. Similarly, learners who have a positive, supportive relationship with at least one staff member are more academically resilient. Last, creating and fostering a healthy, positive learning environment contributes to more positive learner self-esteem and safety.

In many urban U.S. school districts, there is a significant provision of alternative education to aid the population at high risk for school failure and dropout (Perzigian, 2018). According to Perzigian (2018), in 2018 approximately 70% of urban school districts offered public alternative schools for students struggling with academic and behavioral issues, compared to 35-40% of suburban and rural schools. Alternative schools focus on increasing social competencies such as being able to thrive and adapt to various environments and working effectively with others. Studies indicate that the vast majority of instructors, in alternative education, attempt to increase social competencies in an effort to increase the likelihood of employability (Perzigian, 2018).

Gap in the Literature

There are a number of motivating factors that play a part in the academic progression and overall achievement of students, irrespective of age. Those motivating factors are a driving factor in degree attainment and achievement of one's educational goals. Motivation is understood to be the reason why someone behaves or does something. Motivation has been studied for years, in various disciplines, from a number of different angles. Within the scope of education, researchers have examined motivation to better understand the initiation, maintenance, and quality of students' actions (Kaplan

et al., 2012). Research on motivation has consistently pointed at intrinsic and extrinsic factors and the role they play in propelling actions and decision-making (Deci, et al., 1991; Locke & Schattke, 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Weiner, 1990). Intrinsic motivation is understood to be a desire to do something to obtain internal reward such as personal satisfaction. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is derived from external factors such as praise, fame, or money.

Education and the concept of motivation have been deeply intertwined for some time. Educators, parents, and researchers alike have worked to better understand the relationship between the two. Because education is considered to be the cornerstone of personal and professional advancement and a right for most students, in the United States, it has significant meaning within the context of the correctional setting. Educating adolescents and young adults in the correctional setting has proven to be an interesting challenge for educators. However, experts contend that implementing educational curriculum into correctional programs aids in reducing recidivism rates and produces more positive outcomes, post release (Hall, 2015). But reinforcing the importance of education in a controlled environment comes easier than when these students gain their independence and freedom. The current literature offers scant information on the motivational influences of those young adult learners who have been released and continuation of their educations falls on their shoulders. In conducting this research, I sought to address this gap.

Problem Statement

Motivation is key in understanding student engagement, satisfaction, and levels of achievement (Rothes et al., 2017). At present, researchers have identified intrinsic and extrinsic factors that lead to educational persistence including desire for greater knowledge, achievement of a personal goal, greater financial opportunity, and completion of school guidelines (Gom, 2009; Park & Choi, 2009; Hegarty, 2011). Motivation has been shown to affect student learning in that when students are highly motivated, they tend to perform better (Sogunro, 2015).

However, there is limited understanding of the motivational factors of adult learners who had to delay their education. For instance, those with pending legal charges that require rectification, thus disrupting the pursuit of their education, remain an understudied population. Young adults are routinely incarcerated around the United States for various charges that, in turn, disrupt their educational journey. For some students, their education is delayed repeatedly causing them to resume their educational journey as adult learners. Kirk and Sampson (2013) offered that sanctioning of students by the criminal justice system is a continuous source of educational disadvantage. Smeets (2013) further expanded on this point reporting that adolescent and youth offenders attempting to reenter the academic programs had trouble finding academic institutions that were willing to enroll them, causing further academic setbacks in their academics. With the very present obstacles students with criminal justice system involvement face, understanding the motivation of those who overcome these setbacks is paramount in strengthening the academic connection. Gaining a better grasp of the motivating factors

involved may offer insight to stakeholders in the correctional setting about ways to improve educational opportunities for individuals during and after juvenile incarceration and may improve the outlook of the learners.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivation that contributed to academic reintegration for young adult learners who were previously involved in the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) system as adolescent learners. To sufficiently address this gap, I used a qualitative approach. Research indicates that the number of young adult learners is slowly on the rise and that, with the advent of online learning and community educational resources, education has become more easily accessible (Ilgaz & Gulbahar, 2017). The learning landscape has evolved tremendously over the years. Many learners have greater access to educational programs. There are a number of barriers that prevent learners from getting back on track academically, including external or situational and internal or dispositional obstacles (Falasca, 2011). However, there are learners who have managed to overcome their obstacles. Understanding their motivation to do so has yet to be fully addressed.

Research Questions

In this study, I examined the motivational factors that underlie adult learners' decision to reintegrate into the academic sphere by continuing with high school and postsecondary training. I wanted to gain a better understanding of what qualities or experiences these learners have that foster the perseverance to follow through on their educational goals. Through the use of interviews, I extracted rich and thorough

information from participants. Data consisted of responses from a semistructured interview to adult learner participants. I explored the following two RQs:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of individuals who have previously been involved in the criminal justice system who are reintegrating into the high school and postsecondary trainings?

RQ2: How do those individuals who have previously been involved in the legal system motivate themselves to return to their academics?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that served as a guide for this research study was that of the transformative learning theory developed by Jack Mezirow (1991). The theory has been applied in numerous fields but has gained the most traction in the educational sphere (Christie et al., 2015; Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). The transformative learning theory asserts that learning is a process where adult learners begin to make meaning of their specific experiences (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). Learners begin to reevaluate their meaning structures when they conflict with reality (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). Social and structural factors may influence the development of their experiences. Mezirow's theory focuses on the individual. A key assertion is that if individuals are willing to change their current assumptions, they will modify their behaviors as well.

Individuals' unique views of the world are shaped by their environment, upbringing, and people in their lives. Because these worldviews are often so deep-seated, they can be difficult to change. Mezirow argued that a "forceful argument" or

disorienting dilemma is often the catalyst leading to any sorts of changes (Christie et al., 2015).

Transformative learning theory has grown in popularity as evidenced by its use in numerous scholarly texts including recent dissertations (Christie et al., 2015). However, as with most theoretical frameworks there are limitations. Critics of the transformative learning theory often highlight the role of critical reflection, which is central to the theory. Critical reflection requires students to reassess potential problems and the involved emotions, beliefs, and acts involved in decision-making (Moyer & Sinclair, 2016). Criticism stems from the focus given to clearly understanding critical reflection. For instance, critical reflection is influenced by the environment in which it occurs, but little research is devoted to understanding environmental factors and various assessments exist for assessing critical reflection as opposed to a uniform assessment.

The focus of this study was motivational factors in those who had their education delayed due to involvement in the correctional setting to only reengage at a later point in time. Student participants provided their experiences of that journey and the factors that ultimately precipitated in academic reengagement. In Chapter 2

, I further elaborate on transformative learning theory and its relationship to one's education.

Nature of the Study

This study was qualitative in its approach. Qualitative research is powerful in that it allows researchers to better understand the behaviors and attitudes of participants (Creswell, 2010). By using a qualitative research approach, I was able to elicit rich

information about the study phenomenon and analyze the collected data to identify key themes. Thematic analysis allows researchers to best understand reoccurring patterns in participants through the analysis of emergent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants were provided with the opportunity to openly express their views and experiences without judgment or distortion during the interview process. I analyzed the data and tracked emerging themes. A thematic analytic approach allows researchers to play an active role in the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Repeated patterns are critical in ascertaining meaning and making a connection to the collected data set.

This study may further educators' understanding of the decisions of adult learners and enable them to accommodate these learner's needs to promote completion of their education. The goal was to extract rich, meaningful, real-world point of views and experiences from participants concerning their personal motives for reentering the academic sphere despite the odds they were facing. I gathered data by conducting a series of interviews with adult learners whose education was delayed due to involvement in the criminal justice system. Each interview was conducted electronically in Broward County, Florida, over the course of 4 weeks. Participants were in the school setting for their interview. The collected data were analyzed for emergent themes (see Chapter 4).

Definitions

In this study, terms concerning motivation and education are expressed in their simplest form. I drew the terms from the literature. The terms are as follows:

Achievement motivation: The desire to do well in relation to some standard of excellence (Dagneu, 2017).

Extrinsic motivation: Motivation derived from its relationship to some separable consequence; acts/tasks are not performed due to interest (Deci et al., 1991).

Intrinsic motivation: Motivation derived from liking or wanting to engage in an activity for its own sake rather than any specific outcome; enjoyment is derived from engaging, either actively or passively, in the activity (Locke & Schattke, 2018).

Motivation: The driving force that causes people to work towards a particular goal (Dagnew, 2017).

Assumptions

In conducting this study, I assumed that each of the participants felt comfortable enough to self-disclose about their personal experiences regarding their educational journey. I assumed that each interview question was answered honestly and that the answers were not for the appeasement of me as the interviewer but rather the personal truths of participants. I also assumed that participants chose to share their thoughts on their own accord without the use of any coercive methods. A final assumption of this study was that all participants had similar correctional experiences, thus qualifying them for inclusion in the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was to address the motivational factors of young adults who reintegrated into the academic environment following derailment due to involvement in the correctional setting. Participants shared of their experiences of reengaging with their academics, which included the motivation to do so, as well as obstacles encountered

along their journey. The inclusion criteria for the study was listed on the recruitment flyer to insure appropriate participant sampling.

Delimitations are present in all research studies and help to provide a clearer understanding of study's boundaries. In this study, a notable delimitation was the inclusion of young adult learners whose education was halted due to involvement in the DJJ legal system. Another delimitation of the study is that the participants had to be currently enrolled in continuing education courses or had to have recently obtained a GED or high school diploma.

As this study was qualitative in its design, its findings may be transferable to other previously incarcerated populations such as adolescents or individuals who were imprisoned. Furthermore, this study has the ability to be replicated by future researchers, using the same methodology and framework, in other correctional landscapes with other previously incarcerated individuals. The testimonials provided by research participants serves to strengthen the literature on correctional education and provide a more comprehensive understanding for future readers.

Limitations

Limitations are shortcomings of a study that may ultimately impact the findings (Creswell, 2014). As such, it is necessary to specify them. One notable limitation of the study was the potential for dishonest responses from participants. A disadvantage of interviews is that participants often want to provide answers that they perceive as more desirable or acceptable (Creswell, 2014). This concept is known as impression management. A risk is that if participants provide answers that are not true to their lived

experiences this could detract from the rich narratives that might be extracted (Anney, 2014). Another limitation of the study was the comfort level of the participants. Engaging in discourse concerning one's legal record can be a sensitive issue for a number of reasons. As such, some participants may not have the same measure of rapport with me and may not have disclosed as much information as other participants. Last, the potential for researcher bias was another limitation; I currently work in a correctional facility and have been an advocate for educational completion. To mitigate bias, I engaged in a careful analysis of the collected data and asked appropriate questions of participants.

Significance

This research addresses the gap in understanding of the motivational factors that compel some previously incarcerated individuals to pursue education postincarceration. There is a lack of research on adult learners who had to delay their education due to the presence of legal woes (Schwartz, 2015). Findings from this study may provide educators with information that they can use to implement programs, tools, or interventions to address issues of academic reentrance among postincarcerated individuals. Knowing some of the factors that motivate students to continue onward with their education may allow educators to implement proactive approaches to mediate dropout or educational delays. This study has the potential to bring about social change at the local and national level. According to Schwartz (2015), formerly incarcerated adults who are actively engaged in adult learning are less likely to reoffend, have greater employment opportunities, and have a powerful societal reintegration tool in their personal toolboxes.

Better understanding of the motivation behind the decision to reintegrate may therefore potentially lead to positive social change.

Summary

In summary, education within the correctional system has long been an area of interest in the education field. Understanding what motivates students to learn is fundamental in creating a generation of educated contributory citizens (Blazer & Hernandez, 2018). Little research exists on previously incarcerated learners who seek to continue their education postincarceration (Blazer & Hernandez, 2018; Berridge & Goebel, 2013; Brock, 2017; Hall, 2015) . In conducting this study, I sought to gain a better understanding of this population's lived experiences and the catalysts for their motivation to pursue their education. In doing so, this population of learners may gain a voice. In this chapter, I introduced the guiding RQs, defined key terms, outlined specific limitations, and presented the study's potential implications for social change. In Chapter 2, I review current and seminal literature on motivation and correctional education. Various topics are further explored including the history of education, education and motivation, the Florida DJJ, and education within the correctional setting. Chapter 3 focuses on the research methods of this study; it includes an overview of the research design, a discussion of the sample population, and information on the data collection process. Chapter 4 includes an analysis of the data and findings of the research, and Chapter 5 includes discussion of the study findings, limitations, and potential implications for social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Motivation has been a topic of study in the education field for quite some time (Weiner, 1990). Over the years, research has shifted to understanding the relationship between motivation and education across various environments including the correctional setting. Most of the current literature regarding education, motivation, and the young adult criminal justice population centers on educational advancements and reform within the correctional setting (Blomberg & Waldo, 2001; Leone & Wruble, 2015; Platt et al., 2006). Researchers have examined intrinsic and extrinsic factors related to motivation and have identified various noteworthy factors. With criminalization on the rise in the United States, correctional facilities in the country have become overcrowded (Brazzell et al., 2009). Individuals, while incarcerated, are given the opportunity to reengage with their academics. This is important because educational attainment has been shown to lessen the likelihood of recidivating (Ahmed et al., 2019). However, few take advantage of this opportunity. As such, a portion of the population is delaying their educational achievement.

