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A Phenomenological Analysis of Formerly Incarcerated Women's Perceptions of Successful Reentry

Angela Martilik
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Angela M. Martilik

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Review Committee

Dr. David Rentler, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Christie Nelson, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Andrea Goldstein, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2018

Abstract

A Phenomenological Analysis of Formerly Incarcerated Women's Perceptions of
Successful Reentry

by

Angela M. Martilik

MA, Texas Woman's University, 2004

BA, Stephen F. Austin State University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

August 2018

Abstract

Female offenders are distinctly different from male offenders, and present with their own gender-specific needs and issues both in and out of the correctional setting. Most approaches to treatment and programming for female offenders are currently based on research involving males and approaches designed for males. Inquiry regarding the gender-specific needs of female inmates as they pertain to treatment and reentry programs is necessary so professionals can better understand how to serve this population. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 8 women who were formerly incarcerated in the United States, this phenomenological study was used to examine the perceptions of successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated women before, during, and after incarceration that influenced their successful reentry into the community. Coping mechanisms or traits that were important to their successful reentry to the community were also explored. Feminist theory was used to illustrate the differences between male and female offenders, and to highlight the potential benefits of designing treatments and programming that are specifically aimed at the needs of female offenders. Data were analyzed via descriptive and pattern coding, which then allowed for identification of themes, and then cross-interview analysis. Six themes emerged that related to factors that influenced their successful reentry into the community, and 5 themes emerged related to coping mechanisms or personal traits that were important to their successful reentry. Recommendations include implementation of programs and services for incarcerated and newly released women that are gender-specific. These findings could contribute to social change by improving treatment outcomes, reducing recidivism, and improving functioning in the community for female offenders.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Steele and Violet. You two are my inspiration for everything, and the fuel that keeps me going. With every paper I wrote and every event I missed to complete this process, I envisioned a better life for you. I hope my journey is proof that working hard in the beginning allows you to play hard in the end. Set your goals and then make them a reality. Do or do not. There is no “try.”

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

Men commit the vast majority of crime in the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012). Although women account for a very small percentage of the total crime committed in the United States, crime rates are on the rise for women (Stephenson, Woodhams, & Cooke, 2014; Tripodi & Pettus-Davis, 2012). Much of the research involving incarcerated people has been done with men. This is likely because women account for such a small percentage of the population in the U.S. correctional system.

Reentry programs have traditionally been designed using research conducted with males, and then have been generalized to female populations (Vigesaa, Bergseth, & Jens, 2016). However, females have gender-specific needs both during incarceration, and during their reentry to the community (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2013; Wright, Van Voorhis, Salisbury, & Bauman, 2012), and using a “male is norm” approach with females is substantially detrimental (Van Voorhis, 2012). Furthermore, the needs of females during reentry have been underrepresented in the research (Olson, Stalans, & Escobar, 2016; Vigessaa et al., 2016).

Men and women differ in the way they reach the point of incarceration (Brennan, Breitenbach, Dieterich, Salisbury, & Van Voorhis, 2012). Women experience higher rates of victimization than men before coming to prison (DeHart & Moran, 2015; Kerig, 2014). This victimization may include childhood neglect, physical or sexual abuse, or interpersonal violence perpetrated by romantic partners. Women often experience multiple types of victimization before their criminal behavior leads them to prison

(DeHart & Moran, 2015). Because a woman's path to prison is different than that of a man's, it is intuitive that her path out of prison would also need to be different.

Reentry is a process rather than an end product (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2013; James, 2015). Reentry programs in the United States vary widely by state, and even by regions within states. Additionally, many offenders will "max-out" on their sentence, and may not receive any type of reentry programming (Vandenberg, 2013). Since approximately two-thirds of U.S. offenders will be rearrested within 3 years of being released (National Institute of Justice, 2014), a relevant question concerns what makes the other third successful. Very little research has been done with women who have successfully reentered society after incarceration.

In this study, I focused on women's perceptions of the factors before, during, and after incarceration that contributed to their successful reintegration. Future inquiry regarding the gender-specific needs of female inmates and their perceptions of treatment (Olson et al., 2016; Pritchard, Jordan, & Jones, 2014; Wright, Van Voorhis, et al., 2012) and reentry programs (Willging, Nicdao, Trott, & Kellett, 2016) is necessary so professionals can better understand how to serve this population. This type of inquiry could lead to more effective design and implementation of in-prison treatment programs, as well as reentry programs and policies for female offenders.

Problem Statement

The goal of the correctional system is not only to confine and separate offenders from the public, but also to rehabilitate them so that they can successfully return to their communities, resulting in a reduction in crime (van Ginneken & Hayes, 2017). Reentry

to the community will be different for each individual, but the objective remains the same. The reentry process is meant to offer offenders an improved chance at living successfully in their communities while avoiding criminal behavior in the future (Doherty, Forrester, Brazil, & Matheson, 2014). However, not all offenders go through a reentry program when they are released from prison or jail. Some are released directly to the community without supervision.

The average annual cost to house a single inmate in the U.S. is \$33,274 (Mai & Subramanian, 2017). Many offenders return to prison over and over again, increasing the burden for taxpayers. This highlights the need for successful strategies for the reintegration of individuals leaving prison. More than 67% of inmates released from prison are rearrested within 3 years (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014; James, 2015). Males show higher 3-year recidivism rates than females (72.5% vs. 62.9%), as well as higher rates of arrest overall (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014). However, the rates of recidivism for females are still high, with nearly two thirds of females recidivating within 3 years.

All of the activities, treatment programs, and processes that inmates engage in while incarcerated will have some influence on how successful they are when reentering the community (James, 2015). Social, psychological, educational, and economic factors are also contributors to success or failure during reentry (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012). Many women will not be successful when trying to reenter the community to become self-sustaining, productive members. Traditionally, prison programs have been developed for men, using data from research involving men, and yet many of these

programs are considered to be gender-neutral (Stephenson et al., 2014). However, research involving males cannot be generalized to a female population because of the differences in their social, physical, and psychological needs (Bartlett et. al., 2015; Van Voorhis, 2012). Programs for women in the justice system, including reentry programs, should be aimed specifically at their needs (Willging et al., 2016). Ideally, all inmates would have some form of support upon release that is specific to their needs. Research examining the perspectives of women who have successfully reentered their communities is largely absent from the research literature. Leaders in corrections may use the results of this study to develop and enhance personal reentry plans for women released from prison.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand the perceptions of women who were formerly incarcerated for at least 9 months, and who have been successful upon reentry for at least 3 years, regarding what factors made them successful in reintegrating into the community after incarceration. For the purposes of this study, “success” was defined as having no arrests for at least 3 years post-release. Being remanded to prison for even a short time for a technical violation was considered an arrest, and was cause for exclusion from participation in this study. First, I explored the pre-incarceration, during-incarceration, and post-incarceration experiences of formerly incarcerated women pertinent to their successful reintegration into the community. Second, I explored what coping mechanisms or traits the women perceived to have been important to their successful reentry to the community. The purpose of this

study was not to generalize the findings to a larger population, but to better understand the experiences of women who successfully transitioned back into their community.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of successful reintegration as a formerly incarcerated woman before, during, and after incarceration that influenced successful reentry into the community?

RQ2: What coping mechanisms or traits do formerly incarcerated women feel were important to their successful reentry to the community?

Theoretical Framework

Feminist theory highlights women's experiences and perspectives. It draws focus on issues, trends, and problems that may be misunderstood or overlooked by traditional, male-dominated culture. Feminist theory encompasses a wide range of issues including gender differences, gender inequality, gender oppression, and structural oppression (Cole, 2017).

Prisons and jails often overlook issues that are specific to female inmates (McPhail, Falvo, & Burker, 2012). When women are treated using programs that were designed for men, and traditionally used with men, their gender-specific needs are not being considered. Furthermore, research involving males cannot be generalized to a female population because of the differences in their social, physical, and psychological needs (Bartlett et al., 2015; van Voorhis, 2012).

The differences between men and women include personality factors, interests, responses to stress, speech patterns, psychopathology (Harrison, Ahn, & Adolphs, 2015;

Hyde, 2014), and the types of victimization they experience before engaging in criminal behavior (DeHart & Moran, 2015; Lynch, Fritch, & Heath, 2012; Stephenson et al., 2014; Winstok & Straus, 2014). Most incarcerated women are mothers (Miller et al., 2014). Nearly 90% of incarcerated men report that their children live with the child's mother, but when women are incarcerated, their children are most likely to live with grandparents (Roxburgh & Fitch, 2014). Less than one third of children will live with their biological father when their mother is incarcerated. Upon release, fewer fathers than mothers will assume primary parenting roles (Mapson, 2013). Upon reentry, mothers are more likely than fathers to have to juggle parenthood with work or training for a marketable skill. Women released from prison tend to be less educated and have less earning potential than men released from prison (Mapson, 2013). Female offenders also report far higher rates of interpersonal violence than male offenders (Lynch et al., 2012). Therefore, female offenders may have to be more concerned with making safe choices in dating than their male counterparts (Saxena, Messina, & Grella, 2014). Additionally, the factors that contribute to a man's success during reentry may be different than the factors that contribute to a woman's success during reentry (Doherty et al., 2014; Olson et al., 2016).

Much of the current research and theory is premised on basic assumptions about gender differences, combined with the idea that maleness represents the norm (Miller & Carbone-Lopez, 2015). However, female offenders have very different social, medical, and criminological profiles than their male counterparts (Bartlett et al., 2015). Feminist theory can illuminate the struggles faced by female inmates in the United States, and explain how they are distinctly different from the struggles faced by male inmates.

Feminist theory can also illustrate the purpose and benefit of gender specific approaches to treatment of female offenders.

Nature of the Study

This was a phenomenological exploratory qualitative study. Only a qualitative approach would allow for the phenomenological exploration of participant perception that was my focus in this study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Exploratory phenomenology allows the researcher to look deep into the experiences of others, extrapolating meaning without searching for a solution to a problem. This approach best suited this study because the purpose was to explore the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated women who were successful upon reentry to the community and the meaning attached to those experiences. I used telephonic semi-structured interviews to collect data. The semi-structured interview format allowed me to make sure participants fully understood the questions, and to encourage them to elaborate on answers that were vague or confusing (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). After completing data collection, I performed descriptive coding, followed by pattern coding. Themes in the data emerged as data were categorized. Cross-interview analysis was possible at this point. Data collection and analysis stopped upon reaching saturation.

Definition of Terms

The following are terms that I used in this study. For readers' convenience, these terms are defined here.

Comorbidity: The concurrence of two or more disorders or illnesses in an individual (National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2010).

Interpersonal violence (IPV): Violence between individuals. IPV is subdivided into *family and intimate partner violence* and *community violence*. The former category includes child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, and elder abuse, while the latter is broken down into acquaintance and stranger violence and includes youth violence, assault by strangers, violence related to property crimes, and violence in workplaces and other institutions (World Health Organization, 2017).

Personality disorder: An enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture, is pervasive and inflexible, has an onset in adolescence or adulthood, is stable over time, and leads to distress or impairment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): An anxiety disorder that develops in some people after experiencing a traumatic event (American Psychological Association, 2017a).

Reentry barriers: Factors that prohibit the successful reentry of an individual back into the community after incarceration.

Reentry challenges: Factors that may be difficult to overcome for an individual attempting to successfully reenter the community after incarceration.

Assumptions

I asked participants to self-report their arrest and criminal history to determine eligibility to participate and thus assumed that they accurately conveyed this history. My primary assumption was that all participants answered interview questions honestly. I

also assumed that the study would add to the existing literature on this topic, and would be of value to interested parties.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of formerly incarcerated women who have successfully reentered the community regarding the factors that made their reintegration successful. Participants must have served at least 9 months in jail or prison, and must not have been arrested for at least 3 years after release. I undertook this study to better understand the factors that contribute to the success of those who do not recidivate. The methodological procedures used in this study were chosen in order to accommodate the exploration of participant perception. I used a qualitative exploratory approach because a quantitative approach would not have allowed for thorough explanation and exploration of participants' lived experiences.

Given that my focus was on women who were successful upon reentering the community for at least 3 years post-release, participant inclusion for the study was based on age, gender, and incarceration/arrest history. Women over the age of 18 who had had no arrests for at least 3 years since their release from jail/prison were eligible to participate. Technical violations of their probation or parole did not exclude someone from participating as long as they were not arrested for the violation. If they were returned to jail/prison as a result of their technical violation, they were excluded from the study. Men, juveniles, and women without an incarceration history were excluded from this study. The findings of the study should not be applied to populations outside of this study's population.

I used feminist theory as the theoretical foundation in this study after also considering Hirschi's social control theory. Although some may argue that the bonds one has to family and community are responsible for their criminal behavior or their desistance from crime, this approach fails to acknowledge structural factors which may contribute to criminal behavior, and ultimately fails to address issues that are distinctly feminine (Smart, 2013). Feminist theory enabled me to account for all factors contributing to criminal behavior in women. Because feminist theory was a solid foundation for this study based on the research questions and population, I did not take a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory would have only been used had there been a need to derive the theoretical orientation during the research process, based on the data collected and themes that emerged.

The transferability of the qualitative research findings is limited. The findings may only be relevant for the specific population used in the study. Even when women with similar characteristics are chosen for a similar study, women living in other locations or settings may offer different responses to similar research questions. However, the findings may be useful for future research with women, when aimed at the particular themes identified in this study. The findings of this study would not be relevant to a male population, and may have limited relevance to a juvenile female population.

Limitations

As in any qualitative study, the generalizability of this study's findings to other populations is limited. Additionally, qualitative data analysis is a subjective practice,

which could be viewed as being influenced by the beliefs and values of the researcher (Santiago-Delefosse, Gavin, Bruchez, Roux, & Stephen, 2016). In this study, participants were required to self-report life experiences and opinions. The validity of self-reported information is often questioned in research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Not only is it possible for participants to convey inaccurate information in their interviews, but it is also possible that I may have made inferences that caused my interpretations of the collected data to lack grounding in the participant's reality. In short, researcher bias was a potential limitation of this study. I used member checking to reduce the potential for misinterpretation of data as well as misrepresentation of findings. Although I used bracketing to combat the effects of researcher bias, studies can still be affected by researcher bias if bracketing is applied superficially (Gearing, 2004). Therefore, special attention was given to issues of reflexivity during the bracketing process.

Sample sizes in qualitative studies are often small, consisting of far fewer participants than in quantitative studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The sample size in this study was based on how many participants it took to exhaustively collect all relevant information. Once saturation was reached, data collection stopped. The small sample size employed in this study is another factor that prevents the transferability of findings to other populations.

Significance

Some studies on this topic have shown particular risk factors that are strong predictors of recidivism (Barrick, Lattimore, & Visser, 2014; Olson et al., 2016; Scott, Grella, Dennis, & Funk, 2014). Fewer studies have focused on protective factors for

desistance from crime (Bachman, Kerrison, Paternoster, Smith, & O'Connell, 2016; Barrick et al., 2014). Although these studies are informative, the vast majority focus exclusively on men (Olson et al., 2016; Vigessaa et al., 2016). However, the rate of women entering prison is increasing faster than that of men entering prison. The number of female inmates in the United States grew by 20% between the years 2000 and 2013, whereas the number of males in prison only grew by 12% (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014).

The vast majority of inmates will transition back into their communities at some point. There is no set standard between states—or even between communities within states—for the reentry process (James 2015). Additionally, inmates who “max-out” on their sentence may go through no reentry programming at all when reentering the community. Risk factors and protective factors have been the focal point of many studies involving offender reentry. However, few researchers have undertaken phenomenological explorations of successfully reintegrated women’s experiences and perceptions. The perceptions of formerly incarcerated women regarding their success in reintegration is relevant because they are actual members of the population of interest, which gives them unique insight and perspective on their experiences (Doherty et al., 2014).

The new information from this study helps to inform interested parties, such as corrections officials, family members, and other service providers about what is needed in order to successfully reintegrate women into their communities after incarceration. Interested parties may use the information from this study to create improved reentry programs for inmates. Improvement of reentry approaches serves to benefit the women

released from prison, as well as their communities, by lowering rates of recidivism. Furthermore, since women who have criminal histories are often mothers (McPhail et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2014), the benefits of this type of positive social change have the power to positively affect their children, creating a multigenerational benefit.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I described the background of the study, as well as the problem I addressed in it. I have also offered definitions of special terms and outlined the study's purpose, research questions, theoretical foundation, nature, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. Chapter 2 contains a review of existing literature relative to the topic of this study. This review shows the need for further research that would allow for a better understanding of the perceptions of formerly incarcerated women regarding their treatment and reentry needs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Nearly two-thirds of women released from incarceration will recidivate (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014). Many reentry programs do not equip women with the knowledge and skills they need for successful reentry into society, and many incarcerated individuals receive no reentry programming at all. Since the reentry needs of women are different than those of men, a clear understanding of what can aid successful reentry for women is needed. In this study, my focus was on developing a better understanding of women's perspectives of their needs when reentering the community after incarceration. Exploring their perspectives may shed light on better approaches for addressing their needs as they reenter the community. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated women who have been successful upon reentry for at least 3 years. For the purposes of this study, I defined "success" as being free of any arrests for at least 3 years after release. In the study, I explored participants' lived experiences of successful reintegration as a formerly incarcerated woman. I explored experiences they had before, during, and after incarceration that influenced successful reentry into the community, as well as their perceptions of the factors that made them successful in reintegrating into the community after incarceration.

In Chapter 2, I review literature that served as the foundation for this study, including information relevant to the topic, phenomenon, and population. I review books, peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly works, and pertinent online resources. In

the review, I give particular attention to literature related to this study's theoretical framework while discussing how other researchers have used some of its key concepts. I also review studies which examined the experiences of women while in prison, in rehabilitation programs, and during reentry. However, information regarding the perceptions of successfully reintegrated women was largely absent in the literature. A rationale for the study as well as a synthesis of the reviewed literature which is relevant to this study is also presented. The results of the current study contribute to the body of literature supporting reentry strategies for women in the justice system.

Research Strategy

I reviewed relevant literature published between 2012 and 2017 from several disciplines including sociology, criminology, and psychology. Studies included reflect quantitative, qualitative, and meta-analytical approaches. I also reviewed doctoral dissertations. The primary search engines used in this process were EBSCOhost, PSYCinfo, SAGE journals, and Criminal Justice Database. To identify studies and statistical information that would be relevant to the research topic, population, and setting of this study, I used the following search terms: *female offender rehabilitation, reentry barriers, transition programs, successful reentry, offender reintegration, offender resiliency, recidivism statistics, and female recidivism.*

Theoretical Foundation

Feminist theory, which draws on a wide range of perspectives and themes specific to women, was the theoretical foundation for this study. Feminist theory has a broad scope, addressing not only gender differences, gender inequality, and gender oppression,

but also structural oppression (Cole, 2017). Although there are many different variations of feminist theory, these themes remain central to them all.

I used feminist theory to highlight the importance of recognizing and accommodating gender differences in offenders, as well as to note society's marginalization of the study population. Feminist theory originated when Mary Wollstonecraft penned her essay, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792 (Lewis, 2017). This seminal work would lay the groundwork for women to secure the right to education, which would then lead to power and influence in society (Wollstonecraft & Ward, 1996). Wollstonecraft posited that women had reasoning abilities that equaled those of men, and therefore, should be granted the same opportunities as men. Her works made an argument for equal education of males and females.

Since the late 1700s, other feminist activists and writers contributed to a body of work that became the foundation for various feminist-focused theories. Betty Friedan (1963) wrote about the "problem that has no name" in her book *The Feminine Mystique*. Her widely known declaration of female independence took the women's rights movement several steps forward. Friedan challenged the idea that a woman's identity was defined only by her relation to her husband and children, and instead, called for women to be viewed as unique individuals. Rather than be bystanders in a male dominated world where they are to be sexually passive, Friedan suggested they should be viewed as sexual beings with an identity of their own.

Although my specific focus was on the needs of female offenders upon reentry into society, feminist theory encompasses far more than simple gender differences and

gender-specific needs. The primary assumption of modern feminist theory is that in a male dominated culture, the needs, issues, trends, and problems specific to women may be overlooked. While this may be true, it is important to avoid thinking of feminist theory as a dualistic concept. Feminist theory is, at its core, aimed at achieving justice, equality, and freedom for all individuals, regardless of gender, race, or social status (Conlin, 2017; Ferguson, 2017). Certain similarities between male and female populations in the correctional system are acknowledged in this study. I also acknowledge that treating female offenders based on research using male offenders is illogical and unproductive. Feminist theory supports recognizing women's gender-specific needs and creating interventions that reflect this recognition, not interventions that are developed for men and then modified for women.

Feminist theory is also a political endeavor rather than just an intellectual pursuit (Ferguson, 2017). The information gained from studies grounded in feminist principles serves as a springboard for movements that address social injustice and structural oppression of women. This is an ongoing process as society evolves and the needs of individuals and communities change. It is a process that must be engaged consistently in order to affect appropriate social change. The information gained from this study and others like it may serve to raise awareness of the needs of this under-recognized, underserved, and marginalized population, potentially highlighting the importance that lawmakers formally address the needs of female offenders.

Feminist theory has been applied in research in a vast number of areas such as therapy, social work, politics, criminality, and education (Conlin, 2017; Eyal-Lubling &

Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Humans are multidimensional beings, and as a result, these topics are going to be related in some fashion in any given person's life. The interdisciplinary nature of feminist principles and study can be seen in this linking of various facets of life. Intersectionality is what allows feminist theory to cross so many different domains. Intersectionality acknowledges that the world is not linear, and cannot be reduced to a single cause and effect statement (Ferguson, 2017). It is a perpetually changing concept that provides the ability to examine the interrelation of individual identities, lived experiences, systems of oppression, and factors such as age, gender, religion, sexuality, disability, language, or race (May, 2015). Studying the interaction of these various facets of an individual's or a community's existence allows for examination and potential change in systems of inequality and power imbalance (May, 2015). My focus was on illuminating how certain factors affect female offenders. Poor education, lowered ability to make a living wage, difficulty obtaining accessible child care as well as medical and psychological care, and lack of safe, affordable housing, come together to create seemingly insurmountable reentry challenges for women. This study aligns well with the tenets of feminist theory that address power imbalances and the importance of acknowledging rather than overlooking the needs, issues, trends, and problems specific to women.

Researchers have used feminist theory in several qualitative studies of female offenders after their release from incarceration. Garcia and Lane (2012) used feminist theory to connect juvenile girls' delinquency to the factors in their lives that they believe contributed to their delinquent behavior. Stone, Liddell, and Martinovic (2017) used

feminist theory to illustrate the marginalization of incarcerated mothers as a population. Olson et al. (2016) used feminist theory in a quantitative study to help determine whether men and women have different risk factors for recidivism by using the Level of Service Inventory-Revised. Their goal was to illustrate how gender differences impact recidivism and to use their findings to create a paradigm shift in the delivery of treatment and reentry services to females. Holtfreter and Wattanaporn (2014) compared two programs to determine whether gender responsive programs were more beneficial to women than gender-neutral programs. Using feminist theory as their foundation, they were able to show that recidivism was reduced more effectively by using the gender responsive program.

In this study, I used feminist theory to guide my exploration of the gender-specific challenges these offenders face when reentering society, and of the factors that may help them be successful upon reentry. Understanding how social structures and current practices in the justice system contribute to further marginalization of this population may lead to implementation of new policies and procedures for female offenders.

Crime Rates in the United States

Men commit the vast majority of crimes in the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012). Although women account for a very small percentage of the total crime committed in the United States, crime rates are on the rise for women (Stephenson et al., 2014; Tripodi & Pettus-Davis, 2012). Research has shown that incarceration rates for women are increasing faster than for men (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014). The number of

incarcerated women in the United States grew by more than 700% between 1980 and 2015, which is more than double the rate for men (The Sentencing Project, 2017).

A new approach to dealing with law breakers led to the increase from approximately 13,000 women being incarcerated in 1980, to over 110,000 being incarcerated in 2015 (Carson & Anderson, 2016; The Sentencing Project, 2017). When the War on Drugs began in the 1980s, harsher sentencing laws and new mandatory minimums for drug offenses resulted in a massive (more than 1,000%) increase in the number of incarcerated people (The Sentencing Project, 2017; Tripodi & Pettus-Davis, 2012). With the new drug laws and a lack of programs designed to specifically meet the needs of female offenders, the number of women in prison skyrocketed (Glazer, 2017; Tripodi & Pettus-Davis, 2012).

The types of crimes committed by women tend to be different than the types of crimes committed by men. Men are more likely to commit violent crimes than women, while women more often commit property or drug offenses (Carson & Anderson, 2016). Women are also far more likely than men to be arrested for prostitution (Snyder, 2012). While 3-year recidivism rates for women are lower than for men (62.9% versus 72.5%), these rates for women are still concerning.

Characteristics of Female Offenders

Most incarcerated women are unmarried, between ages 25 and 34 years (Barnes & Cunningham-Stringer, 2014), and mothers (Miller et al., 2014). Incarcerated women are far more likely than incarcerated men to be the primary parent for at least one child before and after incarceration (Mapson, 2013). This places increased responsibility and

pressure on incarcerated mothers. Upon reentry, mothers are more likely than fathers to have to juggle parenthood with work or training for a marketable skill.

Female offenders tend to have higher rates of mental illness, substance abuse issues, and victimization perpetrated against them than their male counterparts (DeHart & Moran, 2015; Kerig, 2014; McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Females also engage in more self-harming behaviors than males, and have higher rates of attempted suicide (Sherman, Mendel, & Irvine, 2013; Stephenson et al., 2014). Women released from prison tend to be less educated and have less earning potential than men released from prison (Mapson, 2013; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer (2014) found that more than half of incarcerated women in their study may have received money from illegal activities before incarceration. The desperation that comes from needing to survive and to provide for a family paired with prior experience of making money illegally highlights one of the dangers associated with recidivism that women may face when released.

Women who are released from incarceration are also at increased risk for homelessness (Asberg & Renk, 2015). With fewer resources available to them, mothers may be faced with making decisions that lead to illegitimate ways of making money. Research shows a spike in prostitution charges against women between the ages of 25 and 49 (Snyder, 2012), which points to a potential attempt at survival and to provide for themselves and possibly a family.

Risk Factors for Female Offending

The risk factors and pathways of women into incarceration tend to differ from the pathways men take (Brennan et al., 2012; DeHart & Moran, 2015). Brennan et al. (2012) identified eight pathways associated with female offending. The eight pathways were consolidated into four tracks which identified women as “normal” offenders, battered women offenders, poor subcultural socialized women offenders, or asocial aggressive damaged offenders. This research underscored the importance of recognizing gender responsive factors when determining a woman’s pathway to criminal activity. Although the relevance of gender-neutral factors is acknowledged, the gender responsive factors were responsible for placing women along six of the original eight pathways. Only two pathways were free of gender responsive factors. Brennan et al. (2012) noted the high prevalence of repeated sexual and physical abuse (37%), as well as various types of mental illness (25.2%) in their sample, as well as the fact that victimization of justice involved females often begins at a young age.

In considering the pathways women take to incarceration, we must acknowledge that the pathway often begins before age 18. Justice involved girls experience far more victimization and exposure to violence than non-offending girls. In a mixed methods study, DeHart and Moran (2015) found that justice involved girls begin witnessing violence in the home at a median age of eight, experiencing caregiver violence at a median age of 12, and experiencing sexual violence and drug use at a median age of 13. Running away, stealing, and becoming involved with the justice system tended to happen around age 14. Dating violence, gang violence, and prostitution tended to happen as girls

got into their later teens. Some girls in their sample were prostituting while still minors, using substances to cope with violence, associating with criminally involved adults, and using aggression and violence in retaliation for violence they were witnessing themselves. Narratives provided by the girls revealed how they were being exposed to further victimization by engaging in high-risk activities like substance abuse and sex work. The same phenomenon is discussed later with adult populations. This research highlighted the need for gender informed interventions even at the juvenile level. Waiting until girls become involved with the justice system as adults to address their needs in this way is ineffective. DeHart and Moran (2015) stress the need for gender specific assessment and intervention for females of all ages in order to properly address their specific needs.

Victimization of Females

An overwhelming number of incarcerated adult females were the target of interpersonal violence as a child, and domestic violence as an adult (Correctional Association of New York, n.d.; Lynch et al., 2012). Female offenders experience physical and sexual abuse as children, rape, and romantic partner violence at higher rates than males (Lynch et al., 2012). The types of victimization women experience before becoming involved with the justice system may include childhood neglect, physical or sexual abuse, or interpersonal violence perpetrated by romantic partners (DeHart & Moran, 2015; Kerig, 2014; Pritchard et al., 2014). Although men may also experience some of these types of victimization before coming to prison, research shows that the rates for women are much higher (DeHart & Moran, 2015).

Females, more often than males, are victims of multiple types of abuse, rather than just one (DeHart & Moran, 2015). This is referred to as *polyvictimization*. In a 2012 study, Lynch et al. found that out of 102 incarcerated women, 23.5% experienced four types of victimization (forced intercourse, forced molestation, physical violence with a weapon, and physical violence without a weapon) at some point in their past. 32% experienced three of these types of victimization, and 25.5% experienced two types. Only 10.8% reported that they had never been victimized in any way. Once victimized, women are at risk for further abuse. In the same study, 90% of women reported that they had experienced violence at the hands of a romantic partner within the year preceding incarceration. Victimization often precedes substance abuse, and mental health issues (Tripodi & Pettus-Davis, 2012).

Trauma

Women in the justice system have high rates of trauma exposure, which puts them at increased risk for engaging with antisocial romantic partners, which in turn elevates their risk of being involved in interpersonal violence and revictimization (DeHart & Moran, 2015; Kerig & Ford, 2014). It is a cycle that can be difficult to break. Trauma disrupts one's ability to effectively regulate emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal processes. Individuals exposed to trauma are more likely to use unhealthy strategies for communication, and problem solving, and to have lower levels of interpersonal trust and self-regulation (Kerig & Ford, 2014). Women who have experienced traumatic events often feel shame and guilt long after the event took place (Aakvaag et al., 2016). Women experience significantly more shame and guilt than men who have experienced traumatic

events (Aakvaag et al., 2016). Guilt is often found to be associated with mental illness, but research on guilt after trauma has produced mixed results. It is unclear as to whether or not the guilt and mental health issues are actually the result of feelings of shame surrounding the traumatic event (Pugh, Taylor, & Berry, 2015).

Girls may react with more strain than boys to problems within their family, including abuse by family members (Garcia & Lane, 2012). Since females place more importance on relationships than males, their reactions to dysfunction in these relationships may be stronger (Garcia & Lane, 2012). Additionally, males and females tend to react differently to traumatic experiences. Females develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of trauma exposure more often than males (Nooner et al., 2012). Trauma early in life also predisposes women to personality disorders later in life (Bartlett et al., 2015).

We must recognize that when exposed to abuse and trauma, the likelihood of using drugs, as well as the likelihood of dealing drugs or prostituting to pay for drugs, goes up (Koski & Costanza, 2015). Women who have a history of prostitution often have a history of victimization and trauma (Shdaimah & Wiechelt, 2013). It is recommended that therapists who treat women who have engaged in prostitution be very careful when assessing their history of trauma, as there is often a great deal of physical and psychological trauma for these women (Perdue et. al, 2012). Matheson (2012) posits that physical and sexual abuse create a trauma response that often precedes adolescent delinquency, adult criminal behavior, mental illness, and addiction. Substance abuse is a common maladaptive coping mechanism used by individuals who have experienced

trauma, and who have poor problem solving skills, and will be discussed next (Kerig & Ford, 2014).

Mental Health & Substance Abuse

Women in the justice system have higher rates of mental illness and substance abuse than men (Glazer, 2017; McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Specifically, women are more likely to engage in self-harm, attempt suicide, and to experience symptoms such as psychosis, anxiety, and depression than men (Light, Grant, & Hopkins, 2013). Their mental health issues are often comorbid with substance use issues (Bartlett et al., 2015; Saxena et al., 2014). Sartor et al. (2013) found that childhood sexual abuse was strongly correlated with early drug and alcohol use. Green et al. (2016) found that exposure to interpersonal violence, and family dysfunction were the strongest predictors of development of bipolar disorder, depression, PTSD, and substance abuse issues. Tripodi and Pettus-Davis (2012) found that being physically abused as a child, or both sexually and physically abused as an adult, greatly increased the likelihood of substance abuse, suicide attempts, and hospitalization for emotional problems. However, DeHart and Moran (2015) found that the sheer number of victimization incidents better predicted psychological symptomology than any particular type of victimization.

Justice involved women tend to use different coping mechanisms than men, a phenomenon which may be related to prior trauma, and mental illness (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Drug use is sometimes used as a form of self-medication, as a response to recent and prior trauma (Bartlett et al., 2015). Substance abuse increases the likelihood of involvement with the justice system (Kerig & Ford, 2014). Nearly 60% of

women in federal prisons and 25% of women in state prisons are convicted of drug-related crimes (Glazer, 2017). These percentages are higher than the percentages of men serving time for drug offenses (Glazer, 2017). Although these percentages may not seem high, nearly three quarters of incarcerated women meet the criteria for substance dependency, regardless of the crime they have been convicted of (Lynch et al., 2012).

Research shows that for women, drug use typically precedes criminal behavior, whereas the opposite is true for men (Swan & Goodman-Delahunty, 2013). Women are more likely than men to report that the purpose of their criminal behavior was to support their own, or someone else's, drug habit (Light et al., 2013). Furthermore, women are more likely to be introduced to drug use by a romantic partner or a family member, whereas men are more likely to be introduced to drug use by peers (Yang et al., 2015). These differences in context and motivation for women's substance use have only recently been addressed in the literature (Kreis, Gillings, Svanberg, & Schwannauer, 2016).