The current body of research attests to both the short- and long-term benefits of educational attainment for incarcerated individuals. The literature demonstrates a predominant focus on those who pursue their education while incarcerated. There is a gap in the research in addressing and capturing the experiencing of those who elected to complete their education postincarceration (Brazzell et al., 2009). Those motivated

individuals who made the decision to return to their educational pursuits are a demographic worth better understanding.

In this chapter, I review the literature on the study topic. Before reviewing the literature, I discuss the literature search strategy and describe the theoretical framework. I organized the literature review around the following pertinent topics: (a) motivation and education, (b) obstacles to reengaging with education, (c) education in the correctional setting, (b) correctional education in the DJJ. The intent of this literature review is to provide the educational and criminal justice communities and other interested parties with a critical overview of research that has taken place regarding educational in the criminal justice context. I sought to provide a better understanding of what it already known and what still has yet to be known on the subject matter. This review reveals a gap in the literature concerning motivation to pursue education postincarceration. Little research exists on the population of formerly incarcerated individuals and what propels them to meet their educational goals (Brazzell et al., 2009; Sullivan, 2018). I sought to address this gap in the literature by conducting this study.

Literature Search Strategy

In order to conduct a thorough literature review, I searched various databases to find the most important information. The following databases were accessed and used through the Walden University Library: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Criminal Justice Database, ProQuest's dissertation and theses, and ERIC and Education Source Combined Search. I also utilized Walden's Thoreau Multi-Database Search tool to cast a larger net into the literature. Initial research was conducted using obvious terms of *motivation*,

education, correction(s), motivational factors, adult learner(s), adults, learning, jail(s), student(s), non-traditional education, Department of Juvenile Justice, Florida, alternative education, correctional educators, disengagement, juveniles, juvenile offenders, technology, thematic analysis, achievement motivation, transformative learning theory, and non-traditional education. As the research progressed, I combined some search terms as they were consistently found in the literature including *motivational factors and education, adult learner(s) and motivation, learning and jails, adult(s) and education, education and corrections, adult learners and jail, learning and jails, student motivation and education, student(s) and motivations, student(s) and motivational factors, and education and adult learners, Department of Juvenile Justice and Florida and education, and non-traditional education and adults, technology and correctional education, disengagement and juveniles, and non-traditional education and corrections.*

I also utilized the Walden University's Dissertations and Theses Database to explore previously submitted and accepted dissertations on topics of corrections and education. I searched for dissertations using key words including *corrections, education, and correctional education.* Using the aforementioned search terms, I was able to extract literature that supported this research study as well as provided a comprehensive picture relevant to the subject matter. In my initial research, I did not set date parameters on literature on motivation and education; the search was not time specific in order to obtain a comprehensive history of motivation. However, I later modified my search to the last 5 years, 2015-2020, to include the most recent research on the subject matter. The content older than the 5-year cutoff was identified to be seminal work in the field or was

necessary for inclusion to provide a clearer depiction of the gap in the literature as well as the presenting problem.

Theoretical Framework

I used the transformative learning theory as the theoretical framework to better understand the role of motivation in continuing education for those previously enmeshed in the justice system. Transformative learning theory was originally developed by Jack Mezirow in the 1900s. According to Levisohn (2017), at the heart of Mezirow's theory is the understanding that transformative learning is the process of affecting change. In fact, transformative learning theory was specifically developed to address the learning involved in broad social change (Hoggan, 2016). Transformative learning theory has become a prominent theory in the literature of adult education over the course of the past few decades (Hoggan, 2016). According to Hoggan (2016), transformative learning theory provides a detailed theoretical foundation for adult learning in a field that is often lacking in theory.

The transformative learning theory argues that every individual has a particular understanding of the world; an individual's worldview is shaped by their upbringing, life experiences, culture, or education (Christie et al., 2015). Mezirow argued that some worldviews can be deeply ingrained and will only have the potential to shift when it encounters a powerful human catalyst, a forceful argument, or a disorienting dilemma (Christie et al., 2015). Similarly, Casebeer and Mann (2017) defined transformative learning theory as individuals using their own lived experiences to make better sense of their world, as opposed to assuming assimilated values and views are fact. The process of

evaluating one's own beliefs can lead to an unconscious transformation. According to Hoggan (2016), "transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world (p. 64)." This mentioned shift can occur in one's behavior, self, capacity, and ontological views (Hoggan, 2016).

The phenomenon of transformation is a topic of interest in various disciplines including religious studies, psychology, and consciousness (Hoggan, 2016). Various disciplines have modified the definition of transformational learning to suit their needs. However, Hoggan (2016) supported the notion that one encompassing definition should exist. In a general sense, transformative learning is the process of significant and irreversible changes in the way an individual experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world. Transformative learning theory is especially popular in the educational field because it offers a way to understand how adult learners navigate challenging transitional periods and new demands (Hoggan, 2016). Providing a basis and justification for the adult learners' transition to goal accomplishment is important. Similarly, as transformation requires a shift of perspective it is fitting that it would be most applicable to the adult population; adults have been formed, which is a precondition to being transformed (Levisohn, 2017).

The transformation process that occurs in transformative learning must cause some type of disruption or shake up in the individual. Mezirow frequently uses the term "disorientating dilemma" to describe the catalyst for transformation (Levisohn, 2017).

For instance, some disorientating dilemmas may include anything from a divorce, to job change, to a thought-provoking book, or retirement (Levisohn, 2017). The trigger can be harmless but still evoke a noteworthy internal response that results in change. According to Levisohn (2017), the newly developed frame of reference is qualitatively different than the old one and often better and of greater value. For learning to be considered transformative it should be positive and not leave the individual in a defensive, anxious, or fragile state.

Mezirow asserts that a return to study often leads to consciousness raising on the part of the learner. Transformative learning is a process that occurs in a series of steps starting with a disorienting dilemma, then a process of self-examination, sense of alienation, the process of relating discontent to others, explaining options of new behavior, building confidence in new ways, planning a course of action, knowledge to implement plans, experimenting with new roles, and finally reintegration (Christie et al., 2015). Each of these steps are encountered in some variation along the way to transformative learning.

Adult learners who voluntarily reengage with their academics must experience some form of transformation as the ultimate catalyst for change and self-betterment. In this research study, I looked to gain a greater understanding of the motivational factors that propel adult learners to follow through on their academic goals, most notably those that are often forgotten about post release. Understanding the lived experiences of those adult learners, built upon the existing theory to further highlight the transformation that occurs in cases of extremes.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Education in the correctional setting does not just refer to traditional classroom setting learning but can also refer to vocational training and life skills training (Roth & Manger, 2014; Vacca, 2004). Educational programs implemented in correctional facilities must meet certain state and federal guidelines. However, correctional education is not just a national phenomenon but has been implemented globally as well. The overwhelming consensus seems to be that educational programs utilized in the correctional setting aid in producing more law-abiding and productive citizens, upon release (Vandala, 2019).

Researchers have explored education within the context of corrections with various correctional facilities, differing age groups, genders, and over time. Research has consistently pointed to both the short- and long-term benefits of educational programs including: a decrease in behavioral issues with inmates enrolled in educational programs, an increase in personal self-esteem, the development of positive social skills, greater employment opportunities, and lower recidivism rates (Brock, 2017; Hall, 2015; Roth & Manger, 2014; Vacca, 2004). Research has looked at the motivational factors of incarcerated individual still enmeshed with the criminal justice system; few studies have explored the motivations of formerly incarcerated individual who are divorced from the structure of the jails and prisons. The following literature review provides the history and background of both correctional education and motivation, a description of student disengagement, and a summary of the parameter of correctional education.

History of Motivation

Motivation is a concept that can be tracked back to the days of Aristotle. According to Locke and Schattke (2018), Aristotle identified a difference between pleasure derived from an activity and pleasure derived from outside an activity. In essence, without labeling it as the mainstream community does now, he was outlining the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were first used in the field by psychologist Robert Woodworth in 1918. Woodworth asserted that extrinsic motivation placed more attention on rewards and detracted from the learning meant to take place (Locke & Schattke, 2018). Woodworth also held that motivation can change over time. For instance, an individual may initially be extrinsically motivated then develop a true passion for the activity or subject matter they are working with and become more intrinsically motivated.

Motivation became a dominant field of study stemming from the 1940s up until the 1970s (Weiner, 1990). In the 1950s, Freud addressed motivation and treated it like many of the other phenomenon he addressed. Freud based the clear majority of his assumptions on observable interactions and like much of his previous and future work was provocative in nature (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). Freudian motivation theory purports that behavior is shaped by hidden desires and motives. Other well-known, early, contributors to the motivation discussion included: Gordon Allport, Kurt Lewin, and Henry Murray (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). A second wave of researchers including but not limited to: Albert Bandura, Edward Deci, and David McClelland solidified the importance of motivation in the research community. According to Maehr and Meyer

(1997) David McClelland is credited with bringing the concept of motivation out of the laboratory and into the real-world setting. Motivation went from an observable assessment to an operationalized concept, leading it to be better measured and eventually tested (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). He laid the foundation for much of the work on achievement now conducted in the educational domain.

Motivational psychologists were interested in better understanding what drives, instincts, or needs led someone to go from a state of rest to activity. Studies on motivation have focused on animals, human participants, goal attainment, and stimulation. Educational psychologists took a different approach to motivation and began to investigate whether learning could occur in the absence of incentives, as seen in the work of Tolman (1932). As such, a central area of focus was how educators could motivate people to engage in and with learning (Weiner, 1990). Motivation has been linked to learning, memory, and perception.

Over the years, researchers in the field have shifted made achievement the cornerstone of empirical research (Weiner, 1990). The concept of achievement gained traction due to its importance in so many aspects of life including but not limited to one's personal, professional, and academic life. The trends that began in the 1960s persisted until the 1980s where the motivational dialogue focused on anxiety, self-esteem, achievement motivation, and human behavior. Moving forward to the 1990s, the prominent approach to motivation that has persisted over the years is the cognitive approach. The cognitive approach to motivation explores how thinking effects one's motivation and behavior. The cognitive approach asserts that individuals give special

attention to the information being received and processed. The motivation(s) of an individual to engage in a behavior or not is the direct result of one's thoughts, beliefs, and expectations. Cognitive motivation is propelled by two essential components: the past experiences of the individual and processing the information being elicited.

Over the years, the scientific community has gained a greater appreciation for the concept of motivation and its real-world application. Understanding what motivates employees to be productive, students to learn, and children to be resilient in the face of adversity is essential in creating healthy work, learning, and household environments. However, there is still a great deal of work to be done in the field. There continues to be growing interest of emotion and the role it plays in motivation as emotion was neglected for years in earlier research (Weiner, 1990). The concepts that first emerged with early research continues to appear in the current research as a guiding force in field.

Motivation and Education

Access to education has been linked to economic success, helping to mitigate poverty, and overcoming other impediments countries tend to face. Education has always been framed as a means for success and an opportunity for all potential stakeholders to thrive. For instance, educating the youth leads to more informed voters, more competitive and skills-based employees, and sustained economic growth (Sharmilla, 2018). American economist Theodore Schultz wrote an article in the 1960s entitled "Capital Formation by Education" where he called for education to be treated as an investment in man and to treat its consequences as a form of capital (Holden & Biddle, 2017). Understanding the

sheer impact education has on a nation is important to its continued research as well as what propels individuals to pursue their education.

Motivation has long been studied, within the context of education. Motivation is understood to be the driving force that directs ones' behavior in various contexts including the professional and personal spheres (Akhtar et al., 2017). Gaining a greater understanding of what drives students to succeed academically and achieve their academic goals is important to understanding persistence in human behavior and promoting positive educational outcomes. Furthermore, educational institutions are invested in better understanding the learners' motivation as that information is a powerful tool in student retention initiatives (Rizkallah & Seitz, 2017).

Motivation has been at the center of the discussion of education for years. Former United States Secretary of Education, Terrel Bell, viewed motivation as crucial to the learning experience and believed it was a concept worthy of continuous research. In the 1980s then Secretary of Education Bell said, "There are three things to emphasize in teaching: The first is motivation, the second is motivation, and the third is (you guessed it) motivation" (Terrel H. Bell, U.S. Secretary of Education, 1981-1985). Motivated learners tend to invest more into the material and show higher levels of information retention (O'Connor, 2018).

Motivation has been categorized by researchers over the years into two separate entities: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is conceptualized as being the motivation that is derived from internal drive and feelings (Akhtar et al., 2017; Gom, 2009; Park & Choi, 2009; Hegarty, 2011). Students who are intrinsically motivated may

cite learning as enjoyable, take pride in their performance, or have a sense of accomplishment in obtaining high scores in a class. According to Mellard et al. (2013) different types of intrinsic motivation exist; however, the most applicable, in the context of academics, is personal and situational interests. Research has indicated that intrinsic motivation is positively correlated with student engagement, increased levels of persistence, and academic achievement (Mellard et al., 2013). Extrinsic motivation is the motivation that is driven by the desire to obtain some tangible reward or avoid punishment of some form (Akhtar et al., 2017). Students that cite wanting to please their parents or loved ones or wanting to obtain rewards incurred from being a high performer, may be extrinsically motivated. According to Akhtar et al. (2017) students who identify as extrinsically motivated may lose attention in their goals sooner. However, research supports the notion that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is positively correlated to academic motivation.