Childhood Offending

While the focus of the current study is on adult female offenders, some adults with a criminal record got their start as juveniles (National Institute of Justice, 2014). As such, a brief discussion of characteristics of juvenile offenders is appropriate for further informing the purpose of this study. Research on juvenile offenders has consistently shown differences in the characteristics of male and female juvenile offenders (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2013; Sherman & Balck, 2015; Stein et al., 2015). For example, girls tend to be arrested most often for status offenses such as running away, drinking

alcohol, or truancy (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2013), whereas boys are about four times more likely than girls to be arrested for a violent offense (Glazer, 2017). In 2015, girls were nearly twice as likely as boys to be detained for status offenses and technical violations (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2013; Sickmund, Sladky, Kang, & Puzzanchera, 2017). One reason for this trend is that many judges fear for the safety of girls if left on the street or in their homes, so they choose to detain them (Sherman & Balck, 2015). Although well-intentioned, this approach leads to higher numbers of girls in detention than is actually warranted. Additionally, due to the fact that there are far fewer girls in detention than boys, girls may not be classified according to offense, the way that boys are classified (Sherman et al., 2013). This results in girls being lumped together, and younger girls, girls with mental illness, and girls with low-level offenses being housed with violent girls. This may make them feel especially vulnerable in detention. DeHart and Moran (2015) found that many girls who engage in prostitution do so after having been incarcerated, which we might speculate is the result of “learning” from other girls in detention. Several studies have shown that in terms of rehabilitation, juvenile detention is actually more detrimental than helpful to juveniles (Holman & Ziedenberg, 2013; National Institute of Justice, 2014). This is especially true for girls due to the lack of understanding of gender-specific needs and individualized approaches to treatment in the juvenile justice system (Sherman & Balck, 2015).

Girls in the juvenile justice system tend to have backgrounds that differ from boys in the juvenile justice system. Since girls are more likely than boys to be charged with minor offenses or status offenses, they tend to have their first arrest earlier in life than

boys (Flocks, Calvin, Chriss, & Prado-Steiman, 2017). Additionally, girls tend to be exposed to more types of victimization than boys before becoming involved in criminal activity (DeHart & Moran, 2015; Kerig & Becker, 2012; Stein et al., 2015). Girls are not only more likely than boys to endure multiple types of abuse, but are also more fearful of being revictimized than boys (DeHart & Moran, 2015). This fear tends to be highest in girls who commit violent crimes (DeHart & Moran, 2015). Girls involved in the juvenile justice system attempt suicide far more often than boys (26% of girls vs. 7% of boys) (Sherman et al., 2013). Once involved with criminal activity, girls are at increased risk for future victimization and risky behaviors, such as gang involvement and drug use (DeHart & Moran, 2015). They are also at increased risk for being involved in domestic violence (Kerig, 2014).

Once girls have become involved in the juvenile justice system, they face challenges whether in or out of correctional custody. If they are not incarcerated, they are often exposed to high-risk peers and unsafe hangout spots (DeHart & Moran, 2015). If they are incarcerated, or are living in a setting such as a group home, they are still exposed to high-risk peers, and may be missing the educational opportunities they would receive on the outside. While in the community, girls tend to have lower grades than boys who have juvenile records (Stein et al., 2015).

There are many different factors that contribute to the delinquent behavior of girls. Incarcerated girls and women may have differing opinions from the professionals who work with them regarding what factors contribute to their criminal behavior. Garcia and Lane (2012) conducted a qualitative study to find out what factors got girls in

trouble. Using feminist theory and strain theory as the lens through which to view their findings, they noted that although the experiences of girls and boys may seem very similar on the surface, girls actually experience and process events differently than boys. Garcia and Lane (2012) assert that these gender related differences call for gender responsive actions from rehabilitative services. For their study, girls in the juvenile system, women in the adult correctional system, and juvenile justice professionals participated in focus groups in which they discussed which risk factors they felt were contributors to girls' delinquency. The three participant groups agreed that drug use was the top reason that girls get involved with the justice system. They also agreed that fighting with parents, physical/sexual abuse, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases were contributing risk factors. However, the incarcerated girls and women differed from the professionals on a few factors. Whereas the incarcerated girls and women identified boyfriends and truancy as two of the top reasons they got in trouble, the professionals identified poor parenting, parental criminality, unstable home life, and mental health issues as top risk factors for criminal behavior. From these findings, we might infer that the factors for justice involvement identified by professionals were catalysts to factors for justice involvement identified by incarcerated girls and women. For example, rather than truancy and association with delinquent boys happening spontaneously, they were actually a product of poor parenting, and unstable home life. This highlights the potential differences between perceptions of professionals, and those who are incarcerated, as well as the interconnectedness of various facets of an individual's life.

Many of the programs in place, and reforms that are implemented in the juvenile system, are not addressing the needs of females, or considering the differing pathways that lead them to delinquent behavior (Flocks et al., 2017; Sherman & Balck, 2015). Similar to research involving adult offenders, research involving juvenile females is lacking, which leaves corrections professionals with a misunderstanding of the needs of girls in their system, or of how the “gender-neutral” programming may affect girls (Sherman & Balck, 2015).

Girls in the juvenile justice system present with more complex, critical mental health and social needs than boys (Sherman et al., 2013; Stein et al., 2015). Girls exhibit more pathology, as well as more complexities in interpersonal relationships than boys (Stein et al., 2015). However, because boys make up the majority of incarcerated juveniles, and the research on juveniles is largely focused on males, the issues specific to females are going unnoticed. In a system that is supposed to help stop the cycle of victimization, marginalization, and criminal behavior, girls are being overlooked and treated the same as boys.

Adult women in the criminal system have similar backgrounds to girls in the juvenile system (Garcia & Lane, 2012). Therefore, addressing these gender-specific needs in the juvenile system is also warranted (Flocks et al., 2017). Future research may also address what makes some girls and women more resilient than others (Garcia & Lane, 2012). Once these factors are identified, studies might focus on whether or not resiliency factors can be taught. Additionally, since many women get their criminal start during adolescence, it would be wise for future research efforts to be focused on

determining how trauma-informed, or other gender-focused approaches, might be beneficial for females in the juvenile system (Garcia & Lane, 2012). This early intervention may mean the difference between desistance before adulthood, and continuance of a criminal path.

Risk Factors for Reoffending

There is no lack of research on risk assessment. However, most studies aimed at exploring risk factors for reoffending are done using male subjects (Barrick et al., 2014; Olson et al., 2016). Females are especially absent from literature involving post-release studies (Olson et al., 2016; Vigessaa et al., 2016). Olson et al. (2016) used feminist theory as the lens through which to quantitatively explore the differences between males and females in the risk factors that contributed to their recidivism. Findings revealed that prior self-harm, childhood physical abuse, and previous mental health treatment had no correlation to recidivism. This was an unexpected result. In light of this finding, Olson et al. (2016) suggests that these factors may be more associated with initiation of criminal activity rather than with recidivism. However, these results could also be the result of poor self-reporting of these experiences by participants, or of different rates of exposure to various types of treatment. This study did reveal that being unmarried increased the risk of recidivism for men, but not for women. Having prior arrests for the sale of drugs was predictive of violent offending for women, but not for men. Olson et al. (2016) also found that having a prior prostitution charge put women at increased risk for recidivism, which is discussed more in depth toward the end of this section. This study also supported well-known correlations between both high rates of prior offenses, and age,

with recidivism for both genders. Overall, the authors of this study highlighted the need for attention to context and gender-specific factors when performing intakes, or risk assessment with offenders.

A quantitative study by Scott et al. (2014) looked for predictors of recidivism for women over a 3-year period after release. This study revealed that recidivism could be reliably predicted for women by only four factors (age, not having custody of children, the frequency of substance abuse, and number of substances abused). The correlation between substance abuse and criminal behavior is well documented (Wikoff, Linhorst, & Morani, 2012), but when the frequency and variety of substance use increases, risk of recidivism also increases (Scott et al., 2014). Age is a predictor of recidivism risk for both men and women. As age increases, criminal behavior decreases (Scott et al., 2014). In this study, women who had no custody of their children had a 50% higher risk of recidivating within 3 years after release. In fact, women without custody of their children had more than four times the risk of recidivating within the first 90 days than women without children. In addition to these robust findings, Scott et al. (2014) acknowledges other risk factors that were found to be significant, such as prostitution (gender responsive factor) and criminogenic thinking (gender-neutral factor). The Scott et al. (2014) study culminates by stressing the need to address both gender responsive, and gender-neutral risk factors in assessing and treating offenders.

Olson et al. (2016) acknowledges that during intake, quality of familial and marital relationships is typically not explored. Only marital status is noted. However, further exploration of this factor may allow corrections professionals to ascertain whether

or not an inmate has prosocial friends, family members, or partners to return to. Noting the type and amount of contact an offender has with others on the outside is also valuable in understanding recidivism risk.

Social ties and familial relationships seem to predict recidivism more for women than for men. Barrick et al., (2014) quantitatively examined the impact of social ties on incarcerated women. Although there is limited research aimed at determining the importance of pre and post-release emotional support and contact, the existing literature shows that positive familial support and contact may aid reintegration. The population for this study consisted of 255 women, nearly three quarters of whom had minor children. The types of contact examined were contact by mail, contact by phone, and contact by visitation. Results showed that offenders with more familial contact while incarcerated had better post-release outcomes than offenders with less contact. Results also indicated that women with children were less likely to recidivate than those without children. The most interesting finding was that women with lower rates of familial contact, but higher rates of non-familial contact had higher risk of recidivating after release than those with higher rates of familial contact, but lower rates of non-familial contact. We might infer that women with more familial contact have more stable familial relationships, and therefore, more instrumental support upon release, thus contributing to their success upon reentry.

Just as there is a well documented correlation between substance abuse and crime, as well as age and crime, there is also a significant correlation between low levels of education and crime (Wikoff et al., 2012). Lack of education limits earning potential.

Female offenders tend to have less earning potential than male offenders, which is possibly due to the fact that, as a group, they are less educated than males (Mapson, 2013; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015).

Some women turn to prostitution to earn money. Sex work is often associated with lack of housing and familial support (Scott et al. 2014). Having a prior prostitution charge is a risk factor for recidivism (Olson et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2014). When nonviolent female offenders recidivate, they are more likely than males to reoffend with prostitution (McCoy & Miller, 2013). Risk factors for committing an act of prostitution are recent relocation, substance use, being homeless or having unstable housing, and having mental health issues (Polaris, 2016). These are similar risk factors for overall recidivism as well. Prostitution is a crime of survival, which makes it difficult to stop (Marcin, 2013).

When a woman already has a prior prostitution charge, measures must be taken during her reentry programming to address the way that she has previously earned money. Women who engage in sex work are particularly likely to recidivate when they engage in no reentry programs or other supportive services (Scott et al. 2014). Guidance and support during reentry, and even job placement, may help to lessen the potential that she would return to prostitution to make ends meet.

Olson et al. (2016) notes the importance of acknowledging context when considering the factors that bring a woman in contact with the justice system, and Scott et al. (2014) notes the connection between trauma (although not a risk factor in itself), and the subsequent behaviors that can lead to interaction with the justice system (i.e.

substance abuse or risky sexual behavior). Scott et al. (2014) points out that victimization serves to increase stress and mental health problems, which then may be coped with by abusing substances, which then increases the likelihood of involvement with the justice system. These quantitative studies allude to the intersectionality of various facets of life as they apply to recidivism risk, but a qualitative approach may more fully demonstrate the entwinement of these factors.

Treatment and Reentry Programs for Women in Prison

All offenders need assistance with reentry that goes beyond meeting their basic needs (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). Women have gender specific needs that should be acknowledged during incarceration, as well as during the reentry process in order to offer them an improved chance at being successful upon release. Ideally, planning for reentry should begin while women are still incarcerated, and should include employment training or planning, because successful reintegration is less likely without sufficient income (Johnson, 2014).

There is no single definition or description of reentry programming because programming varies by location and agency. Preparation for release can begin while incarcerated, such as when an inmate participates in substance abuse counseling, or a GED program. Reentry programs may be community based, prison based, or parole based, and may involve a combination of two or more of these approaches (Wikoff et al., 2012). These programs also vary in scope and duration (Wikoff et al., 2012). For some, reentry programming may only be implemented upon release. Some inmates will receive

no reentry programming at all, and be released directly into the community, without supervision of any kind (Vandenberg, 2013).

Twenty-two percent of offenders max-out on their sentences and receive no post-incarceration supervision (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2014). However, offenders who engage in no post-incarceration reentry programming or supervision fare worse than those who do have supervision after release (Ostermann, 2012). Research on programs implemented during incarceration, as well as those implemented after release, show that programming is effective in reducing recidivism (Wikoff et al., 2012), and when interventions are gender specific, they are even more effective for women (Wright, Van Voorhis et al., 2012).

A number of researchers have focused on gender and trauma-specific needs of women while incarcerated, noting specific directions for treatment programs for women, based on those needs (Lynch et al., 2012; Saxena et al., 2014; Tripodi & Pettus-Davis, 2012). Tripodi & Pettus-Davis (2012) quantitatively examined the relationship between childhood victimization and the subsequent mental health issues, drug use, and sexual victimization that followed. The population of this study consisted of 125 female inmates who were soon to be released. Similar to the Olson et al. (2016) and Scott et al. (2014) studies discussed in a previous section, this study was able to connect victimization to drug use and risky sexual behaviors. The study focused largely on which types of abuse were correlated most often with drug use or risky sexual behaviors, and elaborately demonstrated the complexity of the relationship between mental health problems, victimization, and substance abuse. More important to the current research is the

conclusion of this study, which illuminates the need for recognition and accommodation of trauma related issues in prison treatment programs. The authors stress the importance of implementing multimodal treatment for women in prison, addressing issues not only related to substance abuse, but also to mental health issues, and trauma.

Treatment programs for women with a history of victimization and substance abuse issues may be more effective if they are gender responsive. In a quantitative study, Saxena et al. (2014) primarily sought to determine how mental health issues, such as depression, were improved by participation in a gender responsive treatment program. Using the harm reduction model, researchers found that women who participated in gender responsive treatment while in prison showed lowered rates of depression, as well as substance use, post-treatment than those who participated in a gender-neutral program.

An integrated approach to treatment, which addresses multiple issues, rather than just substance abuse, has more impact on women than substance abuse treatment alone. Using a mixed methods approach, Lynch et al. (2012) explored female inmates' past experiences of interpersonal violence (IPV) and how they are related to mental health (i.e., PTSD, depression, general psychological symptoms, substance abuse) and treatment needs. The quantitative portion of the study drew correlations between various types of IPV and mental health status. The qualitative portion of the study explored inmate perceptions of their treatment needs, based on these experiences and mental health issues. Findings indicated that a multifaceted approach integrating substance abuse treatment with trauma treatment, and other issues specific to women would be most beneficial. Participants felt that these treatment efforts should include topics related to parenting,

grief/loss, and the process of transitioning out of prison. One participant expressed the desire for counselors to “look past the substance abuse” because she felt that the most important problems to be addressed were the events that lead to the substance abuse. Some expressed a desire for individual counseling, and one participant stated that there’s “no transitioning back” once you come to prison because the challenges are too great. This study is important because it illustrates the urgency of qualitatively researching the reentry needs of this population. It also expressly illustrates the need to understand underlying issues leading to substance abuse in this population.

Along with integrative treatment while incarcerated, intensive case management beginning before release and continuing after release, may be most beneficial to women. McDonald and Arlinghaus (2014) conducted a quantitative study to determine the effectiveness of gender responsive intensive case management for women upon reentry. Data collected on 108 female releasees from a Kentucky prison were analyzed to determine the type of programming the inmate was involved in, and how it correlates to reentry outcomes and recidivism. The average participant was 35 years old and had two children. Some participated in programs while still in prison, such as GED or vocational certificate programs. Some participated in reentry programming both before release and after. Some only participated in programming before release. McDonald and Arlinghaus (2014) found that although intensive, gender-responsive case management before release decreased recidivism in women, those who participated in programming both before and after release had even better outcomes, especially for new convictions. Those who participated in educational programs primarily did so before release, indicating the need

for these programs to be offered before reentry. Women who participated in the program both before and after release were more likely to be employed full-time after release, as well as to use substance abuse and mental health services after release than those who only participated before release. While many of the reentry issues addressed in this program applied to both men and women, McDonald and Arlinghaus (2014) noted the disparities in opportunities and the subtle differences in reentry challenges between genders. Their study focused on the gender-specific needs of women, and how addressing them in pre and post-reentry programming was beneficial to female participants.

Girls and women need an individualized approach to risk assessment, recovery, and reentry programming, that considers their social, environmental, biological, and educational needs (Sherman & Balck, 2015). Any programs designed for women should feel safe and empowering for the participants so they will feel comfortable enough to effectively utilize, and benefit from the programming (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Programs should acknowledge any history of abuse, and incorporate these issues into a treatment plan. Not only do we have to consider prior victimization and substance abuse issues for women reentering society, we should also acknowledge that this is a marginalized population that lacks education, and marketable job skills (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014).

Reintegration Challenges for Female Offenders

More than 600,000 offenders are released and sent back into their communities each year in the United States (Carson & Sabol, 2012). These offenders will need to be

prepared for reintegration and must have the necessary skills in order to be successful upon reentry. However, there are many challenges faced by offenders reentering the community after incarceration. These include finding housing, accessing medical and psychological care, addressing issues related to parenting, and obtaining employment that is sufficient to pay for it all. Some of these issues are primarily concerns for female releasees. These topics are discussed next.

Housing

Female offenders often face homelessness upon release because housing is often difficult to find (Asberg & Renk, 2015). Many offenders have strained relationships with family members, and are not able to stay with them upon release (Johnson, 2014). Some offenders may qualify for public housing based on financial status, but the type of crime they committed may prevent them from being eligible for public housing programs (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Getting an apartment on their own is often not an option because many landlords conduct background checks for new applicants (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Low-risk female offenders who are placed in halfway houses are actually at a higher risk for recidivism than if they are placed in public or private housing (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Therefore, once all options are explored, halfway houses should be a last resort for low-risk women. When considering housing with friends or family members, the background, and substance abuse/criminal history of those in the home should also be noted because deviant associations pose a risk factor for offenders upon reentry (Davis et al., 2012).

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships play a large role in reintegration. Typically, offenders have a history of engaging with deviant peers or family members, which threatens their ability to desist from drug use and criminal activity upon release. When offenders are able to avoid these types of associations upon reentry, they have an increased likelihood of desistance (Davis et al., 2012). However, Doherty et al. (2014) noted that even when offenders attempt to avoid deviant peers, sometimes peers seek out the offenders once released.

Women who are mothers may have the added challenge of maintaining positive relationships with relatives who are caring for their children. Many family members have long given up on their incarcerated relatives, making communication and collaboration of childcare difficult. Even if relations with family members are not strained, there are far fewer facilities for female offenders than for male offenders. Therefore, the families of female offenders may have to travel greater distances to visit, reducing opportunities for contact (Hagan & Foster, 2012).

Medical and Psychological Care

Accessing medical and psychological care can also be challenging. Most former offenders have no medical insurance (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). This greatly limits their options for medical, dental, and mental health care, which includes substance abuse treatment. Although there are community mental health and substance abuse treatment programs available, accessibility of these programs may be affected by

distance, or by space available in the program (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Finding transportation to reach these services can also be a barrier to receiving treatment.

Employment

Finding employment is yet another challenge faced by offenders reentering the community (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Many employers are reluctant to hire individuals with a criminal record. Additionally, former offenders are typically less educated than those in the general public, and women tend to have less education than men (Mapson, 2013; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Cobbina and Bender (2012) assert that men are more likely to secure employment upon release than women. Even when employment is obtained, the wage earned is often too low to support an individual, much less an individual with children (Willging et al., 2016).

Overcoming economic barriers after release may seem an insurmountable challenge due to unemployment or underemployment. Johnson (2014) conducted a qualitative study with 60 female parolees as participants, to explore the economic challenges that these women face upon reentry. Through semi-structured interviews, participants revealed that financial barriers, combined with the stigma of being an ex-felon made reentry success feel nearly impossible. The most significant barrier to becoming financially stable was employment. Paying for housing, food, transportation, childcare, clothing, and fees associated with parole supervision were paramount. However, obtaining employment capable of meeting this need was difficult for participants. Furthermore, meeting these needs financially was sometimes not enough, such as when unexpected events occurred that required extra funds. Participants

acknowledged that when they were unable to find housing, and obtain sufficient employment to support themselves and their children, it was likely that they would return to theft and sex work to make ends meet. Reconnecting with old acquaintances then contributed to drug use and further criminal behavior.

Gender-Specific Challenges

Many of the challenges facing women upon reentry are gender-specific. Caring for others, besides themselves (i.e. children) creates a gender-specific challenge for women. Women, far more often than men, take on the challenge of regaining custody of children, and then attempting to support them financially (Cobbina & Bender, 2012). The fact that these mothers rarely receive support from the fathers of their children further compounds this issue (Stone et al., 2017). This challenge, above all others, demonstrates the intersectionality of multiple challenges for women upon reentry (i.e. finding employment, obtaining housing, finding access to childcare, enrolling in public assistance programs, etc.).

Upon reentry, mothers must overcome the stigma of being a “bad mother” who violated gender role expectations (Hagan & Foster, 2012). Not only do they face disdain by the community, but they must also regain trust of children and family members (Bachman et al., 2016). These mothers often internally battle shame, feeling broken, and worthless, which can lead to detachment, an unhealthy coping mechanism (Kreis et al., 2016). Ideally, these issues would be addressed in counseling, but many women do not participate in counseling services after release. When these barriers seem

insurmountable, former offenders are at risk of reoffending, whether via technical violation, or by committing a crime aimed at survival.

Research has shown that incarcerated mothers are angrier than incarcerated women who are not mothers (Roxburgh & Fitch, 2014). This is not true for incarcerated fathers. The difference between mothers and fathers may be the result of living arrangements for children of incarcerated people. Whereas 90% of incarcerated fathers report that their children live with the child's mother, children tend to live with grandparents when their mothers are incarcerated (Roxburgh & Fitch, 2014). Mothers tend to take a more active role with their children and feel more intense loss when they cannot be with their children.

In a 2017 study, Stone et al. qualitatively examined the perspectives of professionals working with mothers who reenter the community after incarceration, regarding the challenges they face during reentry. Some of these professionals were once incarcerated mothers, themselves. The most prominent theme discussed was that being separated from their children was the greatest punishment of all. The women felt self-loathing, anger, and isolation once incarcerated. Participants described the emotional process mothers go through as being similar to experiencing the stages of grief. However, most of these women grieve alone while incarcerated. Whether incarcerated for a long time, or a short time, the reintegration challenges were similar. Participants felt that family members and professionals in the community seemed to distrust these women once they tried to reintegrate, and proving themselves as worthy of regaining possession of their children required that they clear many hurdles. Many women felt that

once one challenge was conquered, another popped up. Stone et al. used feminist theory to explain the structural inequalities that challenge these oppressed women in their daily lives. The hope of the authors was to affect social change that would positively impact mothers in the justice system. The authors suggested that instead of directing funds toward incarceration of these women, that funds be diverted to programs that would allow for rehabilitation of these women while living in their communities. Without this type of support, mothers may continue to struggle, trying to provide for themselves while at the same time, having to prove themselves capable of supporting children.

Mothers may be faced with difficult decisions when trying to support themselves and their children. Sometimes this means they may revert to illegal activity to earn money. Women turn to prostitution far more often than men to make ends meet. However, this only leads to more trauma, and involvement with the justice system. Women who prostitute often have backgrounds that are rife with abuse and neglect (Shdaimah & Wiechelt, 2013). In fact, these women are one of the most victimized groups in society (Matthews, 2015). Their emotional and economic vulnerability makes them easy targets for exploitation.

Rural areas pose additional challenges when returning from incarceration. Rural areas have fewer community resources available, as well as fewer places to work. When women are released back to small towns, they may find that there are few available jobs, even for non-felons, and the bulk of the available positions for felons are more suited to men, such as in construction work (Willging et al., 2016). The lack of public transportation in rural areas may make it extremely difficult for released offenders to

reach community resources if they are not located in their town. The only option would be to rely on friends or family members for transportation. This reliance on others threatens successful reentry (Willging et al., 2016).

In a 2016 qualitative study, Willging et al. explored the reentry barriers created by structural inequality faced by women returning to rural areas. Findings revealed that women returning to rural areas face lack of treatment services, employment opportunities, and simple information and support from the correctional system upon release. The women and their family members, who were participants in the study, expressed that they felt alone during the reentry process. The result was an overwhelming feeling of pressure and defeat related to financial and emotional strain.

Governmental policies and institutions may actually serve to increase the risk that marginalized populations like incarcerated women sink further into poverty, poor health, and other problems (Kupchik & Gifford, 2012). Minimum mandatory sentencing laws and the rise in incarcerations since their implementation have caused higher rates of reliance on public assistance. This is evidenced by the positive correlation between incarceration rates and Medicaid enrollments (Kupchik & Gifford, 2012). However, some states make it more difficult than others to qualify for public assistance, and actually have an inverse relationship between incarceration and Medicaid enrollment, sparking discussion of what some are calling “the punitive regime thesis” which asserts that states with harsher laws are also stingier with public assistance (Kupchik & Gifford, 2012). Women in these states may find it harder to get back on their feet after incarceration.

Factors for Successful Reintegration

Explaining why individuals begin criminal behavior is different than explaining how they come to desist from criminal behavior (Davis et al., 2012). In a 2012 qualitative study, Davis et al. explored the protective factors that make adult offenders successful upon release into the community. Participants were both male and female, and had varying levels and frequency of incarceration. Participants identified several protective factors that they perceived as having helped them stay successful on the outside, as well as factors that threatened their success. Overwhelmingly, they identified the following protective factors; desistance from drug use, obtaining education and job training, obtaining legitimate employment, interacting with prosocial friends and family members, and cutting ties with deviant friends and family members. However, this study did not address any gender-specific factors, such as trauma, mental illness, or parenting, and the participant group consisted mostly of men.

A feeling of “readiness” to reintegrate into society may also be a factor in successful reintegration. Doherty et al. (2014) conducted interviews with 31 women released from prison within the previous 18 months to explore factors that made women successful upon reintegration. Some participants had already been returned to prison. Participants were asked about the time immediately following release, concerning what contributed to their success, and what threatened their success on the outside. Participants discussed their “reintegration readiness” as it was affected by factors such as desire to change, unresolved trauma or addiction, emotional states (i.e. self-esteem, depression), interpersonal relationships, educational or economic barriers, and fear of

reintegration. These factors and their interconnectedness were described by participants to explain why they were or were not ready for reentry to the community. Narratives shared in the article were primarily from women who were not successful upon reentry. The most salient limitation of the Doherty et al. (2014) study is that it primarily focused on women who were not successful upon reentry, thereby leaving a gap in understanding what may help women be successful upon reentry.

Motherhood, and other factors related to identity, can affect desistance. In a 2016 qualitative study, Bachman et al. found that study participants who had successfully reintegrated into the community no longer saw themselves as criminals or drug users. Instead, they identified as something more positive such as a parent, or a prosocial member of the community. About half of participants were still abusing substances, and nearly one quarter reported involvement in criminal activity, despite being a mother. This study acknowledged and explored overlapping issues, such as barriers to success that tend to surface when discussing protective factors and successful reintegration.

When comparing reentry programs that are gender responsive to those that are not, we can see how the gender responsive programs are more beneficial to women. A 2014 study by Holtfreter and Wattanaporn examined two reentry programs in order to determine which produced better outcomes for women upon release from incarceration. This feminist theory-informed study acknowledged the differences between males and females in their experiences before incarceration, in the way they process and cope with stress, and their needs once released. Although both programs addressed issues related to parenting, one program included gender responsive issues such as victimization histories,

mental health issues, interpersonal relationships, and marginalization by society. This program allowed institutional as well as community organizations serving released women to utilize gender responsive approaches to treatment. The program that utilized the more comprehensive approach showed better outcomes, reducing recidivism significantly more than the other program.

Women face many barriers to reentry success upon release from incarceration. Economic barriers tend to be the primary theme for women reentering society. Having money makes other reentry barriers, such as lack of transportation, housing, and childcare, nonexistent. However, finding legitimate ways to make money can be challenging after release. A contributor to economic disadvantage of this population is the structural inequality they face upon reentry.

Positive family support is important for successful reentry (Davis et al., 2012; Garcia & Lane, 2012; Willging et al., 2016). Women tend to fare better upon reentry when they perceive themselves as having a positive support system on the outside (McCoy & Miller, 2013). This factor was a strong predictor of desistance from crime for women, but not for men (McCoy & Miller, 2013). Coming home to supportive family members offers offenders an advantage over those who have either no one to return to, or drug using or unsupportive family members to return to. When social support networks are already in place upon release, women tend to be more optimistic about reintegration (Cobbina & Bender, 2012).

There are several factors that increase the odds that a woman will have a better chance at success on the outside. Improving her education level while in prison is

beneficial. Many offenders earn their GED while incarcerated, giving them a better chance at becoming employed upon reentry (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Offering gender-specific reentry programming is also beneficial (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014). Research shows that although intervention programs may be costly, the financial benefits of keeping people out of jail far outweigh the cost of the programs themselves (National Institute of Justice, 2014). Understanding the different needs and risk factors for men and women is also essential so that professionals in corrections can tailor interventions to the specific needs of offenders, which would ideally result in better reentry outcomes (Vigesaa et al., 2016). Additionally, participation in intensive case management before and after release has the potential to reduce the likelihood of committing new crimes (McDonald & Arlinghaus, 2014).

Summary

Upon reentry, there are daily struggles that are unique to women, but many reentry programs ignore this (Koski & Costanza, 2015). For women, successful reintegration after incarceration requires a complex, multi-faceted approach, which addresses housing, employment, childcare, transportation, and medical and therapeutic treatment. These efforts should begin during incarceration, and continue after release in order to achieve maximum effectiveness. Educational programs which lead to attainment of a GED, or other certification that would allow for increased earning potential, would be greatly beneficial for women planning to reenter the community. Current research asserts that reentry programs for women should be gender-specific, holistic, therapeutic,

based on individual needs, and appropriate for the community (Koski & Costanza, 2015; Leap, Benson, Davidson, & Lompa, 2016).

Upon release, many offenders are thrust into a precarious lifestyle, where they are expected to thrive independently, yet lack some of the basic skills and services needed to be successful. In the quest for professionals to determine how to best help offenders reintegrate into their communities, they would ideally implement an individualized approach, considering gender, ethnic, racial, and other differences. The many differences between male and female offenders illuminates the reasons for their different responses and success rates in treatment and during reentry. Correctional professionals need separate research and programs for females in order to meet their needs in a system that is used to serving a predominantly male population (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2013).

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated women that influenced their successful reentry into their communities. I explored the perceptions of formerly incarcerated women regarding the factors or coping mechanisms that aided their successful reintegration. For the purposes of this study, I considered women to be successful upon reentry if they had not had any arrests for at least 3 years after release. Being remanded to prison for even a short time for a technical violation was considered an arrest, and was cause for exclusion from participation in this study. Therefore, study participants were adult women who had been consistently living in the community for at least 3 years post-incarceration. Understanding the person-specific and context-specific attributes, factors, and experiences that contribute to the successful reentry of these women into the community, from their own perspectives, may assist the development of programs or policies for women, relevant to the reentry process. Because these women are members of the population of interest, they have unique insights into their experiences and are best at explaining how they navigated those experiences and the factors that made them successful (Doherty et al., 2014). When exploring the perceptions of these women, I discussed with them themes related to motivational factors, protective factors, and barriers to success. In this chapter, I discuss the research design and rationale, my role as researcher, the study methodology, ethical concerns, trustworthiness of the study, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

I selected a qualitative design and used a phenomenological exploratory approach to fully explore the lived experiences and perceptions of formerly incarcerated women regarding their experiences of reentry to the community after incarceration. Two research questions guided this study and were used as a foundation to better understand the phenomenon being studied.

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of successful reintegration as a formerly incarcerated woman before, during, and after incarceration that influenced successful reentry into the community?

RQ2: What coping mechanisms or traits do formerly incarcerated women feel were important to their successful reentry to the community?

Phenomenology facilitates understanding of the vast experiences and perspectives of others and allows for the analysis of explanations of rich, complex experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This approach makes it possible to glean multiple meanings from a description given by a participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). Exploratory research is meant to explore certain research questions, but is not necessarily meant to solve a particular problem (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Achieving a more in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of study participants may provide corrections professionals and other service providers with the information needed to more effectively direct the care of female offenders reentering society. Because the focus of exploratory phenomenological research is on the lived experiences of people and their

expression of these experiences in language without looking for a direct solution to a problem (Rudestam & Newton, 2015), exploratory phenomenology best suited this study.

Role of the Researcher

I was the sole interviewer and data collector. Using a single interviewer prevents variation in interview style and data collection techniques (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My role was to develop interview questions (see Appendix A), interview each participant, and probe further into participant answers in order to gain a full understanding of participants' perceptions. After data collection was complete, my role was to code and interpret data.