Both forms of motivation are important in the context of education and play a role in the behaviors of educators and students. According to Sogunro (2015) students with higher levels of motivation tend to perform better in their academics. As motivation is directly linked to the learning process it has been purported that lack of motivation can lead to difficulty in achieving ones outlined goals (Tasgin & Coskun, 2018). There are students who present as unmotivated and that directly impacts academic motivation, a subset of the concept of motivation. According to Tasgin and Coskun (2018), academic motivation serves as a determinant of academic performance and it positively influences how students approach their academic assignments and effort put forth to complete a

particular task. Students who lack adequate motivation have a higher likelihood of distancing themselves from learning and the academic environment.

An offshoot of motivational research, in the educational context, is the study of achievement motivation. Achievement motivation refers to the need for excellence in performance and can sometimes be referred to as “the pursuit of excellence” (Sharmilla, 2018). While the vast majority of motivational research has focused on intrinsic and extrinsic factors some have asserted that achievement motivation should be considered in the conversation to disrupt the established dichotomy (Locke & Schattke, 2018). A student can fulfill this need in various ways. Research in achievement motivation has focused on the desire of the student to gain competence and avoid incompetence, with studied subject matter. McClelland is credited with pioneering research in achievement motivation in the 1950s. A central tenant of achievement motivation is the improvements that are made along the learning journey, not necessarily enjoyment of the learning process or task at hand (Locke & Schattke, 2018).

Research indicates that motivating factors, be it intrinsic or extrinsic, may differ for the adult learner versus the child learner. According to Successful Registrar (2010) some of the common motivators for adult learners include but are not limited to: increased opportunities to succeed, personal or professional advancements, a challenge to learn novel material, respect from peers, and greater independence. According to Gyamera (2018) while economic and various social factors were identified, ultimately there was an overarching desire by the participants to “be somebody.” All participants wanted the opportunity to be a contributor in society whether through continued

employment opportunities or increased opportunities for social networking. Some of these motivating factors are seen in the research conducted on those pursuing their educational goals.

Culture and Motivation

Culture is understood to be the characteristics and knowledge base of a group of people that can influence their behavior. Culture includes the value, beliefs, customs, and language of a group. Culture has a significant impact on the lives of those in the group and is a determinant in how group members view their world and shape their social relationships (Guay, 2016). As such, there is a relationship between culture and motivation. According to Guay (2016), the values and beliefs of a culture help to influence student motivation and educational outcomes. For instance, in collectivistic cultures that emphasize family and group goals over individuals, students tend to assign greater weight to achievement as they view it as beneficial to the group as a whole.

Culture has shown to be particularly predictive of achievement motivation. The concept of achievement can be understood differently in varying cultures. Students in Latin America and Asia tend to have higher levels of academic motivation, than their European counterparts which can speak to the sense of obligation to the family that those cultures value (Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011). Different cultures also have different concepts of what it takes to achieve. Some cultures see achievement as ability versus efforts or working together versus working individually.

The role of social relationships is another concept that varies across cultures. Individualistic cultures, seen in the Western world, place a strong emphasis on being

more independent and outgoing to achieve individual goals. The quality of social relationships in collectivistic cultures tends to be stronger as there is the expectancy of maintaining group harmony and unity. Schools and classrooms, by definition, are social environments. Students are encouraged to interact with one another and their educators. According to Ariani (2017) social competence is an important factor in a student's academic motivation. Social competence is exhibited by one's ability to put to use social skills; the application of social skills aids in the achievement of goals through social interaction. Social and cognitive competencies have been found to be important in school adjustment. Better adjustment to the school setting helps one to better perform. The social support seen in functional social relationships can be a motivating factor. For instance, students who have a strong support system are more encouraged to explore their curiosity, increase individual effort, and have higher levels of self-efficacy (Ariani, 2017). Similarly, in collectivistic cultures positive social relationships tend to be fundamental in learning. Essentially, when students feel adequately supported by others, they tend to be more motivated to complete assignments and strive to meet with education goals (Ariani, 2017). Similarly, positive peer relationships can assist students in being more active learners, meaning they more readily engage with the material being taught.

Research, over time and across cultures, has demonstrated motivation can be interpreted differently depending on where one is. Goal directed and motivated behaviors remain an important topic across cultures but the means by which one accomplishes the

goal varies. Culture is a variable that permeates into many aspects of life and motivation is no exception.

Gender Differences and Motivation

The relationship between gender and motivation has roots in both psychological and educational research (Agger & Meece, 2015). Early research centered on personality theories and eventually shifted to cognitive theories that took into consideration affective processing (Agger & Meece, 2015). Research on motivation with adolescents and young adults, looking specifically within the context of education, has tended to be concentrated on mixed class samples (Mansfield & Vallance, 2011). Although the research highlighting gender differences is limited, researchers have attempted to obtain gender specific data by separating male and female students for statistical data. Understanding the existence of gender differences in levels of motivation is an important discussion point. In a study conducted by Asif et al. (2018), they found that male adolescents have lower rates of intrinsic motivation compared to females; males adolescents were also found to have lower levels of extrinsic motivation but higher levels of amotivation.

Research on gender and motivation has also found that men more than women tend to pursue performance goals over task mastery (Mansfield & Vallance, 2011). Men are often more likely to attribute any experienced failures to bad luck or some other external factors as opposed to lack of ability (Mansfield & Vallance, 2011). Interestingly, according to Agger and Meece (2015), girls tend to earn higher classroom grades in all subjects while boys tend to outperform girls in standardized tests.

Socialization and overall achievement experiences have shown to influence the development of gender differences in motivation (Agger & Meece, 2015). Gender differences develop early, and the home environment has shown to be the starting place in the development of confidence and values (Agger & Meece, 2015). Similarly, parents and teachers are instruments for reinforcing gender differences in motivation as seen by the expectations they lay out for girls versus boys or encouraging participation in different activities (Agger & Meece, 2015).

Research over the years has shown that gender and motivation are deeply intertwined (Agger & Meece, 2015; Mansfield & Vallance, 2011). However, while the theories guiding this research has shifted over time, the discrepancies in gender and motivation remain. Various factors contribute to the overarching differences that have been noted. Gaining greater insight into the present differences can help to close the gap between genders.

Student Disengagement

Student disengagement has been a concern for parents and educators for years; it is an issue that has warranted extensive academic research in an effort to appropriately combat it. Disengagement is defined based on the context of the research and there does not seem to be consensus. However, disengagement is more than just lack of engagement; it can be can be typified by lack of value in one's education, being ill motivated to achieve educational goals, or a lack of interaction with peers and teachers (Chipchase et al., 2017). The concept of student disengagement is not considered to be a steady state. Essentially, a student may exhibit varying degrees of disengagement

depending on the course, task, or teacher involved (Chipchase et al., 2017). County, state, and governmental programs have been implemented, over the years, to prevent students from dropping out or remaining on track for graduation. In 2013, it was estimated that approximately 7,000 high school students were dropping out daily. A disproportionate number of students who leave high school without a diploma live in poverty, are students of color, or students with some form of disability (Blazer & Hernandez, 2018). The research has indicated that there are multiple risk factors present that can lead to student disengagement. According to Blazer and Hernandez (2018), school dropout and student disengagement are often linked to four different domains: individual, academic, family-related, or school-related issues. Often, these risk factors can be co-occurring. Students who elect to discontinue their education face a number of disadvantages, making early intervention increasingly important. According to Blazer and Hernandez (2018), all students should be encouraged to engage and be given a supporting learning environment, but special initiatives should be implemented for those determined to be at a higher risk for dropout.

In the early 2000s, the U.S. federal government implemented the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which warranted including graduation rates into the accountability systems for high schools and placed greater attention on standardized testing (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2012). Lawmakers passed the legislation, in part, to better understand the impact of educational policies on students' engagement and success in school (Iachin et al., 2013). The issue of student dropout has also taken center stage globally, where

various European countries have implemented programs to reduce the dropout/leaving rate to less than 10% of their student population.

While numerous interventions have been utilized to rectify this problem, it remains a challenging task and special consideration should be given to the factors that lead to disengagement. The environment one is raised in also is important in the overall discussion of engagement. According to Palomar-Lever and Victorio-Estrada (2017) poverty has long been a predictor of academic success. Students living in poverty tend to have lower levels of academic performance which can reduce the chances of obtaining skilled employment in the future (Palomar-Lever & Victorio-Estrada, 2017). Similarly, students attending schooling in high-poverty neighborhood are subjected to higher rates of bullying, fighting, teacher turnover, and vacancies in teaching positions. As such, students may be subjected to more chaotic and unstable learning environments. Academic disengagement has also been seen linked to the relationship students have with their teachers (Duffy & Elwood, 2013). In looking at the teacher-student dynamic, there is a notable power differential. Students who feel disrespected by teachers or belittled by them tended to feel less valued, which in turn can affect motivation and overall behavior (Duffy & Elwood, 2013). Similarly, the relationship students have with their peers can influence engagement or disengagement. For instance, students who struggle academically may feel less than among the “nerds” or “good students.” As a result, these students may begin to align themselves with those who also struggle with engagement (Duffy & Elwood, 2013).

Juveniles who choose to reengage with academics, while incarcerated, may resolve their legal issues or be released prior to the completion of their classes. This release or legal resolution can potentially disrupt the academic process. According to Brazzell et al. (2009), formerly incarcerated individuals exhibit low participation rates in community educational programs due to lack of awareness of programming or lack of existing educational programming. Less than 20% of formerly incarcerated individuals knew of adult basic education or GED programs in their community. In essence, the disengagement, by the student, is not always intentional.

Student and academic disengagement are issues that have plagued the educational field for years; student dropout has been referred to in the educational field as a crisis (Blazer & Hernandez, 2018). Researchers studying the topic have found numerous contributing factors (financial concerns, lack of support, and academic difficulty), but there is yet to be a uniform solution to the problem (Blazer & Hernandez, 2018; Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2012). Continued research on the issue needs to be done to promote academic reengagement. School engagement has been found to be important for preventative purposes, including the promotion of school success, increase of academic motivation, and prevention of student alienation (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2012).

Education in the U.S. Juvenile Correctional Setting

The United States leads the world in incarceration rates and number of people behind bars (Brazzell et al., 2009). Over the years, greater attention has been given to the role that education plays in creating a better quality of life and positive economic outcomes for disadvantaged populations. In the seminal *Brown v. Board of Education*

(1954) case, the U.S. Supreme Court noted that, “it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity to an education (p. 483).” Within the scope of corrections, implementing and facilitating educational programs shifts the conceptualization of correctional facilities from warehouses-simply housing individuals to a place preparing individuals for their futures.

Children and adolescents involved in the correctional system have a right to education, which should be up to the standards of a public-school education (Leone & Wruble, 2015). According to Sullivan (2018), juvenile detention centers were created to promote rehabilitation rather than enforce punitive justice. The rehabilitative nature of the juvenile detention centers is one of the reasons it is a separate system (Sullivan, 2018). Numerous studies have demonstrated the role education plays in both the prevention and rehabilitation of delinquent youth (Sullivan, 2018). Children have the capacity to learn across environments, be it the home environment or social setting. However, formal education has proven to be the most beneficial in terms of its structure and applicability to continued education.

Dating all the way back to the 1970s, cases involving juvenile corrections have been an issue of contention and remained so. Many have argued that the education provided to incarcerated youths has been inferior and inadequate for a number of reasons including the length of the school day and qualifications of the instructors (Leone & Wruble, 2015). Studies over the years have consistently found that incarcerated youth meet the criteria for special education (Leone & Wruble, 2015; Brazzell et al., 2009). The

average length of stay for juvenile offenders can last anywhere from days to years, meaning a significant period of their education can be disrupted due to the legal system.

Educational programs, within the correctional setting, are often not held to the same standards of public schools due to fluctuating budgets, difficulty obtaining students' previous school records and transcripts, and lack of independence for educators (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018; Murphy, 2018). Moreover, the lack of funding makes it increasingly difficult to employ substitute teachers or provide up to date learning material. Lack of sufficient staff can take an undue burden on existing staff and can prevent those students who require more individualized attention from obtaining it. Furthermore, for those students who have behavioral issues correctional staff may place the student in isolation, as a punishment, which may interrupt educational services being provided (Leone & Wruble, 2015). Rarely is education a priority in the correctional setting as the security and safety of inmates and correctional officers takes center stage. Similarly, the intensive educational services and curriculum required for students with special needs and co-occurring mental health issues is too often not provided.

The issues of education reform, in the correctional setting, is often approached in a back-door manner. Litigation that may ensue is often stemming from a wrongful death or youth suicide (Leone & Wruble, 2015). In addressing a loss of some sort, other issues within the correctional institute will surface such as solitary confinement and availability of mental health services. Various class action lawsuits have been documented that launched investigations revealing a failure to provide adequate educational services

(Leone & Wruble, 2015). Each lawsuit led to policy and programming changes within the respective facilities.