Researcher bias, such as confirmation bias and culture bias, has the potential to alter data during collection and interpretation. During data collection, I used bracketing to avoid influencing the participants' explanations of the phenomena with my own experiences. Bracketing is done by writing honest thoughts, impressions, and feelings as notes while recording or analyzing data in order to recognize any personal influences of the researcher that may alter data collection or analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Reflexivity is the constant assessment and awareness of personal positions, beliefs, and biases during the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I maintained reflexivity throughout the process in an attempt to ensure purity of data collected. Although I have counseled men and women who were previously incarcerated, I did not interview any individuals who were former clients of mine in order to avoid bias or any power imbalance as much as possible.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Study participants were women over the age of 18 years who had served at least 9 months in a state or federal prison or jail, who had not been arrested for at least 3 years post-release, and who had not returned to prison or jail as the result of a technical violation during that time. Any women who served fewer than 9 months were ineligible for participation, as were juveniles and men. I asked participants to offer an explanation of incarceration and arrest history in order to determine eligibility.

Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to gain detailed, robust information from a specific population (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used purposive sampling to identify appropriate participants for the study based on gender, age, and incarceration history. Participants were recruited through two Community Supervision and Corrections Departments, and one church in North Texas. Flyers advertising the study were posted at all locations. Interested individuals called or emailed me if they wanted to participate. I sent potential participants a letter explaining the study (informed consent), which included an explanation of criteria needed to be eligible to participate. Participants returned consent forms directly to me rather than to the church or adult supervision services departments.

Sample size was determined by how quickly saturation was reached during the data collection process. Saturation is the point at which gaining more information does not necessarily yield new information (Mason, 2010). Researchers disagree on the

optimum sample size in phenomenological studies (Mason, 2010). For this study, the target sample size was 10, or until saturation was reached.

Instrumentation

I developed a semi-structured interview protocol based on the two research questions in the study (see Appendix A). Subquestions and follow-up questions were included in the interview roadmap in order to provide direction during interviews. I conducted telephonic semi-structured interviews in order to gain a complete understanding of the experiences of participants. Research has shown that participants feel more comfortable when giving interviews by phone, rather than in person (Novick, 2008). The anonymity provided by not being able to see the interviewer may lead to higher levels of comfort with disclosing intimate information. All calls were audio recorded so they could later be transcribed, and I took notes in order to capture my thoughts in the moment. I informed participants that their interviews would be recorded before they consented to participate. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes in order to allow ample time for interviews to be completed and to ensure that participants fully understood the questions, as well as to encourage them to elaborate on answers that were vague or confusing. One interview was conducted with each participant. Following transcription, I analyzed and coded the data to identify themes.

Other researchers have used semi-structured interviews and focus groups to explore topics related to the reentry process (Davis et al., 2012; Doherty et al., 2014; Johnson, 2014). Johnson (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with women to explore their perceptions of economic barriers to reentry success. Davis et al. (2012) also

used semi-structured interviews, but interviewed both men and women regarding their perception of what makes offenders successful after release, and of factors that may serve as barriers to success after release. Doherty et al. (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews to explore the same constructs, but used only women as participants. I also used semi-structured interviews with exclusively female participants. Using this type of instrumentation allowed for thorough explanation of the lived experiences of participants, and led to a deeper understanding of those experiences.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative data may consist of audio recordings, hand-written notes, or interview summaries. The data collected can be as complex as the lives of individuals from whom data were collected. When researchers code their research, they are capturing the essence of the data (Saldaña, 2015). Two rounds of coding took place after data collection was complete. In the first round, descriptive coding allowed me to summarize the primary topics of the interviews. In the second round of coding, pattern coding was done in order to look for patterns in the data. I then identified categories by determining which coded items belong together in families or groups (see Saldaña, 2015). At this point, themes began to emerge in the data. This laid the groundwork for cross-interview analysis. Data collection and analysis stopped upon reaching saturation (see Saldaña, 2015). Saturation is the point reached when obtaining new data does not yield new information.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In qualitative studies, credibility refers to internal validity. Credibility is largely connected to instrumentation and data in a qualitative study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). From the instrument used, it should be possible to draw meaningful information related to the research questions posed (Toma, 2011). For the purposes of this study, credibility was established via saturation and member checking. Member checks were used to ensure the accuracy of the data recorded (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I asked participants whether I missed or misinterpreted any information gathered from their interviews before data analysis began. Checking in with participants eliminated the possibility of misinterpreting or leaving out information that was relevant to the study. Saturation is reached when no new information is being discovered (Saldaña, 2015). Reflexivity was also maintained throughout the process to avoid researcher bias.

Transferability

In qualitative studies, transferability refers to external validity. Variation in participant selection helped to ensure that a good cross section of the population was represented. I recruited participants through correctional supervision offices in two counties located in North Texas, and through a large church in the area. The first county is a rural county, made up of several small towns. The second county consists mostly of densely populated suburbs of Dallas, Texas, with a few rural towns to the north of the county. The church that was used for participant recruitment is located in North Texas, and has a diverse congregation. I used thick description to increase the richness and

complexity of the research. Participant responses were explored and interpreted in a way that did not gloss over the topic in a superficial way but instead delved deep into the meaning of the experience itself.

Dependability

Establishing dependability requires that researchers have a reasonable explanation for the method of data collection and that the data collected are consistent with this explanation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Essentially, the data gathered must answer the research questions asked. Being able to audit the research process and the actions and influences of the researcher also helps to establish trustworthiness in a study (Carcary, 2009). Making the research process transparent to other researchers allows for determining the trustworthiness of methods used and conclusions reached. An audit trail of the steps taken to conduct this study was maintained for this purpose.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the idea that the study results should come from data obtained from participants rather than from a particular bias of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). The goal for researchers was to remain as objective as possible. However, there are always biases that must be acknowledged. In qualitative research, the researcher must strive to avoid personal influences that may alter the data in any way. Constant reflection on the part of the researcher is necessary. Reflexivity was a primary goal during this research study.

Ethical Procedures

The American Psychological Association sets forth the ethical guidelines for researchers in the field of psychology. These guidelines require that researchers take certain precautions when working with live subjects. Researchers must minimize potential risk to study participants by providing informed consent, maintaining confidentiality throughout the process, representing the statements of participants accurately, and properly debriefing participants before, during and upon completion of data collection (American Psychological Association, 2017b). Approval from the university Institutional Review Board was obtained before contacting any potential participants. Participants were recruited through a solicitation letter posted at correctional supervision offices in two counties located in North Texas, and a large church in the area. Potential participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary. They were informed that there would be no adverse reaction from me or the agency they were contacted through should they have chosen not to participate. Participants were informed that should they choose to participate, their responses would not be shared with the church, or probation or parole officers. They received a \$10 Wal-Mart gift card upon completion.

Informed Consent

Each participant received an informed consent form. This form described participant rights, and all information pertinent to this study. The informed consent form contained information regarding the goals of this study, a description of data collection techniques used, the expected amount of time they would spend participating in this

study, the incentive offered for participation, a confidentiality statement, and a section stating the voluntary nature of participation as well as an explanation of how to opt out of the study. The informed consent form also contained an admission that interviews would be audio recorded. Informed consent forms were sent through the mail, or through email. Understanding of this form was verified over the phone. Participants returned a signed copy of the informed consent form by mail, email or fax before participation in the study began.

Confidentiality

Participants were made aware that a coding system would be used to identify their interviews rather than their name. Using a coding system helps to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. For example, if Jane Thomas was interviewed on January 9, 2018, her code would have been JT10918. Assuring confidentiality allows participants to be more open and honest with their responses. Any electronic data obtained during data collection was kept on a password protected computer. Paper documentation was locked in a safe, along with thumb drives containing audio files. A list of participant names and mailing addresses was kept in a locked safe for the purposes of mailing the gift card to participants, and then destroyed upon completion of the study. All remaining data will be destroyed after 5 years from completion of the study.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to add to the existing literature on women who have been successfully reintegrated into the community for at least 3 years after release from incarceration. Chapter 3 defined the study concepts and explained

details related to the phenomenon being studied. The research questions were reviewed and a rationale for the research design given. My role as researcher, including potential researcher bias was discussed. An explanation of the methodology used was discussed, which contained details regarding participant selection, instrumentation, and data analysis methods. Issues of trustworthiness were discussed, along with plans for reducing bias, and any researcher influence that may alter the data. Finally, ethical considerations were outlined.

Chapter 4 contains a detailed analysis of all data collected. The setting, participant demographics, evidence of trustworthiness and findings of the study are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to explore and understand formerly incarcerated women's perceptions of the factors that made them successful when reentering the community after incarceration. Two research questions were explored in this study:

R1: What are the lived experiences of successful reintegration as a formerly incarcerated woman before, during, and after incarceration that influenced successful reentry into the community?

R2: What coping mechanisms or traits do formerly incarcerated women feel were important to their successful reentry to the community?

In Chapter 4, I present the findings from the analysis of the interview responses. Research setting, participant demographics, and the data collection process are also discussed in this chapter. Finally, I provide evidence of trustworthiness, and discuss the methods I used to establish credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Setting

I conducted phone interviews for the convenience of participants and to promote a feeling of anonymity, confidentiality, and comfort for them. Semi-structured interviews allowed for open dialogue with participants, and the use of phone interviews allowed for exploration of sensitive topics that may have been more difficult to discuss in person. Participants were very forthcoming in their responses, which is evidence of their comfort with the setting used for the interview.

Demographics

Eight women who were previously incarcerated for a minimum of 9 months and had been out of prison for at least 3 years participated in this study. Participants ranged in age from 33 to 48. The mean age was 40. The ethnicities of participants are as follows: One Caucasian, three African-American, and four Hispanic. The sentences they served ranged from 9 months to 7 years. The time they have been out of prison ranged from 5 to 17 years. Six of the eight women had children at the time of their incarceration. The numbers of children participants have ranged from one to seven. One of the women gave birth to her third child in prison. Seven of the women were employed at the time of the interview. The eighth woman reported that she was beginning a new job within the week. Six of the women were living on their own, while two of the women were living with a relative.

This group of participants was diverse in their educational and professional backgrounds. Four of the women were certified for a trade (e.g., hair dresser, welder) or had earned an associate's degree. One woman had a 10th grade education, one had earned her GED, one was a high school graduate, and another had taken a few college classes. One participant owns her own business, and another is a hairdresser. One participant is in charge of the daily care of her autistic nephew, which is a government job. The rest were working in hourly jobs at stores or in food service. All of the women had at least one felony on their records.

Data Collection

My initial goal was to interview 10 participants. However, saturation was reached prior to interviewing that number of participants, and only eight participants were interviewed. The eight interviews were conducted via telephone, which was the most convenient method for all parties involved.

IRB approval (02-12-18-0554248) for this study was given in early February 2018. The participant selection process began immediately after approval. I sent flyers advertising the study to correctional supervision offices in two counties, and a large church located in North Texas, which posted the flyers. Ten potential participants contacted me about the study. Consent forms, which detailed criteria for inclusion, an explanation of the study's purpose and approach, and the voluntary nature of the study, were emailed to potential participants. I then scheduled a brief conversation with each potential participant in order to determine eligibility and to ensure understanding of the consent form. All potential participants who reached out were eligible for the study. One potential participant determined that she did not want to participate in the study. The remaining potential participants completed the consent form and returned it to me. Interview appointments were set at this time, and identification codes for each participant were assigned. One participant continually rescheduled her interview until her interview was no longer needed because saturation had been reached.

Interviews began on February 18, 2018, and continued for 8 days. Interviews were scheduled in 60-90 minute blocks. I asked semi-structured questions, which allowed me to ask pertinent follow-up questions and the participants to elaborate as

necessary. All interviews were audio recorded and stored on secure thumb drive. Hand written notes were also taken during each interview. During the member check process, I reviewed with participants the points discussed during the interviews to ensure that my understanding was correct. Any elaboration or correction was addressed at that time. Several participants chose to elaborate on some of the topics discussed during the review process.

Once completed, I transcribed the interviews using rev.com, an online transcription service. Each transcription was completed within 24 hours of interview completion. I then coded interview transcripts using a Mac Numbers spreadsheet. The document folders containing this data were then saved on a password-protected thumb drive.

The actual data collection method did not deviate from the method described in Chapter 3, and I encountered no unplanned events in the data collection process. Although a few of the interviews were rescheduled from their originally scheduled times, all participants were actively engaged in the process, and the interviews were completed in a timely manner. Although all participants were eager to be interviewed and were forthcoming with their stories of incarceration, reentry, and recovery, some were more talkative than others. Some seemed to have a more limited vocabulary, which restricted their ability to give richer descriptions and details. Regardless, these participants were just as open with sharing their stories and opinions as the others.

Data Analysis

I reviewed the transcribed interviews before beginning data analysis. Each transcript was reviewed in detail. Taking notes during interviews allowed me to better recognize terms and ideas that were emphasized multiple times by participants. Descriptive coding, and then pattern coding was used to analyze data. Categories then emerged, allowing for identification of broad themes.

The following terms were frequently used during interviews: family support, family ties, try harder for my children, lonely, hopeless, helpless, scared, don't give up, determined, valued freedom, halfway house, addiction, programming, faith, mindset, accountability, change, attitude, behavior, employment, education, housing, hard-working. I highlighted important terms and themes in different colors in order to visually group these concepts, which aided in creating the spreadsheet containing the data. Hand written comments were made on the transcriptions to indicate my interpretation of certain remarks. Important quotes were marked with yellow highlighter. A master spreadsheet was made which allowed for grouping of related terms and concepts into broader categories. The themes related to the first research question that emerged during analysis were *supportive relationships, employment, education, transportation, parenting, and positive programs*. The themes related to the second research question that emerged during analysis were *readiness for change, motivation/determination, accountability, turning to faith, and communing with likeminded women*.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Accuracy of findings in qualitative studies can be determined by examining evidence of trustworthiness. In what follows, I discuss the four components to trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Credibility

In order to confirm the quality of this research, I used saturation, member checking, and environmental and data triangulation. Saturation was reached before completion of 10 interviews, which was the original number I had targeted. Interviews stopped after the eighth interview. At that point, participant responses had become redundant and any further data collection would have been superfluous. Member checks allowed for participants to correct any misinterpretation of their statements I may have made, and to elaborate on topics that needed clarification. Member checking helped to establish credibility of data collected. This is a common technique used in qualitative research, and it allowed me to ensure that I had not inserted my bias into the collected data.

Transferability

The findings of this study are not meant to be generalized to other populations, as they are context specific. In order to allow outside readers to better understand and interpret the data, I used thick description. Using thick description allowed me to highlight the intersectionality of context, beliefs, emotions, relationships, and other details. Providing sufficient detail and description of these complex life situations allows

for individuals other than previously incarcerated women to find meaning in the study findings. I used purposive sampling to recruit multiple participants with potentially varying viewpoints. Other researchers may determine for themselves if the findings of this study might be transferrable to their own research settings and population.

Dependability

Environmental and data triangulation helped ensure dependability of the findings. Participants were interviewed on different days of the week, and at different times of day. Participants were also in different locations during interviews. Participants served time at different facilities, and served different amounts of time. This helped to ensure that the views expressed were accurate, and fairly static across participants. The challenges and factors needed for success after incarceration expressed by participants can be considered trustworthy since they were similar across various participants. I have securely stored all records related to this study in order to provide an audit trail, establishing dependability and credibility.

Confirmability

Since I was responsible for analysis and interpretation of this data, I am aware that researcher bias may have impacted study outcomes. Journaling allowed me to document my concerns about my role as researcher as well as any preconceptions or assumptions I had that may impact this study. Reflexivity was maintained throughout this process. Reflexivity is the constant assessment and awareness of personal positions, beliefs and biases during the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Of specific interest was the fact that my journaling increased as the number of participants

interviewed increased. This was done in an attempt to avoid the assumption that the upcoming interview would resemble the previous interview.

Results

When exploring formerly incarcerated women's perceptions of successful reentry, their lived experiences, and their traits and coping mechanisms, eleven major themes emerged. Relating to RQ1, the following themes emerged: *supportive relationships, employment, education, transportation, parenting* and *positive programs*. Relating to RQ2, the following themes emerged: *readiness for change, motivation/determination, accountability, turning to faith* and *communing with likeminded women*. These themes are listed and described in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Study Themes and Descriptions Relating to RQ1

Theme	Description
Facilitators of reentry success	
Theme 1: Supportive relationships	Includes familial relationships and friendships, and often determines how much and what kind of support women receive after release.
Theme 2: Employment	The primary task required for reentry success because it allows a woman to provide for herself and possibly children.
Theme 3: Education	A contributor to reentry success, education increases a woman's potential to find employment.
Theme 4: Transportation	A contributor to reentry success, which determines the ease of completing daily activities that are necessary for success: Getting to and from job, visiting children in the care of others.
Theme 5: Parenting	A motivational factor in reentry success.
Theme 6: Positive programs	Programs both during and after incarceration that contributed to participants' reentry success.