Education, with the correctional setting, has often become intertwined with politics. In 2008, legislation known as the Second Chance Act (SCA) was enacted. The SCA aims to reduce the recidivism rate, rebuild ties with offenders and their families, and support-evidence based practices to support the community at large (Whetzel & McGrath, 2019). SCA focuses on those returning from state or federal prisons, local jails, and juvenile facilities. While the main focus of the SCA is mental/substance abuse treatment, housing, and job training, educational services are also provided to those interested (Schultz, 2006).

Similarly, in 2014, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Attorney General Eric Holder visited the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center School to introduce their guiding principles for high-quality correctional education. The five federally recommended guidelines are as follows:

- A safe, healthy facility-wide climate that prioritizes education provides the conditions for learning, and encourages the necessary behavioral and social support services that address the individual needs of all youths, including those with disabilities and English learners.
- Necessary funding to support educational opportunities for all youths within long-term secure care facilities, including those with disabilities and English learners, comparable to opportunities for peers who are not system-involved.

- Recruitment, employment, and retention of qualified education staff with skills relevant in juvenile justice settings who can positively impact long-term student outcomes through demonstrated abilities to create and sustain effective teaching and learning environments.
- Rigorous and relevant curricula aligned with state academic and career technical education standards that utilize instructional methods, tools, materials, and practices that promote college-and career readiness.
- Formal processes and procedures-through statutes, memoranda of understanding, and practices- that ensure successful navigation across child-serving systems and smooth reentry into communities (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

These guidelines were recommended in conjunction with suggested core activities to be incorporated, in an effort to enhance the educational experience and produce more positive educational outcomes. The overarching goal of the aforementioned principles is to provide incarcerated youths with a high-quality education which will help to bring about success, upon their release (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Education, for juveniles, within the correctional setting should be a right not a privilege. However, it seems to take a backseat to and be at the mercy of security and other correctional issues. Providing a quality education to incarcerated individuals remains a daunting task. Although, greater recognition has been given to the necessity of a proper education leading to necessary and fundamental policy changes at both the local

and national level. While there is still more work to be done, the sheer progress speaks to the importance of the issue.

Correctional Education and Societal Reentry

Exploring education and the link to corrections has long shown a significant relationship to inmate recidivism rates. According to Roth and Manger (2014), education has been considered an important factor in inmate rehabilitation. However, it should be noted that incarceration rates affect communities at differing rates (Brazzell et al., 2009). The addition of education, in correctional programming, has drawn greater attention to what exactly the benefits are post-incarceration. According to Brock (2017), prisons that provide educational opportunities to inmates experience a reduction in criminal behavior both within the prison system and upon the inmate's release. The research has consistently indicated that providing incarcerated individuals with an education helps to develop a sense of positive self-value and social skills (Brock, 2017; Lawton-Stricklor, 2018; Vacca; 2004). Individuals who acquire an education are more apt to use their newfound positive social identity in a productive manner. Similarly, Kaiser (2010) found that correctional education helps to promote a successful reentry to society by improving the potential wages for the returning offender. A study conducted by the RAND Correctional Education Project in 2015 found that incarcerated individuals who participated in either academic or vocation correctional education had higher odds of obtaining employment, post-release (Rogers, 2015).

Societal reentry is increasingly easier when previously incarcerated individuals leave correctional facilities with an education of some form. The likelihood of finding

gainful employment is higher when an individual has an education. Similarly, the development of some measure of self-worth and self-value decrease the chances of recidivating and makes for a more empowered individual who is more inclined to be a contributing member of society (Brock, 2017).

Characteristics of Juvenile Offenders

Juvenile delinquency is a serious social problem that has persisted over the years (Donges Jr., 2015). In 2010, it was estimated that approximately 1 million youths have had contact with the court systems in the United States (Sander et al., 2010). Having a clear or working understanding of the characteristics of juvenile or potential juvenile offenders can aid in preventing juvenile delinquency. Delinquent behavior has been linked to family discord, issues in the neighborhood, and on a larger scale, societal issues (Moitra et al., 2018).

Categorizing and addressing juvenile crimes can be a complex, convoluted process, but mitigating the precipitating catalyst is an issue worthy of resources and heightened awareness. Children who become involved in the juvenile justice system tend to have co-occurring mental health issues and are more apt to be behind academically. These same children may have experienced significant traumatic experiences as well (Martin et al., 2008). Some of the juvenile offenders accused of serious crimes tend to have histories involving physical and sexual abuse, exposure of parental substance use, and developmental/emotional issues (Martin et al., 2008). These children tend to come from more impoverished families, with lower levels of academic achievement (Leone & Wruble, 2015). Studies on children involved in the correctional system revealed a high

rate of special education eligibility and that these children were performing three to four years below their peers. A number of studies have documented the high rate of special education eligibility among the incarcerated youth (Leone & Wruble, 2015). Juveniles who have unhealthy and unstable home environments or are involved in the foster care system tend to be more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors (Martin et al., 2008). Also, male juvenile offenders, raised in single parent homes, are more than twice as likely to be arrested by the age of 14 as their counterparts in two parent households (Martin et al., 2008). While the rates of juvenile male offenders are significantly higher than females, female offenders' crime rates are on the rise. As such, knowing their specific criteria is of great importance in the mitigation of potential crime. According to Martin et al. (2008) female juvenile offenders tend to be, "poor, undereducated minority females who have complex histories of trauma and substances abuse" (p. 610). Early unwanted pregnancies and co-occurring mental illness in the form of anxiety and mood disorders tend to be predictive of female juvenile delinquency.

According to Karger and Currie-Rubin (2013) the education provided to juvenile offenders may be the last opportunity for these youth to reconnect with their education and graduate. A significant percentage of juvenile offenders who are released from custody do not return to school. Similarly, an early awareness and understanding of the preexisting or encountered juvenile delinquency risk factors can aid in preventing the continuation of or emergence of delinquent behaviors.

Educators in the Correctional Setting

As education is viewed as instrumental in reducing recidivism rates and as a source of rehabilitation, it should come as no surprise that the educators entrusted with teaching the youth, in the correctional setting, are worthy of discussion. According to Michals and Kessler (2015), educators in the correctional setting can be subdivided into two categories: those who view the correctional setting as an important site for education and those who view education as a radical intervention to combat social injustices and political strife. Some educators are drawn to the setting strictly due to curiosity, while others view it as an opportunity to enrich the lives of those incarcerated (Michals & Kessler, 2015).

Well trained and engaging teachers are the backbone of any educational system. Correctional systems require that their teaching staff, at minimum, be certified as a public-school teacher. The Correctional Education Association (CEA) is an accrediting agency for both adult and juvenile correctional education systems across the nation (Brazzell et al., 2009). The CEA and other organizations consistently offer educators training courses in teaching in corrections and adapting curriculum to special populations.

Educators in the correctional setting face unique challenges compared to their public-school counterparts. Teaching in a locked correctional setting can pose both behavioral and instructional hurdles (Murphy, 2018). Novice teachers will frequently experience feelings of confusion and go through an adjustments period acclimating to jail or prison culture. A true challenge for some teachers can be coming to the realization of what makes up the correctional institution-the confinements of possible criminals and

individuals who may be a public safety concern (Michals & Kessler, 2015). Infrequently are educational staff and correctional staff trained together to understand each other's role. As such, educators are often teaching at the mercy of the security staff. Teachers in the correctional setting may come into the field with little to no background about the setting or specific demographic. While security in a jail or prison setting is of the utmost importance, for teachers the number of activities and range of assignments is quite frequently limited due to the security procedures (Becktold, 2001). Similarly, bringing in any additional learning material or equipment requires prior authorization, which is not always an expeditious process (Michals & Kessler, 2015). Correctional educators attempt to provide the best possible education to their students while still working within the security parameters.

Another unique challenge of the correctional educators is the demographic they work with daily. The educational level of the students in a jail or prison can vary tremendously-from complete illiteracy to some level of high school education (Brazzell et al., 2009). Depending on the educational program requirements at a facility, a class can have learners of all different skill sets lumped together. Additionally, teachers have recognized that their students can be manipulative and engaged in power struggles amongst themselves that can complicate the learning process (Michals & Kessler, 2015). There is also an emotional stress attached to the job. At times, teachers do not find out until the last minute that the student they were working with has been moved, despite being close to graduating. Similarly, teachers do not have the opportunity to override

correctional decisions and students may be permanently removed from class due to behavioral issues (Michal & Kessler, 2015).

Educators and educational programming take a back seat to the correctional system. In local jails especially, educators begin to invest in programming and their students only for the stay to be brief. Educators often struggle with providing programming to a population that steadily changes. Similarly, transfers between jails and facility lockdowns can disrupt the educational process (Brazzell et al., 2009).

The aforementioned issues contribute to the high turnover rate of educators in the correctional setting. According to Kamrath and Gregg (2018) correctional institutes rarely provide or require involvement in professional development programs or have established coaching or mentorship programs that are seen in the traditional educational setting. As such, some teachers are left to navigate unfamiliar waters in a landscape they were never trained for. For some educators, feeling ill-prepared, having limited support, and working in isolation leads to short-lived careers. High teacher turnover rates can lead to undue to stress for correctional administrator as well as their incarcerated students (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018). In a survey conducted amongst correctional educators some of the most prominent factors contributing to their decision to leave the correctional classroom included: inadequate support from administrators, lack of collaboration with colleagues, overall job dissatisfaction, inadequate technological resources, and high teacher/student ratios (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018).

Teachers are and will forever be considered agents of change, irrespective of the teaching environment. However, for students to thrive in the educational setting they

need teachers who are well-equipped, supported, and motivated to educate. The correctional setting poses unique challenges to its educators; with open lines of communication between correctional staff and teachers many issues can be addressed more directly potentially leading to more positive outcomes.

Technology in Correctional Education

Technology has revolutionized the world in which individuals live, from the way they order food and communicate with one another to the way in which they learn. Technology has been looked at as a means for enriching the educational landscape. However, proper implementation of technology in any arena requires some digital literacy on the part of the learner. As educators are becoming more adept to the benefits of technology it has permeated into the academic sphere including the correctional academic sphere.

According to Chappell and Shippen (2013), if correctional education is to prove relevant and remain an asset to incarcerated students, then technology must be included in the conversation. The use of technology in corrections can help to address two very salient issues: the various learning needs of the inmates and the staffing issues encountered in correctional classrooms (Chappell & Shippen, 2013). Research over the years has consistently found that those in jails and prisons function well below those in the general population (Chappell & Shippen, 2013; Sullivan, 2018; Vacca, 2004). These inmates tend to have lower levels of math and reading comprehension skills and are typically students who leave high school without a diploma. The overrepresentation of those with academic deficiencies and delays in the correctional setting poses a challenge

to correctional educators. Being able to meet the needs of such a diverse bunch is something that can be addressed through the use of technology. Technology allows for individualized instruction and to some degree takes the burden off the instructor of providing one-on-one instruction to students. According to Chappell and Shippen (2013), incarcerated students who receive individual instruction tend to have greater academic achievement than those learning solely in the group setting. Another issue faced by those in the correctional educational sphere is the continuous undersupply of instructors. According to Chappell and Shippen (2013), many facilities lack the necessary instructors to provide the depth and breadth of education needed. Technology helps to mediate this problem by providing quality educational programming to students through the use of audio/visual aids and online learning systems (Chappell & Shippen, 2013; Gorgol & Sponsler, 2011).

In 2016, the Indiana Lawyer published an article that looked at a 2-year program at Madison Juvenile Correctional Facility where adolescent girls had access to computer tablets. The article discussed the significant decline in filed grievances and increase in reading (Odendahl, 2016). The technology was introduced to help students to keep pace with their traditional classroom counterparts. Students were able to use the tablets to access their classroom curriculum, do homework, use the digital library, and as a reward play educational games (Odendahl, 2016). The software on the tablet was modified to prevent access to the internet. The state of Indiana found that providing controlled access to technology helped to close the gap in learning, between incarcerated and non-incarcerated students.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education produced a study that utilized technology in corrections to help in reducing recidivism rates and ease the reentry process. According to the study, inmates who participated in correctional education programs were 43% less likely to return to prison than those who did not (Tolbert & Hudson, 2015). Furthermore, familiarity with technology prior to release allowed for inmates to have more successful releases as they were able to secure housing, address outstanding legal issues, and apply for jobs (Tolbert & Hudson, 2015). The benefits of introducing technology into the correctional sphere does not just have roots nationally-but rather internationally. According to Tolbert and Hudson (2015), a number of foreign governments including Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand have been exploring and implementing correctional education initiatives that include access to technology-based education and career resources.

However, despite the many benefits of utilizing and implementing technology into the correctional setting it still poses a serious security risk. The vast majority of correctional facilities are reluctant to introduce technology to their inmates due to the potential security risk. According to Tolbert and Hudson (2015), all correctional agencies are concerned with inmates having access to technology and potentially contacting victims, storing prohibited content and images, or engaging in further criminal activity. Correctional administrators also vocalize concerns about their own staff misusing technology. Correctional facilities are also resistant to technology due to the associated fee. The purchasing and maintenance of technological equipment requires funding

(Tolbert & Hudson, 2015). Lastly, using technology in the correctional setting often requires shifting the perception of correctional administrators and policy makers as to whether educational technology is an appropriate and cost-effective service to provide (Tolbert & Hudson, 2015).