Table 2

Study Themes and Descriptions Relating to RQ2

Theme	Description
Personal traits and coping mechanisms	
Theme 7: Readiness for change	Refers to the extent to which one is mentally ready to make life changes. A factor in reentry success.
Theme 8: Motivation/determination	An explanation of the motivators that helped maintain determination and focus to succeed.
Theme 9: Accountability	The extent to which one accepts responsibility for her own behavior and the consequences of that behavior.
Theme 10: Turning to faith	Belief in God and participation in faith-based activities to cope with life in prison and during reentry.
Theme 11: Communing with likeminded women	Gaining support from other women while in prison and during reentry.

Facilitators to Reentry Success

The following themes emerged, relating to RQ1, which explored the lived experiences of successful reintegration as a formerly incarcerated woman before, during, and after incarceration that influenced successful reentry into the community: supportive relationships, employment, education, transportation, parenting and positive programs. Participants described how these six themes influenced their success when reentering the community after incarceration.

Theme 1: Supportive Relationships

Participants in the current study discussed how family and friends can make a difference in the lives of incarcerated women. These relationships may be positive, supportive relationships, or they may be negative, destructive relationships.

Subtheme: Familial relationships. Familial support played a large role in the success of participants both while incarcerated, and while reentering the community. Many of them received financial and emotional support from family members, as well as help with children, when they were incarcerated. Financial support allowed the women to purchase snack foods, shower shoes, socks, feminine hygiene products, soap, shampoo, and other extras, making incarcerated life a little more comfortable. Women who did not have this support had to find creative ways to get by. Participant 1 mentioned making tampons when she had no money to purchase them. Participant 8 washed her clothes with a bar of soap because she was unable to afford detergent. Participant 8 had strained relationships with family members, causing family members to deny her financial support. Participant 1 reported that her family had very little money to offer, but she was thankful for what they were able to send.

Some participants left their children in the care of family members while incarcerated. Participant 4 discussed how thankful she was for her parents, who kept her three children while she was incarcerated.

My parents were always there. My parents took care of my kids while I was gone. My parents are already older. They're in their 60s and they're taking care of all three of my kids and they're always a support for me. And I think it's the

family support. If you don't have that family support, it'd probably be harder on someone, you know?

Familial support was also emotionally beneficial for participants while incarcerated. Participants described prison as a very lonely place. For some participants, contact with family members provided them with the contact they needed to at least temporarily break the isolation they felt. Unfortunately, some participants received no visits while they were incarcerated. They received no visits because their relationships with family members were strained, or because they were simply too far away for family members to visit. Participant 1 lived in Texas, and was arrested in Texas, but served her time in California, where there was a facility that had space for her. This made it impossible for her grandmother, her only supportive family member, to visit her. Participant 1 still felt connected to her grandmother through letters and phone calls during her incarceration. Other participants also discussed serving time in places that were too far for family members to visit. Participant 5 stated,

For me it was rough because I was so far away from all of my family. I was two states away from my home base. I never had a visitor while I was incarcerated for two and a half years.

Familial support was necessary not only for monetary and emotional support, but also to serve as a home base, a place to go back to when participants were released.

Participant 1 described the effect that lack of family support can have on recidivism.

There was one girl named Tiffany. That girl came in there [prison] three times. I was just like damn, is this your career coming to prison? I mean what is going

on? So, but you know, listening to her story, she didn't have anything going back out. She didn't have no family, you know what I mean? She didn't have anywhere stable that she had an address that you can even call anybody or that somebody's sending you money. You know? I talked to my family when I was there. They sent me money while I was there. Even my pastor I had at that time, my pastor was there for me to talk to.

Family served as the foundation for Participant 1 when she returned from prison. She was able to use her grandmother's home as a stopping point along the way to independence. Participant 7 also discussed the benefit of being able to live with her mother upon release, until she could save enough money to afford her own apartment.

Subtheme: Friendships. Supportive friendships, much like supportive familial relationships, served to motivate and uplift participants when they needed support. Participant 7 noted that a friend on the outside helped her get her first job after incarceration at a fast food restaurant, making that part of the process less stressful. Participant 2 described how supportive friends helped her with reentry after prison.

The good friends that I have were my number one supporters so they encouraged me to do a lot. So, if you don't have any encouragement from your family or your closest people then you're pretty much gonna go back down the same road. You know, you're not gonna have anybody that leads you in the right direction, and I had that.

Participants discussed how friendships on the outside can serve to contribute to a woman's success after release, or to contaminate it. Many participants noted that friends

who are still living a criminal lifestyle should be avoided if a woman wants to have a successful, crime-free life. Participant 6 stated,

I've always said the people that you hang around with, they're the people that influence you the most. So you've got to surround yourself with positive people, people that want the best for you.

This participant described how old friends sought her out after her release, and how she ran into them at the grocery store. She opted to abandon her full cart of groceries in order to escape the situation. Her solution, since she could not move away, was to alter her schedule so that she did her shopping early in the morning, when she was less likely to encounter old acquaintances. This avoidance of old friends aided her success by limiting negative influences in her life.

Participant 3 elaborated by stating,

If you want your life to change, your environment has to change. Period. It's no other way around it. If you want your life to change, you cannot go back into the same environment doing the same thing, hanging around the same people.

Theme 2: Employment

Employment is the primary task required for reentry success because it allows a woman to provide for herself and possibly children. However, several participants noted that finding a job can be challenging for someone with a felony.

Six out of eight participants in the current study were able to find employment very quickly after their release, which they felt was a contributor to their successful reentry. Some mentioned the pride they felt in achieving this task so quickly. For these

participants, the benefit of obtaining employment was not only in building financial stability, but also in building self-esteem. Participant 7 said,

That job was the best thing that could happen to me, because that was like my first step right there to getting other jobs that led up to better pay, better benefits.

Participant 8 reported that her probation officer was very impressed that she found employment only 1 week after her release.

I did get a job a week after I got out of prison. One week! And my probation officer said she had been doing it for over ten years and she'd never seen anybody get a job in 1 week. But my determination was enough. I did not want to fail.

When asked what she found most challenging about the reentry process, participant 2 said,

The background check. But I figured what's the worst they can say, no? So, I just kept going.

Participant 2 applied for and was hired for a state job soon after her release. Although she assumed that she might be turned down for a state job because of her status as a felon, she tried anyway. She has now held that job for 5 years. In addition to this job, she obtained a second job at the local community college. She stated that having these jobs helped her feel like she had redeemed herself in the eyes of her family members, and she was no longer embarrassed of who she was.

Participant 3 took the first job she could find after release, which was in construction, but then found a job at a factory, which offered better pay in a setting that required less strenuous manual labor. She recounted her experience with working long

hours so that she could earn enough money to purchase a vehicle. She was very proud of her achievement.

I walked to work every day, every morning. In the evening I walked home.

Worked 12-hour shifts, sometimes longer, 5 days a week and you know, I was just real determined, but then I got me a car. It was a Dodge Neon, black. It was cute, two-door, five-speed and I felt like that was a Lexus. I don't think I've ever been that happy since then or before then about getting a car.

Theme 3: Education

Education is a contributor to reentry success, as it increases a woman's potential to find employment. For participants 1 and 4, having a trade certificate or a college degree opened doors to jobs that do not involve strenuous manual labor. Participant 1 has a cosmetology license, and still works as a hairdresser today. She specifically mentioned that having this license made it easy for her to find a job when she was released. She said this about finding a job.

It was because I had my license before I went in, so it was fairly easy. I finished college [cosmetology school] before I went.

She was extremely grateful that the judge who sentenced her allowed her to complete her cosmetology program before turning herself in to serve her 7-year sentence.

Participant 4 chose to pursue an education while she embarked on her 3-year job search after release from prison. She explained that the welfare program she was enrolled in allowed her to get an office administration certificate at no cost to her. However, she wanted to earn her associate's degree in office administration. Her

solution to this problem was to save money in other areas in order to pay for classes. She completed her associate's degree while receiving public assistance, and now works in an office setting, which was her goal. Participant 2 earned an associate's degree and participant 6 earned a trade certificate, but neither are working in a field related to their education. Despite this, they are both proud of their achievements and are happy they received the education. For participants in this study, educational achievements led to more earning potential, and a sense of pride.

Theme 4: Transportation

Having transportation is a contributor to reentry success, which determines the ease of completing necessary daily activities such as getting to and from a job, or visiting children in the care of others. Several participants mentioned the importance of transportation when you are trying to rebuild your life. Those who had cars found it easier to visit loved ones, get to job interviews, get to their jobs on a daily basis, get to drug tests, and get to meetings with probation officers. Participant 1 stated that it can be really difficult to get where you need to go when you have to rely on the public transit system. Participant 3 described her experience with the Dallas public transit system.

When I tried to get that job, I caught a bus, and I thought it was going to get me close to the place I needed to go, but it did not. I was miles away and there was nothing close by. I end up having to run down a steep hill that was covered by nothing but trees. It stopped at a college and I was so scared and I ran to the bottom of that hill and at the bottom of the hill was a gas station. I sat down and I cried and I cried. I was like God, I am trying my best. And a lady came up to me

and she asked me was I okay. I was sweating, I was just crying, I was just a mess. Because I was trying really, really hard and I'm like, God if I don't get back to this place on time, they can send me back to jail. And so this lady walked up and she was, "Are you okay?" I was, "No I'm not, I'm trying to get this job and if I don't get back to the halfway house," because I explained my whole situation, "I can get in trouble, I can get locked up." And she was like, "I can give you a ride." She didn't judge me or anything, she was just real, real sweet about it. So transportation is very, very important and if you don't have it, how are you going to accomplish anything?

Participant 3 also discussed her difficulties with getting to visit her two daughters, who were staying in two different homes while she was in the halfway house and then at the YWCA. Her perception is that her relatives made no effort to bring the girls to visit her, so it was up to her to find a way to get to their houses.

Participant 1 purchased a vehicle soon after release in order to make the 40-mile daily drive from her halfway house to her job, making her less reliant on others for rides. She described how riding the train and the bus increased her anxiety because she had spent 7 years in prison and was not used to being around crowds of people. Having her own transportation helped her feel safe and calm.

Theme 5: Parenting

Parenting can be a motivational factor that contributes to reentry success. All six participants who have children stated that they wanted to do better for their children.

Many of them stressed how their children motivated them to be better people, and to live a life free of crime. Participant 4 said,

I changed my life. I changed around. I didn't wanna go back. I really had to think about my kids. It was hard on my kids and stuff like that, you know, me being away.

Participant 7 said,

Really what motivated me the most was my kids. It was really hard for me to be there, locked up for like 3 years, and have barely any contact with my kids.

Participant 3 desperately wanted to get back to her children in order to ensure their safety since they stayed with their father, who was a drug addict, while she was incarcerated. This situation was the motivator she needed to change her criminal behavior. She said,

I could not wait to get them. I imagined so many days seeing my kids ride in the car or us going somewhere to get something to eat or looking into their room and seeing them, those type of things. Just the simple things that we take for granted every day.

Theme 6: Positive Programs

There were programs, both during incarceration and upon reentry, which contributed to participants' successful reentry to the community. Six out of eight participants were able to name and describe programs that aided in their success upon release. These programs varied in length and content, but were all found to be beneficial by participants. In particular, participants found programs helpful when they delved into

underlying issues for problem thinking or behavior, when they increased self-esteem, when they increased a specific skill set, and when the program allowed them to gain support from others who were understanding of their situation. Participant 1, having served the longest sentence (7 years) of all participants, participated in several programs. She said,

They would teach us how to love ourselves. We would tell different stories about our background that would kind of help us go through the class. It made me reflect on how I even got to prison, because I didn't even realize how I got here because everything was just in such a fog.

Participant 1 also entered the prison's weight loss program, and lost 100 pounds during her incarceration, which she says increased her self-esteem.

Participant 8 was happy to participate in the program for pregnant women in her prison. She found community with the other mothers and the caseworker that stood with her during her delivery. The program helped her by allowing her 3 months after the birth of her child to bond with the baby. The program then required her to give the baby to someone on the outside that would care for the baby until her release. Although it was a stranger who cared for her baby during her incarceration, she is very thankful for the program and for the woman who kept her baby until her release.

Participant 6 participated in a lengthy drug treatment program that allowed her to successfully overcome her drug addiction, and to closely examine and understand the underlying reasons for her drug use. She said,

I think it would help everybody 'cause it changes the way you look at things, the way you think about things. You know, if something happens, I don't jump on the bandwagon with everybody else now because they're all looking at it one way and I look at it completely different because I've learned how to analyze stuff. They got to the root of, you know, my situation with drugs. 'So why did you use drugs?' 'Well, 'cause they made me feel good.' 'Well why did they make you feel good?' You know, it got past that, back to why I initially took that first drug, and the way I break scenarios down so that I look at it differently.

Participant 4 learned HVAC and vehicle painting skills while in prison. She described her jobs and how she enjoyed learning these things. She said,

My first job that I had was HVAC, and we would service the washers, the dryers, the stoves, ovens, the freezers, the refrigerators, our ACs, our ice machines, and that was just something really interesting and cool! You know, I never even really knew what HVAC was until then. And we'd wash, and sandblast, and paint all the vehicles that would come in. For me, that was like a big stress reliever, because I'd just pop in my headphones and get to work. I mean, if I didn't have that job, I think I'd probably be a lot more depressed and miserable while I was there, because that really just keeps you going.

Participant 3 found peace and community with others through the prison ministry program. She said,

We were able to talk to other women who had been through what we had been through, and it was just very inspiring.

Participant 3 also discussed a program that offered her transitional housing after leaving the halfway house. Having felt like she received very little help in the halfway house, the transitional housing program was a refreshing change. In this program, she felt that they offered real support for a successful launch into society. She said,

This place was different. They were nice. Helped me with some sheets and stuff, dishes that I needed, you know, just now starting out. That helped me to be able to transition from the halfway house to there, which was good because I needed an inexpensive place to stay, and they were very positive people.

Participants 4 and 7 noted that their halfway houses provided positive experiences for them as they transitioned to the community. All of the programs mentioned provided some kind of meaning and growth for participants, which aided in their successful reentry.

Personal Traits and Coping Mechanisms

The following themes emerged, relating to research question 2, which explores the personal traits and coping mechanisms of participants that contributed to their successful reentry to the community: Readiness for change, motivation/determination, accountability, turning to faith, and communing with likeminded women. Participants described how their readiness for change was influenced by their motivations to change and their level of personal accountability. Also discussed were their coping mechanisms, turning to faith and communing with likeminded women, which helped them find strength and resilience in difficult times.

Theme 7: Readiness for Change

Several participants discussed their “readiness” to change their lifestyle. This refers to one’s desire to live a different life, free of crime. Participants spoke of one’s readiness to change as being marked by a change in attitude, and a change in priorities. Participant 4 discussed her readiness to change.

I needed to change, I needed to get back right, to get right to the way I used to be before my addiction.

Participant 1 said that part of being ready for change is having a positive attitude. She commented about those who are not ready for change.

Their attitudes were in the wrong place. It was that thing about humility. Some get it, some don't. And I really think that it's based on each individual person really, on whether they want to get it or whether they don't want to get it. That's what I really had to change because before I got incarcerated my attitude was on zero.

Participants also discussed a change in priorities as leading to a readiness for change. Participant 3 said,

Prioritize. What's most important? Who is most important in your world? Do they value their freedom? Do they value their time with their kids? Do they value being able just to go out to eat or chew gum? Because you can't do that locked up. Where do their values lie?

Theme 8: Motivation/Determination

Personal motivators and level of determination to succeed based on those motivators affects reentry success. A few participants commented on the need to have a motivator that helps keep them focused on avoiding criminal behavior, and working toward positive goals. Many participants stated that they were “determined” to do better, but gave varying motivators for that determination. Participants 1, 2 and 5 simply stated that they value their freedom, and the privileges that come with that freedom. They were not willing to engage in any behaviors that might jeopardize that freedom.

Participant 4 described how she had hurt her parents and her children by going to prison, and was therefore determined to live a better life. She said,

I think it was just my determination to be successful after this whole ordeal that all of us went through. It wasn't just me being locked up for a while. Everybody went through it. My parents went through it. My kids went through it. It wasn't just me. My decisions affected everybody, you know, my immediate circle, it affected all of our lives.

Participant 7 had concerns about the welfare of her four children during her incarceration because they were in the care of their father, who was a drug addict. She described how this motivated her to do well while incarcerated.

Really what motivated me the most was my kids. It was really hard for me to be there, locked up for like 3 years, and have barely any contact with my kids. Their dad, at the time, was going through some hardship, and he got involved in drugs and other stuff. He wouldn't answer my phone calls, but that really just kept me

going. I programmed, I did everything I had to do, because I wanted my kids back. It was hard.

Participant 7 also explained that whether a woman is successful upon reentry or not is determined by her motivators. She said,

Honestly, I think it just has to do with the person, and their mindset, and what their goals are, and what motivates them.

Her motivation extended beyond her incarceration and through reentry. Her determination to support her children drove her to work long hours at multiple jobs to help ensure that she could meet their needs. Five out of six participants who had children at the time of their incarceration mentioned feeling motivated to succeed in order to be with their children.

Theme 9: Accountability

Personal accountability was a theme that was discussed by all participants as being necessary for success after release from prison. Each participant indicated that she took responsibility for the behavior that led her to prison. All participants also discussed the need for any individual released from prison to maintain personal accountability in order to avoid being returned to prison. Participant 3 said,

I would say the first factor is accepting responsibility for your actions because when you realize you are the one that messed up, you are the one who created the situation here, when you accept that and look at it for what it is, that is the beginning part of being free to move forward. If someone is living in denial and

blaming everybody else, they will go out and do the exact same thing, thinking that it's somebody else who's doing it.

Participant 5 said,

I was the one to blame for my problems, not anybody else. I can't blame it on the drugs. I can't blame it on the stresses of life. I can't blame it on my ex-husband.

No one forced me.

Theme 10: Turning to Faith

Turning to faith refers to the belief one has in God, and the act of engaging in faith-based activities. Turning to faith was a coping mechanism used by several participants both during and after incarceration. Six out of the eight participants acknowledged using faith as a way to stay strong during challenging times. Faith helped to move some of them in a more positive direction, using teachings from the bible as a guide. These participants found strength in their faith, which helped them cope. When discussing the experiences she had while incarcerated that she found beneficial,

Participant 4 said,

I feel mostly it was the prayer, the prayer groups and the church. I think that really was...because they really didn't have anything else like besides extracurricular activities. You know, they had like a parenting, you know, classes like that but that's...I'm already older. I kind of knew, you know, how to parent and you know stuff like that, but I really, really feel it was the religious part of it that kind of motivated me.

When discussing what motivated her to keep going, Participant 7 said,

My faith. My faith kept me going. Because, really, that was...I was always at the church helping with bible studies, and picking up chairs for the, you know, setting up the chairs for the bible studies, picking out movies that were Christian movies. I don't know. How do I say it? Going to church, and going to the bible studies, that's where I found my peace. That's what kept me sane. That was the main...that played a big part for me. That was the best thing ever.

Participant 3 was able to find meaning in her incarceration by listening to her favorite minister. She recounts his statement, and the meaning it held for her.

He said "God will take you away from everything and everybody that you know to get you where he wants you to be." And that really did something to me. It gave me a peace in my mind that it was only temporary and that I needed that moment.

Theme 11: Communing with Likeminded Women

Communing with likeminded women refers to the act of building relationships with other women who are on a similar, positive path. Several participants recounted the many positive relationships they built with other women while they were incarcerated. They described how these relationships gave them the strength to cope with their incarceration, by helping them feel like they were not alone and by receiving support and possible solutions to their problems from other women. Participant 5 explained the benefits of getting to know other women in prison.

I think meeting different people from different walks of life, different races, different religions and all having to come together and basically being there just

to listen or to give a different perspective, I think that helped a lot. Not everybody was that way, but you did find some women that would actually talk about the problems and possible solutions. Just having that unity I think helped a lot in a lot of ways.

Choosing the right women to spend time with was crucial for participants. Many participants discussed how some women in prison don't seem to care that they are there, and are already planning their next illegal activity. However, they felt that the women who are on a positive path will help keep others focused, looking toward making a better life for themselves, without crime, and those are the women that they chose to interact with.

Summary

Eleven major themes emerged from this study. For facilitators of reentry success, themes included supportive relationships, employment, education, transportation, parenting and positive programs. All themes included in this section related to research question 1, which explored the lived experiences of participants that contributed to their successful reentry.

For personal traits and coping mechanisms, prominent themes included readiness for change, motivation/determination, accountability, turning to faith, and communing with likeminded women. All themes included in this section related to research question 2, which explored the coping mechanisms and personal traits that participants believed to be important to their reentry success.

Study findings are discussed in Chapter 5. Conclusions and recommendations are also discussed. Areas for future research are also presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to understand the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated women that influenced their successful reentry into their communities. I also explored the perceptions of formerly incarcerated women regarding the personal traits and coping mechanisms that aided their successful reintegration. The central research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of successful reintegration as a formerly incarcerated woman before, during, and after incarceration that influenced successful reentry into the community?

RQ2: What coping mechanisms or traits do formerly incarcerated women feel were important to their successful reentry to the community?

The findings of this study showed two broad categories of relevant information: facilitators of reentry success, and personal traits and coping mechanisms. The first theme within the category relating to facilitators of reentry success was *supportive relationships*, which included both familial relationships and friendships. Supportive relationships play a vital role in a woman's success after release according to participants. Participants acknowledged the importance of familial support both during and after incarceration. Receiving financial support while incarcerated allows for a more comfortable stay while in prison. Family can also provide emotional support by visiting an inmate, helping them to cope with and combat feelings of loneliness and depression. Family members may also help incarcerated women by parenting their children during

their incarceration. Upon release, assistance from family can help with providing a foundation for rebuilding their lives.

According to participants, friendships both in and out of prison can serve to either contribute to one's success after release, or contaminate it. Participants stressed the importance of choosing to engage with only positive, non-criminal friends and abandoning unhealthy friendships. Positive friendships can provide connections that may help a woman find employment and may also be uplifting and motivating.

Other themes relating to facilitators of reentry success were *employment, education, transportation, parenting* and *positive programs*. Overwhelmingly, participants acknowledged that obtaining employment is the most urgent task to be completed after release. However, all of these themes were interconnected. A woman's level of education determines what sort of jobs she will be qualified for. Several participants in this study discussed education at length. Transportation was the next theme discussed frequently by participants. Simply having a car makes life after incarceration much easier. Getting where you need to go allows for not only greater success with employment and visiting probation officers, but also helps women to visit family members and children. Parenting, another theme in this category, was a motivational factor for women to successfully reenter the community. The experience of being a mother had been taken away during incarceration, and participants with children longed to be with and look after their children again.

The final theme in this category related to positive programming during and after incarceration. Participants recounted experiences with several positive programs that

helped them change their ways of thinking, as well as their choices and behaviors in order to offer them a better chance at success on the outside. These programs opened their eyes to the internal factors that had contributed to their incarceration, and gave them new skills to conquer adversity, stress, and the tasks that lie ahead of them after their release.

The final category contained themes related to personal traits and coping mechanisms used by participants, which aided their successful reentry to the community. Participants discussed readiness for change and how it is necessary for a woman to be successful on the outside. If a woman is not ready to live a different lifestyle, her behaviors will likely lead her down the same paths she has travelled in the past. Her personal motivators are an indicator of the choices she will make. Participants in this study spoke about how the things that motivated them gave them the determination to keep pushing through various challenges. Personal accountability also helped participants lead a successful life on the outside. Participants reiterated how lack of accountability leads to repetition of old behaviors. In addition to these personal traits, two prominent coping mechanisms emerged during data analysis. Participants turned to faith and communed with likeminded women to gain the support and strength they needed to be successful.

Interpretation of Findings: Facilitators of Reentry Success

The first research question in this study focused on exploring the lived experiences of successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated women. Answering this question, participants discussed the facilitators to their reentry success as they related to various challenges presented by the reentry process.

Theme 1: Supportive Relationships

Several studies have shown the role that supportive interpersonal relationships play in one's successful reentry. Barrick et al. (2014) noted the supportive role that family members can play both during incarceration and after release. The researchers found that not only does familial support aid reintegration, but contact with family during incarceration also increases the likelihood of positive outcomes after release, such as lowered recidivism. Participants in my study stressed the benefits of supportive familial relationships for various reasons. Emotional support from family helped to alleviate stress and feelings of isolation during incarceration. Financial support made incarcerated life more bearable by allowing participants to purchase commissary items. Help with children during incarceration gave participants the peace of mind that their children were being cared for, and offering a place to stay after release made for a smooth transition to the community for some participants. Women have to find their place in a socially supportive system in order to feel a sense of reconnection with the community (Hackett, 2013). The importance placed on interpersonal connections for emotional support and the need for help with children during incarceration points to facets of incarcerated life and reentry that are distinctly feminine.

Facilities for female offenders are few in number. This simple fact often prevents women from having contact with family members while incarcerated because women are moved far from home to serve their time, making the distance too great for family members to travel (Hagan & Foster, 2012). Several participants in this study noted the distance between their correctional facility and their home, citing this reason for the lack

of contact with family members during incarceration. Lack of familial visits during incarceration contributes to a feeling of isolation and loneliness for incarcerated people. The only other avenue for contact is through letters and phone calls, which all participants utilized during their incarceration. Any method of contact with supportive family members is beneficial.

Simply having the perception that one has a positive support system on the outside is enough to create optimism in women about their chance of success upon release (Cobbina & Bender, 2012; McCoy & Miller, 2013). McCoy and Miller (2013) noted that having the perception that they have support on the outside was a strong predictor of desistance from crime for women, but not for men. When women feel that they have nothing and no one to return to, they may already feel defeated and give up. The level of social support a woman perceives that she has is inversely related to her level of anxiety (Anumba, DeMatteo & Heilbrun, 2012). Therefore, as her social support decreases, her anxiety increases, potentially making the tasks required for reentry appear less attainable. A participant from this study alluded to this point when she stated that some women she was incarcerated with had no drive to succeed because they had “nothing to go home to.”

Theme 2: Employment

Finding employment is the first step to reentry success because it makes all other reentry responsibilities possible by providing the funds needed to purchase a car, rent an apartment, and clothe and feed yourself and your children. Employment was the first topic discussed by most participants in this study, and was reiterated by many to stress its

importance. Some participants noted that the process of finding a job can be complicated by the kind of charge they have on their record because many employers are reluctant to hire people who have committed certain types of crimes. Additionally, women are at a disadvantage when searching for employment, since the most readily available jobs are those that require strenuous manual labor, like construction. In rural areas, job options are further restricted, requiring women to either take jobs that are better suited to men, or look for employment outside of their town, which may not be feasible due to lack of transportation (Willging et al., 2016). Participants further noted that they are told to get a job after incarceration, but are not told how to go about getting a job. This assertion was also made by participants in Hackett's (2014) study. Without a way to earn money, many women will begin to feel desperate and hopeless, which could potentially lead to choosing to make money in illegal ways (Johnson, 2014). This finding was supported by Marcin (2013) who asserted that prostitution is a crime of survival, which makes it difficult to stop. Participants in the current study spoke about sex work as an easy way for women to make money. Some of the participants in this study noted that they knew other women who had used prostitution as a means to make money, and one participant admitted to this herself.

Women have less earning potential than men after prison (Mapson, 2013; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Many participants in this study noted that finding work in construction was an option, but this type of work is not always suitable for women. Participants further noted how difficult it can be to find an office job, or any other type of job that does not involve heavy manual labor. This supports Cobbina and Bender's (2012)

findings, which showed that men are more likely to secure employment upon release than women (Cobbina & Bender, 2012). Willging et al. (2016) asserted that even when women do find employment, the wage earned is often too low to support them. McDonald and Arlinghaus (2014) noted the importance of recognizing that this is a marginalized population that lacks marketable job skills.

Despite the challenges that come with finding employment after incarceration, six out of eight participants in the current study were able to find employment very soon after release, easing their transition into the community. Formerly incarcerated women can gain not only an income from employment, but also a sense of pride. Many participants in this study spoke about the speed at which they found employment with great pride, and some were proud of the job they found because it related to their education. The relief that came with finding a job alleviated the stress and uncertainty that comes with beginning the reentry process.

Theme 3: Education

There is a strong interconnectedness between employment and education. Education offers learners a sense of self-confidence, and creates possibilities for the future. Education is power. However, the vast majority of incarcerated people lack a formal education.

Having an education can make it easier for women reentering society to find employment. Women released from prison tend to be less educated than men released from prison (Mapson, 2013; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015), which limits earning potential for women. We can even look at the juvenile offender population to see that girls tend to

have lower grades in school than boys (Stein et al., 2015). This means that females will face greater challenges in finding employment due to their lack of education.

Four of eight participants in the current study had earned a trade certificate or an associates degree. Of those four, only two had a job that actually utilized the skill they were trained for. The two who did use their education to find employment after incarceration noted how easy it was for them to find a job quickly because of their education. The higher an education a woman has when she is reentering the community, the better off she will be in the search for employment, but if she did not obtain that education before going to prison, her chances of finding employment substantial enough to support herself, and possibly her children, are slim.

McDonald and Arlinghaus (2014) assert that many offenders earn their GED while incarcerated, giving them a better chance at becoming employed upon reentry. However, earning a GED, a trade certificate, or a college degree is not an option in all correctional facilities. One participant in this study specifically noted that there were no programs in her facility for advancement of formal education. Other participants noted that in facilities where these programs are available, the cost for the programs may be too high for inmates to afford, making the programs inaccessible. There is a misconception in the general public that educational advancement is readily available to all inmates who are housed in correctional facilities, but this is not the case. In 1994, Pell Grant eligibility ceased to apply to prisoners (Lagemann, 2015). As a result, there are now very few degree-granting programs available to people in prison, and for those that do exist, they are not free.

Theme 4: Transportation

Transportation is something that many people in the free world take for granted. For those leaving prison, having their own transportation is a privilege rather than a right. Two participants in this study mentioned that while on probation, the purchase of a personal vehicle must be approved by one's probation officer. Offenders living in halfway houses, and those on probation, are expected to ride the bus to work and to necessary appointments. In some areas, public transportation is not an option, making releasees dependent on friends or family members for transportation. Even in large cities, the public transportation system may not be able to get you to where you need to go. For example, Dallas has a public transportation system, but it is not as expansive as a system like Philadelphia's. Several participants in this study noted the difficulty of getting to the places you need to go if there is no reliable transportation available, and how this potentially threatens reentry success.

For the few participants who were able to purchase a vehicle, daily tasks became much easier. Even for those who relied on friends and family for rides, getting from place to place was perceived to be easier than if they had to use public transportation. However, Willging et al. (2016) notes that this reliance on others is a threat to successful reentry to the community. Having to depend on others means that when others prove to be unreliable, it is the person who was depending on them that suffers. Although participants in this study did struggle with transportation issues, several of them found ways to get to the places they needed to go, which may point to the possibility that these

particular women may be more resourceful than others. Adaptability may be closely related to this theme, but was not explored in this study.

Theme 5: Parenting

Parenting, like no other reentry challenge, demonstrates the intersectionality of all other reentry challenges. Most incarcerated women are unmarried and are mothers (Barnes & Cunningham-Stringer, 2014; Miller et al., 2014). Incarcerated women are far more likely than incarcerated men to be the primary parent for at least one child before and after incarceration (Mapson, 2013). None of this study's participants were living with the fathers of their children after release, or during the time of their participation in this study. Some even noted that the fathers of their children were altogether absent. This supports findings from Stone et al. (2017) that mothers who have been incarcerated rarely receive support for their children from fathers of those children. Two participants had admitted to being victims of domestic violence at the hands of their children's fathers. Lynch et al. (2012) found that 90% of the women in their study had been the victims of domestic violence in the year preceding incarceration. If this finding is generalizable to the population of the current study, we might assume that some of the participants may have been victims of domestic violence but had not disclosed this during their interview.

Women in this study placed a great deal of importance on being a mother. Those with children stressed how their children motivated them to live a crime-free lifestyle. Barrick et al. (2014) found that women with children were less likely to recidivate than women without children. Scott et al. (2014) found that not having custody of their

children was a strong predictor of recidivism for women. In fact, women in that study had a 50% increased risk for recidivism within 3 years of release if they had no custody of their children. Other studies have also found that motherhood is a strong contributor to reentry success (Barnes & Cunningham-Stringer, 2013; Cobbina & Bender, 2012). The findings from the Barrick et al. (2014) and Scott et al. (2014) studies as well as the current study show how, for many women, having children is a factor in their successful release from prison.

Women with children not only have to rebuild their relationships with their children, but also with relatives who had been caring for their children during their incarceration (Bachman et al., 2016). This sentiment was expressed by participants in the current study. At times, mothers have to not only regain the trust of children, but they may even have to get to know children who have no recollection of their mothers due to their young age at the time of their mother's incarceration. Women have to support not only themselves, but their children as well. They have to find housing that is suitable for themselves and for their children. For women with larger numbers of children, this can be especially challenging. Fifty percent of the women in this study had three or more children. Despite all of these challenges, the desire to parent their children was strong, and the distress created by the separation from their children was immeasurable. This desire gave them the drive to focus their energies toward positive endeavors after their release, and the strength to leave behind old friends and old ways of behaving.

Theme 6: Positive Programs

Prison and reentry programs are meant to influence offenders in a positive way, increasing their likelihood of being successful upon reentry to the community.

Participants discussed programs that they felt were beneficial to their reentry in some way. Programs that were helpful to participants were programs which delved into underlying issues for problem thinking or behavior, increased self-esteem, increased a specific skill set, or allowed participants to gain support from others who were understanding of their situation.