Technology has made the lives of its users significantly easier, irrespective of where it is utilized. It has been argued that incarcerated individuals should not be exempt from the benefits of technology. Successful implementation of technology into correctional education has been linked to better educational outcomes due to individualized instruction, lower rates of recidivism, and easier reintegration post-release (Chappell & Shippen, 2013; Tolbert & Hudson, 2015). However, technology in the correctional setting is still in the early stages because it is a potential security issue (Tolbert & Hudson, 2015). For instance, access to internet or computers could potentially lead to inappropriate contact between inmates and their victims. Similarly, access to the outside world could be the breeding ground for facilitating an escape (Chappell & Shippen, 2013). Correctional staff can be reluctant to allow for technological devices in their facilities, despite its numerous benefits.

Education Offered by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice

The Florida state statute has specific provisions that address K-12 education. Section 1003.01 of the Florida Statute specifically addresses juvenile justice education programs and schools. Juvenile justice education programs or schools is defined as follows, “programs or schools operating for the purpose of providing educational services to youth in Department of Juvenile Justice programs, for a school year comprised of 250

days of instruction distributed over 12 months” (s. 1003.01, F.S.). Within the scope of juvenile justice education are the specific providers, which may consist of the DJJ, the correctional staff, and contractors under the umbrella of the DJJ that provide treatment, care, or youth in juvenile justice programs. Students in the care of Florida’s DJJ program are not recipients of a traditional education due to their pending legal charges or the sentences they may be facing. Section 1003.52 of the Florida Statute specifically outlines that juvenile justice education programs should, at a minimum, include career readiness, truancy, and dropout prevention programs (Florida State Statute, 2019). Programming is broken down into different groups but includes subject matter such as interpersonal skills, decision-making skills, conflict resolutions skills, coping with stress, and industry recognized certifications.

The Florida DJJ is a state-run agency that is responsible for operating juvenile detention centers. Currently, DJJ operates 21 detention centers, in 21 separate counties, within the state. Youth offenders who have met a specific criterion for arrest are taken into custody by law enforcements officers and transported to the closest receiving facility (DJJ, n.d.). Once at the facility, youth offenders, under the age of 18 are screened to determine whether they are appropriate to be detained. While in DJJ custody, youth offenders have access to educational, mental health, substance abuse, and medical services (DJJ, n.d.). DJJ is considered a short-term program with the length of stay lasting anywhere from 24 hours to 21 days. Young adults that require a stay over the 21-day mark are typically placed into long term residential or non-residential programs (DJJ, n.d.).

When a student is enrolled in educational programming at DJJ, DJJ will work with a student's local school district to obtain educational records to best provide individualized learning goals and objectives into educational programming. DJJ also works to meet the educational needs of special education students (DJJ, n.d.).

Under the scope of DJJ, the Office of Education works in conjunction with the Florida Department of Education and local school districts to ensure implemented DJJ programming is in compliance with all outlined state and federal educational guidelines. Educational programs at DJJ incorporate CAPE courses which focus on career building, various lines of work, and life skills (DJJ, 2012). With continued growth in the economy, more and more jobs are requiring post-secondary education or technical skills.

According to Platt et al. (2006) youths entering the correctional setting possess a number of risk factors which makes them a challenging population to appropriately design educational programming for. For instance, youth offenders often tend to struggle with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health issues. However, the state of Florida has continuously modified their educational programs to better accommodate this population and ensure educational requirements are being met.

Alternative Education in Florida

The educational system in the state of Florida, much like other states, does not always come packaged in a perfect box. Some students, commonly known as nontraditional students, fail to thrive in the traditional classroom setting, which has led to the emergence alternative education programs (Murray & Holt, 2014). According to Shillingford and Karlin (2013), the term nontraditional student encompasses those who

do not possess a high school diploma, delayed their enrollment into college, attend school at a part time basis, is a single parent, or works a full-time job while enrolled in school. There are numerous reasons why students are unsuccessful in the traditional classroom setting such as: schools that fail to acknowledge differing learning styles, students having problematic home environments, being credit deficient, being below grade level in common core areas, and behavioral issues (Murray & Holt, 2014).

When thinking about alternative education in the state of Florida the first thing that comes to mind is online or distance learning. Florida leads the nation in its online education initiative. Online education has become more mainstream in the collegiate realm; however it is currently being used in the middle school and high school domains as well. Former Florida House Speaker Will Weatherford was a strong proponent for online education in the state believing it made the state more competitive and ensured better opportunities for students (Walker, 2013). In 1997, the state launched Florida Virtual School, which offers approximately 120 online courses to middle and high school students. Enrollment into Florida Virtual School occurs throughout the year and students can be enrolled part time or full time. Part-time enrollment into Florida Virtual School allows for the opportunity for blended learning. Blended learning occurs when students learn in part at a brick-and-mortar learning institute under the supervision of an instructor as well as through an online system where the student is able to determine the location, pace, and path of the learning (Baugh, 2015). While incarcerated students often lack access to the internet, internet-based learning is occasionally used in some prison systems across the nation.

The learning landscape has shifted tremendously over the years in an effort to accommodate more non-traditional learners. Alternative learning programs are typified by more student-supported learning environments, smaller class sizes, and an emphasis on individualized attention (Murray & Holt, 2014). In the state of Florida, virtual learning has been incorporated into middle and high schools as well as at the collegiate level. Virtual learning has provided those who struggle in the classroom setting or those who cannot attend normal schooling to still thrive academically.

General Education Development Exam

The General Education Development (GED) was originally designed as a high school credentialing process for World War II veterans, who were seeking to complete their education. As such, the GED is typically understood to be the equivalent of a high school diploma. The GED is a way for students who have not earned a high school diploma to be able to earn the necessary credentials to move on to college and pursue greater employment opportunities (Tuck, 2012). The GED exam is produced and administered by the American Council on Education's GED testing service (Cohen, 2018). In order to pass the GED test, students need to have command of various subject matter including science, social studies, math, and English. Test takers need to be able to exercise critical thinking skills. Over time, the GED has become more readily available to civilians and high school students (Horne et al., 2012). It is estimated that 16 to 19-year-olds account for the largest percentage of GED enrollees (Horne et al., 2012). According to Zajacova and Montez (2017), the number of GED recipients has exceeded half a million individuals, annually.

It has been proposed, by some, that the dropout rate may be linked to GED enrollment. Student frustration with the public-school system and the plethora of standardized tests, large class sizes and little individual attention, and even issues with bullying and acclimation have all been linked to school dropout (Murray & Holt, 2014). For those who drop out but still have a desire to complete their education, the GED becomes increasingly important.

General Education Development Participation

Offering GED programs in the correctional setting has proven to be a cost-effective way to reduce the recidivism rate. According to Berridge and Goebel (2013), as the prison population surges in the United States the percentage of prisoners participating in education programs has declined. Obtaining an education while incarcerated has consistently proven to be a tool to combat crime as it leads to more positive societal reentry and better individual outcomes. Berridge and Goebel (2013) found for both male and female inmates GED participation centered around three sub-themes: achievement of a life goal, a desire for increased self-worth, and instructor encouragement. Male inmates viewed obtaining a GED as a direct link to financial success and as a steppingstone to continued education. Both male and female inmates viewed participation in the GED program as a way of rewriting their narrative and carving out a better future for themselves (Berridge & Goebel, 2013).

Many instructors believe in the benefits of a GED education but struggle to get students into the classroom. According to Berridge and Goebel (2013) low participation numbers may be directly related to self-esteem-many inmates do not view themselves as

smart enough to participate in schooling or have had negative educational experiences in the past serving as a deterrent. Further, there are obstacles to GED participation-namely correctional staff. Correctional staff and protocols including but not limited to: lockdowns, class cancellations, and various legal reason all serve to prevent consistent class attendance (Berridge & Goebel, 2013).

The research has identified both benefits and setbacks to GED participation. According to Berridge and Goebel (2013), students who pass their GED exam receive a boost in their self-confidence and often vocalize their pride in their accomplishments and level of intelligence. Similarly, correctional staff witnessed a noticeable change in the behavior of students as evidenced by a decrease in disciplinary problems and fights.

There are also barriers that present themselves for adult learners who are not involved in the criminal justice system. According to King (2002), many adult education providers do not make accommodation for families making it difficult for learners that have children. Also, some participants found the courses to be of poor quality and too sparsely placed making enrollment and consistent attendance an issue (King, 2002).

How the study's participants developed and maintain motivation after leaving a correctional facility to either continue or begin a GED program is the basis of the dissertation's problem statement and purpose. Research centered on those presently incarcerated found that motivation to begin or complete their education was frequently driven by the opportunities it would lead to post-release such as potential financial stability, greater opportunities for gainful employment, and stronger familial ties. This research study served to expand upon previous research by looking at the motivation and

experiences of those whom, to some degree, have reintegrated back into society but still made educational attainment a priority. This research study provided firsthand accounts of those who have successfully reengaged with their academics apart from possible coercion from correctional or educational staff members.

Summary and Conclusions

The relationship between educational attainment and the correctional setting remains interconnected. Incarcerated individuals working towards and obtaining an education while incarcerated consistently yields more positive outcomes. Most of the research cited focused on those working on meeting educational goals, while still incarcerated. In an effort to build upon the existing literature, this research focused on the experiences of the young adult learners who pursue their educational goals post release, independent of any correctional influences or guidance.

Research on education in the correctional setting was introduced into the professional literature in 1950s. Although research on education in the correctional field has persisted over the years, there is a notable gap in providing a voice to those previously incarcerated individuals. It is time for those who no longer have the structure and encouragement from correctional staff to understand what propels them to complete their education.

In this review, I examined the history of motivation in the educational domain, motivation as it relates to culture, gender, juvenile correctional educational, and the literature encompassing previously conducted studies on motivation and the young adult

population previously incarcerated. Chapter 3 consists of the research design and rationale, the researcher's role, the data collection process, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to provide a greater exploration into the motivation that contributes to academic reintegration for young adult learners, for those who were previously involved in the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice system as adolescent learners. I selected a qualitative research design as the research approach to provide a deeper level of insight into the individual motivational factors for learners' following through on their academic goals. The guiding RQs for this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of individuals who have previously been involved in the criminal justice system who are reintegrating into the high school and postsecondary trainings?

RQ2: How do those individuals who have previously been involved in the legal system motivate themselves to return to their academics?

This chapter includes a discussion of the research design and rationale; role of the researcher; methodology, including instrumentation; and issues of trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative research provides the opportunity for researchers to explore a specific phenomenon and better understand the rationale behind its occurrence (Williams & Moser, 2019). In doing so, a researcher can generate a great deal of rich information. Qualitative research is explorative in nature and helps researchers to gain greater insight into the motivation and opinions of the participants.

For this study, I used a thematic analysis approach to explore the motivational factors present in young adult learners who elected to pursue their education after previous delay due to involvement in the justice system. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is relevant to qualitative research because it provides a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within the data set (Nowell et al., 2017). A properly conducted thematic analysis helps to produce trustworthy and insightful findings. Thematic analysis was selected as the approach for this study because it is a flexible approach that can easily be modified to meet the needs of the study while simultaneously providing a rich and detailed account of the data (Nowell et al., 2017).

I asked the interviewees the same questions in the same order to ensure some measure of uniformity in the interview process. The semistructured nature of the interview process allowed flexibility for me and the participants (see McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The RQs of this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of individuals who have previously been involved in the criminal justice system who are reintegrating into the high school and postsecondary trainings?

RQ2: How do those individuals who have previously been involved in the legal system motivate themselves to return to their academics?

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is especially important. According to Thurairajah (2019), the relationship between the researcher and their

participants is essential; only by cultivating this relationship can the researcher acquire information. The researcher is the main instrument in the data collection process. For this research study, I selected participants and conducted a series of semistructured interviews, as well as collected, analyzed, and coded the gathered data. As the researcher, I transcribed the data I collected to look for emergent themes and codes.

In the semistructured interviews, participants answered the primary interview questions while also being able to expand on their experiences in reengaging with their academics. As participants shared the research asked follow up questions to allow for better clarification. Participants described the various motivational factors leading up to their choice to reintegrate into the educational field.

As I currently work in the correctional setting, there were some potential biases related to the research study that I must disclose. I am a proponent of education attainment and frequently address the topic with my patients in the therapeutic setting. Additionally, the study was conducted in the same county where I am currently employed. To prevent any additional bias, none of the study participants had previous interaction with me while incarcerated. Participants were made aware of my status as a student and clinician but not the context in which my clinical work was conducted so as to mitigate the potential for participants censoring or filter their responses. Similarly, participants may have been housed at my correctional site; they may have had knowledge of my role or title at the facility, but they did not have a therapeutic history with me.

Methodology

I used a thematic analysis approach to explore the experiences of young adult learners who had their education disrupted due to involvement in the justice system. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analytic method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is popular in qualitative research because it is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis also acknowledges the active role that the researcher plays in identifying reoccurring patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The aspects of thematic analysis were instrumental in this research on the exploration of motivational factors in academic reengagement among young adult learners who had their education disrupted due to involvement in the justice system.

Data collection and analysis, in particular, thematic analysis, are ongoing processes that require detailed note-taking from start to finish. As such, I diligently recorded ideas and potential themes as I interacted with the data. Note-taking was useful in analyzing data obtained from participant interviews. I closely followed the six phases of thematic analysis followed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first step in the thematic analysis process was becoming familiar with the data. Familiarization comes from reading and rereading transcripts, transcribing information, listening to audio recording, and jotting down initial ideas. Second, I began to develop some initial codes. The third step in the process was to search for themes in the data. The fourth step included a more refined analysis of the themes and the development of a thematic map. In the fifth step,

the themes were more refined and defined. The sixth step consisted of the development of the final report, which relayed the findings of the analysis.

Participant Selection Logic

I used purposeful sampling to select the participants for this qualitative study. Purposeful sampling allows for researchers to obtain participants in their target population (Creswell, 2014). Similarly, an advantage of utilizing a purposeful sample for this study was that it allowed for contact to be made with various educational institutions and seek out participants who met the criteria of the study. The participants for this study were young adult learners who were in the process of working on completing their GED or high school diploma in Broward County, Florida. I recruited participants through the use of flyers provided to the 10 included schools; the flyers explicitly mentioned inclusion in the study required previous involvement in the criminal justice system. I strove to recruit 10 young adult learners or until data saturation occurred in the data collection. Data saturation occurs in qualitative research when there is enough information to replicate the study, further coding is no longer necessary, and new information is no longer being generated (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation is an important aspect in a study's overall validity. Other researchers have proposed that researchers who conduct interviews draw their samples in multiples of 10 to reach data saturation (Saunders et al., 2018).

The sample included in this study was drawn from the population of young adult students in Broward County, presently enrolled in GED courses in preparation for taking the exam to earn their high school diploma. The sample also included students enrolled in

adult high school diploma courses, who only needed a few remaining credits to meet the requirements for graduation. Adult learners in Broward County have numerous options in how to proceed in an effort to obtain their diploma. Students are offered classes throughout the day, in various locations throughout the county. Students are given the opportunity to proceed at their designated pace, have round the clock access to material, and are being taught by certified teachers who specialize in working with the adult population. The principal at each educational institution was contacted prior to the data collection process to obtain permission for the study to take place. The current research has consistently reflected populations, either working on their educational goals, while still incarcerated at either the county jail or prison facilities.

Instrumentation

I conducted the interviews with adult participants who voluntarily agreed to engage in the study. Individual interviews were conducted virtually using the telephone.

All participants were in a private room at the learning institute for their interview.

Interviews were also tape recorded as well for further analysis. Each interview consisted of semistructured interview questions related to participant experiences (see Appendix).

The semistructured nature of the interview questions allowed me to probe further for clarification and/or additional follow-up information pertinent to the questions.

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), interviews provide deep, rich, individualized, and contextualized data that is centrally important to qualitative research. The primary goal of interviews in qualitative research is to gain insight into participants lived experiences. In utilizing interviews, I hoped to gain an in-depth understanding of participants'

experiences. Through the interview process, offering a non-judgmental approach provided the comfort necessary for participants to disclose freely of their personal experiences and gain greater insight into the motivational factors that played a role in their decision-making process.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Selection

I utilized a purposeful sampling recruited from 10 of the local schools that offer adult learning programs. Only students who are on track to graduate and who have maintained consistent attendance were contacted for inclusion into the study. Consent forms were emailed to each participant, prior to the interview process.

Recruitment

The first step in participant recruitment and seeking out participants was to converse with staff, via email, at the selected adult learning institutions and meet with staff, if possible, and provide paper fliers related to the study. Each paper flier provided the criteria for participation as well as the purpose of the research study. The flier included contact information for me in the form a newly created email address for data collection. The second step in the recruitment process was to set up phone session with adult learning educators and speak with them about any appropriate participants. Upon an appropriate referral, the recruitment flier was emailed to potential participants with my contact information.

The next step in the recruitment process was to respond to interested participants. Each response thanked participants for their response and willingness to participate. Additionally, more detailed information was provided to the potential participants about

the study and its purpose. Each email response included an electronically attached informed consent document. All potential participants were encouraged to reply back with their completed informed consent document. The last step in the recruitment process was going over the potential participant applicants and making a selection. Participants were selected based on their previous involvement in the juvenile justice system and current standing towards graduation or completion of their GED. Selected participants were contacted via email to arrange a time to conduct a Zoom interview at their current learning institutions. Zoom is a communication technology that allows for videoconferencing. All interviews took place over the course of 4 weeks. As I discuss in Chapter 4, after learning about participants' preferences, I opted to conduct the interviews for this study via the telephone.

Data Collection

I served as the main instrument for data collection. Data were obtained through the use of a series of semistructured interviews. I initially planned to use the videoconferencing platform Zoom to conduct the interviews; at the request of participants, I conducted the interviews via telephone. During the interviews, I was at a home office while participants were on school property in a library study room. Each interviewee was asked the interview questions, in the same order, and given the opportunity to freely share about their educational experiences. The RQs were designed to have the participants open up about their personal lived experiences to appropriately fulfill the purpose of the study.

Each conducted interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The goal of each interview was to provide as much detailed information about each participant's experience and motivations in reengaging with their education. Each interview began in the same manner, with extended greetings and introductions as well as an overview of the study's purpose. I also went over the signed informed consent form, providing a reminder that participation was strictly voluntary in nature and could be terminated upon participant discretion. Participants were reminded that no identifying information was included in the study so as to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Similarly, participants were reminded that all of their responses would be recorded to aid in the data analysis process but would be secured appropriately.

Each interview will be conducted electronically, and participants' answers will be recorded using an electronic tape recorder for convenience of further analysis. Interviewees provided their initials as opposed to names. This coding system aided me in protecting the privacy of the participants as well as providing a measure of anonymity. The information that was gathered was then typed out into a transcript document for later reference. The formatting of the semistructured interviews allowed for the interviewee to play a more active role in the discourse and allow for more fluidity in their narrative.

Upon completion of each interview, I asked participants if there was any additional information they would like to share or felt was necessary for inclusion. Each participant was thanked for their participation and sharing freely of their experiences. I also informed them that I will keep their individual contact information, should contact need to be made later on in the process. The data collection process will be completed

with the appropriate storage of the data; data will be stored for 5 years after the publication of the study and thereupon will be destroyed using shredding and hard drive erasing methods.

Data Analysis Plan

From an analytic perspective, semistructured interviews compare participant responses by item. As the participants were all asked the same questions, in the exact same order, the data collected is comparable. The gathered data were analyzed through the use of a thematic analysis approach and coding. Participants recounted their personal experiences and feelings that played a central role in leading to the decision to reengage with their academics, in the pursuit of a GED or diploma.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative, analytic method within the field of psychology. Thematic analysis is a method used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes found in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher plays an active role in identifying the themes present in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six phases that were followed closely during the data analysis process including: familiarization with the data collected, generating an initial list of codes, looking for potential themes, refinement of the initial emergent themes, defining prominent and noteworthy themes, and a final analysis to report on the collected data. The data collected was coded manually and analyzed using gathered handwritten notes, taken during the interview process, and previously collected tape recordings. I carefully read through the collection of notes, multiple times, on the participants personal experiences and began dividing the information into meaningful units.

Thematic analysis has proven to be a flexible and useful research tool that aids researchers in providing a rich and detailed account of the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Javadi and Zarea (2016) a good thematic analysis can be helpful in reflecting and clarifying the reality of its participants. Upon completion of the manual coding process, all of the data analysis paperwork and additional documents will be secured safely.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The issue of credibility is important to establishing trustworthiness. Credibility refers to the truth of the data or the participant views and the interpretation and representation of them by the researcher (Cope, 2014). A qualitative study is considered credible if the description of the human experiences is immediately recognized by individuals that share the same experiences (Cope, 2014). Credibility of qualitative inquiry depends on four distinct but related elements: systematic, in-depth fieldwork that yields high quality data, systematic and conscientious analysis of data, credibility of the inquirer, which depends on the training, experience, and status of self, and readers' and users' philosophical belief in the value of the qualitative research (Patton, 1999).

To enhance the credibility of this research study, I encouraged the participants to speak openly and expand upon the answers they provide. In allowing for clarification and participant elaboration, I was able to determine any existing idea repetition in their responses. Additionally, to promote credibility and with the consent of all participants I recorded the interview sessions to accurately transcribe them and identify any emergent

themes. In order to avoid threatening credibility, all potential biases related to the study were disclosed.

Transferability

In qualitative studies, transferability refers to the degree to which the results of the research can be transferred to other contexts with other participants (Anney, 2014). A well outlined description of the participant selection process, description of the data, and emergent themes of the study were provided. With this information, future researchers will be better able to determine if the study design is applicable to their setting. In order to establish transferability a thick description of the phenomenon being studied was provided so as to allow readers to develop a proper understanding about the phenomenon being studied and make a determination about transferability.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the evidence of consistency in data collection, analysis, and reporting. It also means that any sort of adjustments made in the research process are documented and explained appropriately (Burkholder et al., 2019). The dependability of the research study was achieved through a clear and well-developed research design taking into consideration thorough data collection, data analysis, congruent RQs, and transcription of the data using handwritten notes and recordings from interview sessions.

Confirmability

Confirmability is understood to be the degree to which the results of a research study can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Anney, 2014). By

demonstrating confirmability, the researcher ensures the findings can be derived directly from the gathered data (Anney, 2014). As such, it is important that the researcher be aware of not influencing the results or the information gathered. In order to avoid this undue influence, I will remain mindful of the way in which I ask the RQs. Furthermore, to address confirmability I was mindful of my tone, the presence of nonverbal cues during the interview process, and refrained from discouraging any disengagement on the part of the participant.

Ethical Procedures

I conducted this research study per the guidelines of Walden University's Institutional Review Board, after receiving their consent and approval to move forward (approval no. 03-02-21-0675342). The study was founded on the collection of interviews from young adult participants, who were previously involved in the criminal justice system in some capacity. As such, as former offenders they are considered a vulnerable population. In research it is important to safeguard vulnerable populations from any sort of exploitation. For this research study, safeguards included: conducting all interviews in private area at the learning institute, using participant initials to aid in anonymity, and conducting all interviews on a voluntary basis where attrition was not prohibited. Contact with participants was made only after receiving Institutional Review Board approval and signed consent forms.

Summary

The purpose of this research study was to better understand the experiences and motivating factors of young adult learners who fully reengaged with their education after

a delay due to legal involvement. I utilized a thematic analysis approach in this research study as well as semistructured interviews to best capture their personal lived experiences. This chapter provided a detailed account of the study's methodology, participant selection and recruitment methods, and data analysis plan. In Chapter 4, I will provide the research study's findings. Information gathered from the interviews, further data collection, data analysis will all be detailed extensively.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

I conducted this qualitative research study to explore and better understand the motivational factors for adult learners who elect to voluntarily reengage with their learning following a correctional delay. Thematic analysis was utilized to further analyze the emergent themes present in the data. I sought to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of individuals who have previously been involved in the criminal justice system who are reintegrating into the high school and postsecondary trainings?

RQ2: How do those individuals who have previously been involved in the legal system motivate themselves to return to their academics?

The information and insight from this research study could be useful to educators and correctional staff in addressing factors that require early intervention or mitigation. By doing so, they may be able to reduce later recidivism rates among the study population. Additionally, information learned from this study could be used in community-based divergence programs with populations at risk for recidivism. Early onset interventions can yield positive outcomes (Hall, 2015). This chapter will include information about the research setting, participant pool, data collection, and data analysis. I will also present data analysis results and provide evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

I conducted semistructured phone interviews to explore the motivational factors of eight adult learners who reengaged with their education postincarceration. I conducted

each of these interviews from my home at times that were convenient for the participants. All participants were asked the same eight open-ended interview questions. All interviews were audio recorded, using an electronic recording device. Audio files from the electronic device were immediately transferred to a secure Google drive, where they were coded using participants first and last name initial. As audio files were all stored together in one folder, they were easily accessible for the transcription process. In total, all eight interviews were conducted using the phone.

Prior to each interview, I provided each participant with a consent form to read, sign, and later electronically return to me. The informed consent form clearly outlined the background of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality measures, and the risk and benefits of participation. The informed consent also included information about how to drop out of the study. All participants were reminded of the informed consent form at the onset of their interview. No participants opted to terminate the interview or drop out from the study during the interview process. At the onset of their interview, participants provided their initials to be used for further identification. I was not made aware of any personal or organizational conditions that influenced any of the participants or their interview experience.

Demographics

Ten participants reached out to me via email to affirm their interest in participating in the study. I sent an email to each prospective participant containing the study's informed consent. Prospective participants were instructed to read through the consent form and respond to the email with their signed consent. Upon receipt of the

signed consent form, I reached out to interested individuals to coordinate the most convenient interview times for them. Two participants did not complete the consent form and notified me that they were no longer interested in participating in the study. The remaining eight participants individually conveyed they did not feel comfortable conducting Zoom interviews and preferred phone interviews instead. Upon conferral with my chair, I completed audio recorded phone interviews with eight formerly incarcerated adult learners. As requested on the recruitment flyer, all participants were over the age of 18 and actively working on their diploma or GED. Three of the participants were male; five were women. No other demographic information was gathered. However, participants did provide their first and last name during the consent process.

Data Collection

I obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board to begin data collection on March 2, 2021 (approval no. 03-02-21-0675342). After obtaining this permission, I posted the recruitment flyer at local facilities that cater to adult learners on April 19, 2021. I electronically posted my recruitment flyer on pages of various learning institutions and outreach groups for formerly incarcerated individuals. The flyer provided a brief description of criteria for participation and contact information. Following limited response to the posted flyers, I began to reach out on social media Facebook pages and Instagram on June 2, 2021. The recruitment flyer was posted on numerous pages including those geared toward adults working on their GED, adult learning facilities, formerly incarcerated support groups, and reentry programs. After approximately 3 weeks of being on social media, I began to get inquiries. I recruited six

of the eight participants from social media and two from word-of-mouth from others who knew of my study.

Participants were initially informed of the Zoom platform that would be used to conduct the interview. Participants expressed reluctance to participate if the interview was going to be conducted via webcam. As such, phone interviews were conducted and audio recorded so as not to jeopardize participation and to increase participants' comfort level. A total of eight participants were interviewed for this study. After the eighth interview, I concluded that I had reached data saturation.

Data Analysis

Transcription

I began data analysis by transcribing all of the recorded interviews. Audio recordings were individually provided to an online transcription company, Rev.com that converted all audio files into text. Within a day the transcripts were received in a Word document. The site provided a feature that allowed me to include who the speakers were and the presence of accents or any other pertinent terminology. As some of the research participants did have accents that information was provided to aid in accuracy. The transcribed data were then compared back to the audio file to ensure the highest level of accuracy. As this process was done meticulously, it afforded me the opportunity to become very familiar with the recordings.

Coding

Upon final review of the transcribed data, I began the coding process. Coding in qualitative research is comprised of a process that enables collected data to be assembled,

categorized, and thematically sorted providing an organized platform for the construction of meaning (Williams & Moser, 2019). I used inductive thematic analysis for the coding process. Thematic analysis is a common data analysis method in qualitative research. Thematic analysis allows for the researcher to capture data that directly relates to the RQs in a way that carries meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data and codes are developed without trying to fit into a pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The coding process officially started when I began re-reading the transcriptions. I went through each response line by line. Responses that were determined to be important to answering the RQs were highlighted. As the transcribed data sets were in the form of Word documents, I utilized the track changes feature of Word to summarize the responses into concise phrases that captured the content. I continued this process for each interview transcription. Afterwards, I compiled all the developed codes into a singular list. At the time of completion, a total of 58 individual codes were developed. All codes derived from the coding process are included in Table 1. This list was later analyzed and codes were grouped based on their similarities. Similar codes were assigned a numerical value, ranging from one to four. The codes were then grouped based on their designated numerical value. After grouping, the codes were again analyzed and given a specific theme name. The themes were revised to ensure each theme had enough support and were in fact distinct.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the researcher's ability to take into account all of the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility in qualitative research is interconnected with the research design and the researcher's instruments and data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure the credibility of this research study, meticulous note taking was utilized to keep track of participants' insight and highlights of their testimonials and then compared with the transcription. Also, I reviewed the audio recording after initial transcription to make sure that the data were as accurate as possible and no information was left out in the transcription process.

Transferability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), transferability is the way in which qualitative studies can be applicable, or transferrable, to broader contexts while still maintaining their context specific richness. To foster transferability, I provided detailed recordings of the study's findings and conducted in-depth interviews with all participants. In doing this, all readers of the research will be able to transfer aspects of the study's design and findings instead of trying to replicate the design and findings (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). A researcher who has access to a similar population should not have difficulty replicating this study.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the data (Ravitch and Carl, 2016).

Qualitative research studies are considered to be dependable if they are consistent and stable over time (Miles et al., 2014). Dependability for this research study was achieved by documenting in detail the research and data collection processes, keeping and reviewing audio recordings and transcripts, and securing all collected data. All collected data were reviewed multiple times to ensure the highest level of accuracy.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, confirmability is concerned with establishing that the researcher's interpretations and findings are clearly derived from the data, requiring the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Nowell et al., 2017). In order to ensure confirmability of this research study I kept detailed notes of my review of the collected data. I also kept notes on each interview through track changes on Microsoft Word to help organize my thoughts. As I had no previous experience on the phenomenon being researched, I was able to interpret the research findings solely from the data collected and had no undue influence.

Results

I conducted this research study to discover more about the personal experiences of adult learners who reintegrated into the educational realm, following a delay due to legal involvement. I used semistructured interviews to answer two RQs. The RQs were as follows:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of individuals who have previously been involved in the criminal justice system who are reintegrating into the high school and postsecondary trainings?

RQ2: How do those individuals who have previously been involved in the legal system motivate themselves to return to their academics?

I structured the interview questions in such a way that they would elicit rich information about the personal lived experiences of the participants in relation to their journey of reintegrating with their education, following a correctional delay. As a result of the specific line of questioning, various themes and subthemes emerged from the data collection. The themes related to motivation that were identified following the coding process included: motivation for self-betterment and care/concern for others. Another important theme that emerged was contributors of initial incarceration. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the themes and subthemes.

Table 1*Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme category	Subtheme
Theme 1: Motivation for Self-Betterment		Wanting to prove self
		Remaining optimistic
		Not wanting to be a failure
		Pursuit for higher education
		Wanting to make something of self
		Motivated by desire to learn
		Wanting to turn life around
		Presence of self-determination
		Desire for personal gain and satisfaction
		Wanting to be employed
		Meeting successful peers
		Improved quality of life
		Opportunity for advancement
Theme 2: Care/Concern for Others		Financial motivation
		Wanting to give family better life
		Employment leads to greater attainment
		Being a role model for others
		Wanting to take care of family/parent
		Wanting to be example for child
		Wanting to be successful
		Living up to family standards
		Presence of supportive family
		Desire to prove self to others
Theme 3: Contributors to Initial Incarceration	Home environment challenges	Toxic family dynamics
		Single family household
		Lack of discipline
		Strict upbringing
		Minimal presence of positive affirmations
		Absence of a support system
		Freedom during adolescence
		Working to help at home
		Strained family dynamics
		Lack of parental role models
		Teenage pregnancy
		Pressure from parents
		Presence of substance usage

(table continues)

Theme	Subtheme category	Subtheme
	Pattern of poor decision-making	Falling in with wrong crowd Manipulative behaviors Negative peers Consequences not effective Lack of addressing co-occurring issues Time management issues Pattern of truancy Gang involvement Associating with poor influences Probation not working Pattern of poor decisions Education not enforced Single-parent household Past resurfacing

Theme 1: Motivation for Self-Betterment

The theme of motivation for self-betterment was developed based on multiple participants emphasizing how a desire to improve the condition of their personal lives could serve as a motivator for reintegrating into academics. The concept of self-betterment is understood to be the act of improving oneself. Self-betterment comes in various forms and can affect one's health, education, relationships, careers, and overall well-being. Self-betterment is an area that has gained traction in recent times as individuals are making more of a concerted effort to improve themselves (Rouse, 2022).

Participants collectively felt as though wanting better opportunities for themselves lead to education attainment. Some of the codes that were extracted from the data include but are not limited to: wanting to turn life around, pursuit for higher education, motivated for desire to learn, desire for personal gain and satisfaction. For instance, Participant AL shared that being a self-determined individual served as an aid through difficult times and assisted her in seeing through with her personal goal of completing her education. She

similarly felt as though her upbringing and personality served her in the sense that she was not going to let setback in life define the trajectory of her future. Participant RL stated:

It's not for financial ability. It's not for job advancement. It's nothing more than personal gain and personal satisfaction to say I did this. And I don't ever want my kids to look at me like I settled for something just to have it. I want them to strive and want more too. So, I feel like it's a role model thing. It's a personal achievement.

This sentiment for self-betterment was further echoed by Participant AR who shared, “The decision to do it was very much, I wanted to prove them wrong.” However, she also cited the mere desire to not be viewed as a failure in the eyes of others as motivating factor.

Participant SA was unique in mentioning how meeting those around him who were successful served as a source of encouragement. He stated,

Well, I talked to some of my friends a few of them that I kind of grew up with and they introduced me to some other folks, and who didn't have anything other than a high school education. Granted they weren't saddled with any sort of criminal history get really successful jobs in the IT industry. And when I saw that, especially with the fact that they didn't have any advanced degrees that really motivated me. And at that point, I just said like, okay, I mean, knock the GED out so I can get to the real harder stuff... the biggest motivator was seeing that other people did it and then seeing that the timeline didn't require a 4-year degree.

Participant SA also shared how the pursuit of higher education would lead to the opening of doors, most notably in the form of greater employment opportunities. The sheer desire to learn was also a motivating factor.

Consistently, participants expressed the desire to put themselves in the best possible position for further attainment, which appeared to serve as a catalyst to pursue the completion of their education. Multiple participants cited wanting to be employed as a motivator. Specifically, Participant AR stated, “I needed to get a better job and it was just something I felt I had to do. Something that I had missed and I should have done.”

Participant DG offered,

I really think that going back to school was my chance to advance my position in life. Schooling opens up a lot of doors for you and I think it gives me a chance to move up in life. I can get hopefully get a better job or live in a better area.

The concept of self-betterment was a consistent theme in the data and was a motivator for individual goal achievement. According to Gore (2013), in the United States alone the journey of self-betterment has transformed itself into a billion dollar industry promoting the use of books, online applications, and more readily available therapeutic services.

Theme 2: Care/Concern for Others

While the desire to complete one’s education can be done for strictly personal reasons, many participants cited the presence of others in their lives as a motivator for pursuit of their educational goals. As a result of this, the theme of care/concern for others was developed. The desire to do something for others such as sharing a snack with a friend, donating something, or volunteering one’s time is known as prosocial behavioral

(American Psychological Association, 2014). Some explanations for prosocial behavior lie in evolution while others are best described through social motivation. According to the American Psychological Association (2014), helping others helps create social bonds. Prosocial behavior can also be spontaneous in that it can presumably be motivated by a general concern for the welfare of others. This study demonstrated that aspect of prosocial behavior.

Participant AL felt as though her incarceration was not in alignment with her family's values and that helped to motivate her to do better. To highlight this point, she shared the following:

Well I think it's because of the background I'm coming from. My family's a very strict Catholic family. They don't even know about my incarceration. Inside, I always have to just hold myself to those standards. For me, being incarcerated and getting myself up in people who I'm not supposed to be around and getting into trouble, I realized that I had time to think. This is not me. This is not how I want to live my life. Jail just motivated me to actually do something with my life. So, for me, I hate to say it, but it was like a positive experience.

Participant RL found motivation in the desire to prove herself to others, stating "So it's like, it was more of a, screw them I can do this. For me it was proving that I was more than a 17-year-old mom dropout high school loser."

Family also was a strong motivator for participants. For instance, Participant RL shared how having support in her family and their level of involvement in her life made her ability to juggle school and other priorities more manageable, which ultimately

helped in her overall degree attainment. Similarly, for Participant SA the desire to be role model for his children motivated him to want for more. He noted,

I thank God every time that I'm able to accomplish the things that I want to accomplish. And so far I've been able to accomplish what I wanted, even though it took a little more time and took a little more effort. It took a few more steps, but I want to do the most that I can do. And what happened in my past, I don't let that stop me. And I do it for my family. I do it for my sons. I want them to see that I'm a good role model for them. So I have many reasons, but that's just the basics.

Providing for and taking care of their families was a motivating factor for many participants. Financial freedom was important to many participants. Participants stated that putting themselves in a better financial situation would open more doors for them.

Participant DD shared,

It's so hard to get a good job when you don't have any education. You get stuck with the worst jobs and you don't make anything, less than minimum wage. At least with a diploma you can get a good job and make decent money and afford things.

This comment is reflective of participants' view that educational attainment could lead to financial freedom.

Theme 3: Contributors to Initial Incarceration

All the participating adult learners shared in their interview various aspects of their background that ultimately led to their incarceration. The contributing factors that they mentioned are supported in the literature. Multiple studies have addressed the risk

factors of incarcerated individuals. The literature emphasized factors such as exposure to substance usage in the household, absentee parents, introduction into gang life, and teenage pregnancy (Iachini, Buettner, Anderson-Butcher, & Reno, 2013; King, 2002; Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Lawton-Stricklor, 2018). Regarding the theme of contributors to initial incarceration, two subthemes emerged from the data: home environment challenges and a pattern of poor decisions.

Home Environment Challenges. Many of the participants shared in their interview the challenges prevalent in their home environment that made completing and focusing on their education the first time around a hardship. Participant AR shared that lack of a support system affected her upbringing and her outlook on education early on. She also spoke about the toxicity in the home and specifically with her mother offering,

She didn't think I was important. Some of my charges were with her. She'd call the cops on me, it's like "I'm your kid? Are you for real right now?" Or, she'd have no contact orders with me. Then she would call me to the house. I would pick up charges because of her. It was a toxic relationship, and she didn't think I was worth anything. She threw me away, and she didn't think I'd amount to anything.

Strained family dynamics was also seen in the data. Participant RL shared about growing up with an absentee parent and co-occurring substance usage in the home. She shared,

But I went to therapy, and I dealt with issues. I had the whole daddy issues and the mommy and daddy not married, and my adopted dad was an alcoholic, and I had a lot of issues and anger and resentment that was controlling who I was.

The lack of parental role model in the home facilitated in the lack of structure in their lives and homes which ultimately led to incarceration.

Pattern of Poor Decisions. A consistent trend in the data was a pattern of poor decision-making exhibited by the participants. Participant DD shared about joining a gang at an early age and how that involvement distracted him from completing his schooling on time. Participant DD shared, “I got caught up with the wrong crowd and joined a gang. After that it was just off to the races, started skipping, I got a girl pregnant, started using drugs. Just made a mess of my life.” Participant DG shared a similar experience of becoming a mother at an early age and initially attempting to balance motherhood with being a teenager, which proved to be difficult. Participants also found themselves falling into a wrong crowd, which served as a detractor to the upkeep of certain tasks such as attendance at school and homework assignments.

Participant DF discussed discovering her manipulative behavior early on and very early beginning to test the water of where those behaviors would take her. She offered,

I was manipulative in high school. Elementary school was really nothing. Junior high and high school was the same thing. I was manipulative. I got my way. I cut school a lot. I didn't get caught because I was manipulative enough to sign myself back into the school if I needed to. Sound like my mom on the phone.

The presence of these behaviors led to a snowball effect and without necessary consequences, compounded into incarceration.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and better understand the underlying motivating factors that contribute to an individual's desire to pursue their education. This chapter provided details relating to the participant recruitment process, data collection, and data analysis. The findings from this study further expand on existing research that adult learners are motivated by both internal and external factors. Many participants drew motivation from their previous life experiences to pursue their educational goals. Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the study's findings as well as recommendations for future research. The next chapter will also provide limitation of the study and implication for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the findings presented in Chapter 4 about the lived experiences of adult learners who were previously involved in the correctional system and what motivated them to reengage with their education. In this qualitative research study, I sought to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of individuals who have previously been involved in the criminal justice system who are reintegrating into high school and postsecondary trainings?

RQ2: How do those individuals who have previously been involved in the legal system motivate themselves to return to their academics?

Data were collected through the use of semistructured interviews until data saturation was achieved. Upon completion of data collection, all of the interviews were transcribed, coded, and then analyzed. Data analysis revealed three major themes: motivation for self-betterment, care/concern for others, and contributors to initial incarceration. In this chapter, I will further address the findings of the emergent themes. I also discuss the limitations of the research, offer recommendations for further research, consider the study's implications for positive social change, and provide a conclusion to the study.

Interpretation of the Findings

Many incarcerated individuals typically do not successfully reintegrate into society. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), within 3 years of release, four out of 10 prisoners will have committed new crimes or violated the terms of their

release and be reincarcerated. Studies have also indicated that the education being received in correctional facilities is often subpar. According to Leone (2013), youth typically enter the juvenile justice system with a range of intense medical, mental health, and social needs. These issues, in addition to learning disabilities and emotional disturbances, can be a challenge to address within the correctional setting. Researchers have not found evidence that these factors cause delinquency, but they have identified a strong relationship with delinquency (Leone, 2013). A correctional facility's primary purpose is to ensure safety and security; as a result, educational concerns are of lesser importance.

In reviewing the literature, I was not surprised to see that the vast majority of research on correctional education centered on reformation within the facility. The U.S. Department of Education (2012) has cited how reentry can pose a significant challenge for those formerly incarcerated. However, this study's primary focus was centered on those who had left correctional facilities and were making efforts to reengage with their academics on their own accord. Research has indicated that there is a disconnect in the education continuum postrelease (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The findings from this study confirm that participants are motivated by a number of intrinsic and extrinsic variables that ultimately lead to reintegration in the academic world. This is consistent with previous research (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Rothes et al., 2017). Several themes emerged from the research including motivation for self-betterment, care/concern for others, and contributors to initial incarceration. These

themes provided insight into the journey of the adult learner refamiliarizing themselves with their education, while degree seeking.

Participants consistently indicated the challenges they faced along their journey that served as obstacles to both continuing their education, at the age-appropriate time, as well as while in the process of working on their degree, after restarting their education.. Some of the specific challenges noted by participants included the presence of negative peers who did not offer the necessary support, the occurrence of teenage pregnancy, a childhood spent in a single-parent household where the importance of education was not reinforced, involvement in gangs, and the necessity of working to contribute to the home. These challenges typically tend to affect racial minorities at much higher rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Some of the challenges faced by participants initially were an impediment but later became a motivating factor. For example, participants who were young parents noted that their children were motivators in their decision to try to obtain their degree. Similarly, some of the negative aspects witnessed in their home life, such as the presence of substance usage, a lack of parental role models in the home, and minimal to no positive affirmations in the household, were enough of a motivator to live a better life and make more positive life decisions. Participants in the study were also consistent in identifying that the desire to put themselves in a better position was of the utmost importance. Participants, men and women , noted that wanting to prove something to themselves and an overall desire for self-betterment motivated them to complete their educational goals.

Overall, the findings from this study corroborated previous research. For instance, Lumsden (1994) identified years ago that motivation was influenced by either internal or external factors or a combination of both. As evidenced by the findings, participants cited such influences, to go back to school and stay on track to complete their degree, in the form of having something to prove to oneself, the potential for financial advancement, and wanting to pursue knowledge. Participants drew motivation to work on completing their studies from various aspects of their life. Similarly, this study further supported previous research denoting gender differences in motivation (Agger & Meece, 2015; Mansfield & Vallance, 2011). More than half of this study's participants were women. Also, previous studies highlighted that women tend to experience higher levels of overall motivation, which could also speak to their greater involvement in the study (Asif et al., 2018).

This study also supported previous research done using transformative learning theory as a backdrop. For instance, transformative learning theory asserts that individuals only change their line of thinking or worldviews when they encounter a deep structural shift (Hoggan, 2016). As reflected in the study, majority of participants experienced significant life events that propelled them towards working on their education. Participants cited life events such as early parenthood, growing up around substance usage, being on placed on probation, and gang involvement during their formative years.

While the study supported previous research, new insight was derived into some of the interventions that can be implemented to better aid individuals in an attempt to reduce recidivism rates and deter individuals from a life of crime and poor decisions.

Based on the collected data it became abundantly clear that early intervention would be most beneficial in the process of deterrence. It can be hypothesized that had these young adults had access to educational after school programs or sports clubs, crisis counseling, or greater community involvement they may have had less delinquent behavior and avoided the educational delay seen in this study.

Limitations

Limitations in a qualitative research design are the characteristics of design or methodology that may impact or influence the interpretation of the findings from your research (Price & Murnan, 2004). It is important to acknowledge the study's limitations as it can be connected to suggestions for future research.

One limitation of this study lies in the sample size. The challenge in selecting a sample size, in qualitative research, is finding a robust enough sample to provide thorough and meaningful findings while simultaneously minimizing the burden on participants and the expenditure of resources (Young & Casey, 2018). The sample size for this research study was eight participants. This can be a limitation in terms of transferability. To avoid transferability issues, I looked to obtain data saturation. Saturation is viewed as the gold standard in qualitative inquiry, in regard to determining the appropriate research sample size, as upon its achievement of no new codes or themes, data can emerge. I continued to obtain data until the saturation point was reached, which ended up being eight interviews. The eight participants consisted of men and women, of varying ages.

Another potential limitation of this study is the data collection method-the use of interviews. A known drawback of interviews is the issue of truthfulness. Interviewees may withhold information out of fear of how they may be perceived or embellish parts of their story for dramatization. So, the information provided may not be dishonest as much as it may be distorted (Randall & Phoenix, 2009). It is possible that the information being provided was not an accurate depiction of the participants' personal experiences, despite the interview questions being well thought out and the interviews being rich. So, it is possible there may be additional information that was not included in the data.

In most studies, the presence of bias may be a clear limitation. According to Alsaawi (2014) researchers intentionally or unintentionally carry unseen biases or preconceptions into the interview, which can influence the way data is interpreted and analyzed. In order to avoid bias, I made a concerted effort to take detailed notes during the data analysis process and continuously referenced my notes to stay true to the information provided by participants.

Lastly, this study relied upon purposeful sampling as a means of selecting research participants. Purposeful sampling can have drawbacks in qualitative research as it can bring into question the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, participants knowing they have been selected for a particular reason may influence the data collection. However, this study relied on purposeful sampling as I was looking at a specific demographic in order to address a specific phenomenon. Purposeful sampling requires the identification and selection of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Recommendations

Results from this research study indicated a series of potential changes that may prove to be valuable. Firstly, there was a significant disconnect in the amount of outreach done while learners are incarcerated versus when they are released. Many participants received little to no assistance post-release and were forced to have to navigate reintegration into society alone or with limited support. As such, continued contact with formerly incarcerated individuals may have significant positive outcomes in overall future success. Stakeholders may be better served to take into consideration outreach programs. Furthermore, expanding the scope of the study to include others states would help to increase generalizability and make for richer data collection. This will help in determining whether the motivational factors present were specific to a particular subset of the population.

The data collected came directly from adult student learners. However, adult educators are equally as important in understanding the full narrative of reintroduction into learning for those previously incarcerated. So, it would be beneficial to interview them as well. This could lead to a greater understanding of the motivators they are privy to and some of the observations that make in successful students.

The study also focused on adult learners who were previously incarcerated at the county level of custody. All participants shared about incarcerations in county jails. However, no data were gathered from adults who were previously imprisoned. Prison sentences are often administered to those with more severe charges, lengthy criminal records, and those whose sentences require housing long term (Frey, 2018). Due to their

extended removal from society, reintegration can be more challenging. Reaching out to this demographic could further enhance the narrative on motivation as those previously imprisoned may have more challenges with regard to reintegration.

Finally, my research did not address the role location may play in the availability of post-release resources, however, it may be an area of interest to stakeholders and again provide new insight into any gaps that may be present. For instance, larger more urban locations may have a greater abundance of resources at their disposal that can better aid individuals as they navigate schooling after a delay versus more rural locations.

Implications

This research study demonstrates that the attainment of education provides several implications for positive social changes for individuals. Participants all provided their personal testimonies chronicling years of setbacks and upheaval that negatively affected their educational journey. In providing such rich information, however, powerful information can be extrapolated to better understand the varying factors that can be cultivated to aid in the prevention of criminal re-offense and therefore lessen the overall recidivism rates. On a broader scale, such information could be used to develop programs to aid at risk individuals to assist them in remaining in school and avoid the existence of a criminal record.

Additionally, improving the condition of an individual has the potential to impact the greater society. For instance, investing in the individual and seeking to prevent them from seeing the inside of a correctional facility, through the promotion of education, can

lead to a stronger workforce, a more educated population, lower unemployment rates, and reduced reliance on public assistance programs.

Finally, growing correction costs and inmate populations can be a financial burden at both the state and local level. For example, in Oklahoma, a growing state prison was projected to cost an estimated \$249 million in additional spending by 2021 (Department of Justice, 2013). As such, significant savings could be had by early interventions that deter criminality and risky behaviors.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to explore the motivational factors that contribute to academic reintegration for young adult learners, for those who were previously involved in the Florida DJJ system as adolescent learners. I focused on adult learners who were in the process of completing their high school diploma or GED. The findings of this study show both the presence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors that influenced participants' decision to reintegrate into schooling. Similarly, the study's findings also highlighted concerning environmental and negative dynamics present in the lives of those who tend to disengage from their education at an early age.

Research has demonstrated that there are a number of academic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal challenges that can threaten learners and potentially make them "non-completers" (Lewis, 2021). However, available supports can aid students towards positive educational and professional outcomes (Lewis, 2021). The testimonials received in this study provide further support to the notion that developing supportive programming that can help learners and potentially avoid educational derailment.

Effective intervention would most likely require collaboration from a number of parties but has the potential to bring about true positive social change.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Let's start by you telling me a little bit about your education, prior to incarceration.

Probe: How did legal charges affect your education? (If not directly answered)

2. Tell me about your involvement with academics in the correctional setting.
3. Tell me about what made you decide to continue your pursuit of education, post-release.

Probe: Did you have any specific influences?

4. Have you encountered any obstacles on your journey thus far? If so, what were they?

Probe: What kept you going? (If not answered directly)

5. Did you have any assistance, as far as getting reengaged with your academics?

Probe: Were there any specific resources you left the correctional facility with?

6. What do you hope to gain by completing your degree/GED?
7. What have you learned about yourself along this journey?
8. I appreciate the time you took for this interview, is there anything else you wanted to add, that would be valuable for me to know?

Closing: Again, thank you for your participation in this interview. Did you have any questions for me, before we end the interview?