Wright, Van Voorhis, et al. (2012) asserts that when programming is gender-specific, it is more effective for women than if it were gender-neutral. Participants in the current study described facets of their prison and reentry programs that were gender-specific. The program Participant 8 engaged in allowed her to bond with her new baby while still incarcerated, to learn the skills necessary for caring for a baby, and to bond with other women in the program. Participant 1 emphasized the benefits of the program that helped her raise her self-esteem and explore her own needs by teaching her to be more introspective, looking into the past to discover the reasons for her incarceration. Programs like this are important for female offenders because the path that women take to get to prison is often different than that of a man (DeHart & Moran, 2015). Therefore, her path out of prison will also be different.

When offering substance abuse treatment for incarcerated women, there are gender-specific factors that should be considered. Women often use drugs as a form of self-medication, to ease the pain of prior trauma (Bartlett et al., 2015). With this in mind,

professionals treating women have to recognize and tend to substance abuse issues and trauma-related issues simultaneously during treatment. Participant 6 explained how her drug treatment program allowed her to not only work toward ending her drug use, but also toward a better understanding of the factors that led to her initial drug use. The program taught her to analyze problems differently, and armed her with new solutions to life's challenges. In a 2012 study by Lynch et al., one participant noted the need for programs to "look past the substance abuse" in order to address the issues that lead to the substance abuse. The drug treatment program, as described by the participant in the current study, did exactly that. Tripodi and Pettus-Davis (2012) elaborately demonstrated the relationship between victimization, mental health problems, and drug use in women, highlighting the need for programs like the one attended by Participant 6.

Participants also spoke about helpful gender-neutral programs, such as the job interview and resume preparation help they received while living in a halfway house. The halfway house programs were positive for two of the seven participants who utilized this option when transitioning back into the community, offering them the support they felt they needed during their transition. However, two other participants noted problems with the gender-neutral approach taken by their halfway houses, which combined men and women not only in daily activities, but also in group therapy. These participants felt that this approach rendered the treatment in the halfway house ineffective, and set the stage for uncomfortable interactions between male and female residents. They suggest that the program may have been more helpful if there had been complete separation of men and women. Supporting this suggestion, McDonald and Arlinghaus (2014) assert

that any programs designed for women should feel safe and empowering for the participants so they will feel comfortable enough to effectively utilize, and benefit from the programming.

Interpretation of Findings: Personal Traits and Coping Mechanisms

The second research question in this study focused on exploring the personal traits and coping mechanisms of formerly incarcerated women who were successful upon reentry to the community. Answering this question, participants discussed the personal traits and coping mechanisms that aided their reentry to the community.

Theme 7: Readiness for Change

Being ready for change and a non-criminal lifestyle is an important factor for successful reentry. This readiness is affected by many different factors, such as fear of reentry, whether one desires to change, and whether or not mental health and substance abuse issues have been resolved (Doherty et al., 2014). Readiness for change may also entail a change in how one identifies (Bachman et al., 2016). For example, instead of identifying as a drug dealer, like Participant 6 did before prison, or as a “ho” as Participant 8 did before prison, they might now identify as a mother, or a business owner, or simply as a prosocial member of society. Cobbina and Bender (2012) assert that when a new identity is adopted and it is incompatible with the old, criminal identity, the criminal behavior will cease. Participants in this study discussed how they no longer wanted to be the person they were before incarceration. This indicates a desire for a change in identity.

A change in thinking also has to take place in order for incarcerated people to be ready for reentry. Criminal thinking leads to criminal behavior. Participant 1 described how several women she met in prison were already planning their next illegal activity. She knew they would not be ready for reentry, and would likely return to prison. However, once a woman changes her thinking, she can then change her behaviors to conform to those expected by society (Hackett, 2013). Every participant in the current study indicated that a change in her thinking had taken place, causing her to pursue a non-criminal lifestyle.

Readiness to change is also affected by an individual's confidence in herself. According to several participants in the current study, women reentering society must have confidence in their ability to succeed on the outside. Lynch et al. (2012) found that the defeat that many women feel after incarceration can contribute to their lack of effort to succeed after release. Confidence in one's abilities, and optimism about the future affect whether a woman even makes an effort to change her life. Several participants in the current study discussed the confidence they had in their abilities and how that contributed to their determination to succeed. They stressed how women need to "believe in themselves" in order to be successful.

Theme 8: Motivation/Determination

The source and strength of a woman's motivators to reenter society successfully contribute to her determination to succeed. She will be drawn to tend to and nurture whatever she values most (Flake, Barron, Hulleman, McCoach & Welsh, 2015). Rebuilding relationships with children after incarceration was the most important goal

related to parenting for several participants. Participants reported that children may be angry with their mothers for leaving, they may be skeptical that their mothers have changed in a positive way, and some of the children may not remember their mothers because they were so young when their mothers were incarcerated. Despite these challenges, mothers in this study reported that their children were their biggest motivators to be successful after release. This supports a recent study by Stone et al. (2017) in which formerly incarcerated mothers described being separated from their children as “the greatest punishment of all.” It should be noted that this phenomenon may be true more so for women than for men since mothers tend to take a more active role with their children and feel more intense loss when they cannot be with their children than fathers (Roxburgh & Fitch, 2014).

Motivation to achieve a goal is determined by the values one holds, but the cost associated with trying to achieve a goal cannot be greater than the value of achieving the goal (Flake et al., 2015). Some participants in the current study spoke about valuing freedom, and all the things that come with that freedom. Valuing freedom and the benefits of that freedom more than the people, places or activities that contributed to incarceration indicates that the cost associated with giving up old people and places was not so great as to override the value of freedom. Some spoke about valuing their relationships with their children or with God more than anything their former lifestyle had to offer. Unfortunately, addiction will override an individual’s priorities, altering behavior in a way that is geared to satisfy the addiction rather than achieve any goal.

However, absent of any addiction, individuals are free to examine their motivators, and make goals based on those motivators.

The level of determination one has to achieve a goal is affected by how powerful the motivator is. For women in the current study, their motivators were strong enough to effect change in their behavior. Participants frequently mentioned how “determined” they were to be successful after prison so that they would never again be separated from the people and things that were important to them. Females place more value on relationships than males (Garcia & Lane, 2012), so this phenomenon may be more relevant to a female population than a male population. Relationships were a motivating factor for reentry success for every participant. For those who had children, it was the children who motivated them most to live a crime-free life in the community. For the remaining two participants, family members were an important motivator.

Theme 9: Accountability

Personal accountability was a prominent theme relating to reentry success in the current study. The term “personal accountability” was explicitly mentioned by five participants, and alluded to by the remaining three participants. All participants agreed that accepting responsibility for one’s own actions, and one’s own situation was required for successful reentry. According to participants, inability to accept this responsibility would likely contribute to continuation of the path that originally led the individual to prison.

Feeling personally accountable for one’s actions and the outcomes that result from those actions is important because it indicates an internal locus of control. Those

who have an external locus of control may be more likely to blame others for their situation, and less likely to purposefully direct their own behavior in a positive way (Pals, Love, Hannibal & Waren, 2016). Having an internal locus of control is much more beneficial than an external locus of control because it is associated with lower levels of psychological distress, better academic performance, and lower levels of deviance (Ross & Mirowsky, 2013). Ahlin (2014) found that those with an internal locus of control are less likely to commit acts of violence than those with an external locus of control regardless of whether or not they live in a high-crime area, because they recognize that they are personally responsible for their own behavior and the outcomes of that behavior.

Participants in the current study had all concluded that they are responsible for their stations in life, and that they have the power to purposefully direct their lives. This belief in the power to control their lives, and to accept responsibility for personal choices helped participants to make positive choices after release from prison. Participants made it clear that this particular contributor to reentry success is not optional if a person wants to be successful when reentering the community.

Theme 10: Turning to Faith

Female offenders with a history of victimization are likely to have underdeveloped coping skills as opposed to those with no history of victimization (Anumba, DeMatteo & Heilbrun, 2012). Paired with the knowledge that more than 90% of female offenders have been victimized in some way (DeHart & Moran, 2015; Tripodi & Pettus-Davis, 2012), we can see how most female offenders will lack the coping skills necessary to combat the stress of incarceration and reentry. Faith has been shown to be a

beneficial coping mechanism for incarcerated individuals, and is associated with lowered rates of deviant behavior (Pargament, Exline, Jones & Shafranske, 2013). Several participants in the current study turned to their faith to gain strength during prison as well as during reentry. Belief in a higher power brought them comfort in difficult times. This coping mechanism was used by six out of eight participants in the current study.

Along with finding peace in their belief system, participants experienced great joy in engaging in faith-based activities. These activities, such as attending church and participating in bible study groups, allowed for participation in a routine, which consisted of positive messages delivered by supportive individuals. In prison, women can be surrounded by people, but still feel isolated. Fortunately, faith and faith-based activities were a uniting factor for many participants in the current study, easing the mental stress often experienced by incarcerated individuals. These findings support research that found turning to faith during incarceration to be an effective coping mechanism which allows one to find peace and gain respect from others (Mandhouj, Aubin, Amirouche, Perroud & Huguelet, 2014). The 2014 study by Mandhouj et al. also revealed that faith was beneficial when transitioning to the community, and that it was associated with lowered recidivism and risk of suicide.

Theme 11: Communing With Likeminded Women

Participants in the current study felt that communing with other proactive, supportive women who were also ready for change, was one of the factors that helped them stay focused on changing for the better. Participants felt supported and understood by other incarcerated women because those women had first hand experience with not

only incarceration, but also the life circumstances that led to that incarceration. This supports findings by Wright, DeHart, Koons-Witt and Crittenden (2012), which show that prosocial connections in prison are beneficial to women because they offer opportunities for modeling positive behavior and goals as well as support through stressful times. These prosocial friendships also provide women with a link to prosocial activities and networks, which are a positive alternative to the activities and networks they were previously associated with.

Many formerly incarcerated people stress the importance of avoiding negative friends and old places that might draw them back into a criminal lifestyle (Davis et al., 2012). However, complete isolation may also be detrimental to one's mental state (Wright, DeHart et al., 2012). Therefore, replacement of old, negative friends, with new, positive friends is most beneficial to incarcerated women. The benefits of these friendships extend into the community after release, such as when a friend helps with obtaining a job, or simply offers emotional support during this trying time. For several participants in the current study, the positive friendships they made in prison lasted for years beyond incarceration.

Interpretation Summary

Many of the themes above are interconnected. One's relationship with family members is connected to whether or not they have financial support and housing upon release, whether they have transportation, and whether they have help with children. Relationships with others may help with finding employment, but may also negatively influence one's mindset and behavior. Being able to discern which relationships are

unhealthy and then choosing to abandon those relationships is important to reentry success.

Education and employment are strongly connected. Higher education leads to quicker and more lucrative employment. However, women are at a disadvantage in the hunt for employment after incarceration. Employment is strongly connected to transportation and parenting because income is necessary to obtain personal transportation, and to accommodate the needs of children. However, once transportation is obtained, finding employment and getting to and from a job is much easier. Because employment and transportation are needs that tend to occur at the same time, this part of the reentry process is stressful and complicated.

Being a parent while reentering the community after incarceration intensifies the process and makes each task more complicated. Mothers are typically the primary parent for their children, so they must ensure that they obtain employment capable of accommodating not only their own needs, but also the needs of their children. Having personal transportation makes travel with children much more feasible, so they must make enough money to purchase their own vehicle. Mothers must do all of this while rebuilding their relationships with the children they were separated from during incarceration. In spite of these difficulties, being a parent is a protective factor for women, and a motivator for success.

Prison and reentry programs often help women to gain the skills and insight they need in order to be better parents and individuals after release. These rehabilitative and psychoeducational programs offer women a therapeutic setting that is necessary to make

life changes that will help them succeed. For many women, gender-informed substance abuse programs are the key to making lasting changes. Supportive groups may help empower women to make positive life choices after release.

There are certain personal traits that are conducive to success during reentry to the community. Believing in personal accountability, and possessing positive motivators that are more valuable than the things associated with a criminal lifestyle are paramount to success after release. A person who has non-criminal goals, and the determination to achieve those goals is more likely to be aggressive about finding employment, pursuing an education, and tackling the other necessary tasks to be successful upon reentry. A woman has to be ready for change in order to embrace what she's learning in programs, and to leave behind people in her life who might be damaging to her success.

Coping mechanisms are used to deal with difficult or stressful situations. For participants in this study, turning to faith and communing with likeminded women were the primary coping mechanisms used to combat the stress of incarceration and reentry. Faith provided strength and comfort during stressful times, and building relationships with other prosocial women offered support and guidance from positive influences.

Using a feminist theoretical lens, we can see the disadvantages women face after incarceration, and the opportunities they are missing because of these disadvantages. At the same time, we can acknowledge the differences in male and female offender populations. Ideally, we would offer women services and treat them in a way that levels the playing field for them. Beginning in prison, women must be treated as individuals, with programs and approaches designed with feminine differences in mind. The task of

helping inmates reach readiness for change must be approached differently in male and female populations. The added burden of childrearing must be acknowledged and addressed in female populations. If we fail to care for women in gender-specific ways, we do a disservice to this already marginalized population.

Limitations of the Study

This phenomenological exploratory study was meant to better understand the lived experiences, personal traits and coping mechanisms of formerly incarcerated women who were successful upon reentry to the community. Due to a lack of qualitative research involving formerly incarcerated females who were successful upon reentry to the community, which was discussed in chapter 2, this study addressed the issue.

As with most qualitative studies, the sample size involved in the study was small. The sample size in the current study, eight participants, was based on how many participants it took to exhaustively collect all relevant information. The small sample size used in this study prevents the transferability of findings to other populations.

The participants in this study served varying amounts of time in various United States correctional facilities. At the time of the interview, all participants had no housing issues, all who had children had custody of their children, and all were employed or beginning a new job within the week. Due to the locations in which participants were recruited, the study may have attracted a higher functioning group of participants than if participants had been recruited from locations such as homeless shelters, or welfare offices. Recruiting from other locations may have attracted participants who are

struggling more than the participants in the current study, thus altering the outcome of the study.

Participants were not required to disclose the crime they were convicted of for this study, although some did so voluntarily. It is possible that all or most participants in this study committed a particular type of crime, which could have influenced how successful they were after release. Therefore, as with other qualitative research studies, the findings of this study should not be generalized to other groups. Professionals and other readers of this study must discern whether or not these findings would be relevant to their own settings and uses.

As described in Chapter 4, the methods implemented to ensure trustworthiness were followed. There were no known limitations to trustworthiness in this study.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change resulting from this study are significant because findings contribute to the body of research aimed at female offenders and their perception of contributing factors to their success during and after incarceration. This study outlines both positive and negative experiences women have during incarceration, and during reentry, which influence their likelihood of success during reentry. Specific suggestions are offered to help interested parties increase the effectiveness of programs and services for females in the following section.

Participants outlined the coping mechanisms and personal traits needed to succeed after incarceration. These traits were considered paramount in whether or not a woman returned to criminal behavior. The outlining of these traits offers treatment professionals

a foundation to help women build their new mindset, and make new choices, leading them toward a healthier path. Overall, the goal of incarceration is not only to separate offenders from the public, but also to rehabilitate them, sending them back into the community armed with new skills, a new mindset, and goals for the future. If the findings of this study result in change for programs and policies used for treating female offenders, the potential outcome would be lowered recidivism for females and an increase in intact families due to fewer mothers being incarcerated.

Recommendations for Action

This study's focus was on exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of formerly incarcerated women regarding the factors that contributed to their success after release. Adding to existing research, the findings of this study suggest action that can be taken to improve outcomes for women reentering the community. Specific recommendations that can be implemented either while incarcerated, after incarceration, or both, is discussed next.

First, we must remember that reentry is a process rather than an end product (Holtfreter & Wattanaporn, 2013; James, 2015). As such, we must teach individuals reentering society about the steps that are necessary for them to succeed. A manual that specifically outlines the necessary steps one should take during reentry may be helpful for many people who may not have an understanding of how to navigate the process. Contact information for up to date community resources and a description of the services they offer would be beneficial.

Programs that women engage in also need to be examined in order to determine whether they are effective. Surveying participants would allow for a candid look at the opinions of those involved in the programs, and perhaps shed light on ways to make the program more effective. When a woman participates in an effective program, she comes back to the community armed with new skills that help her succeed in society. When programs are gender-specific, they are more effective for women (Willging et al., 2016). As suggested by two participants, separating males and females in halfway houses may be more effective than housing and treating them together. If women are uncomfortable speaking openly about their issues and concerns in front of men, the therapeutic groups they attend with men will be less effective for them.

A caring person can make all the difference for someone attempting to reenter society. Women have different social and psychological needs than men, and they react differently to stress than men (Bartlett et al., 2015; Hyde, 2014; van Voorhis, 2012). Several participants noted the disparaging, ugly comments made to them by people in charge of their programs. A woman's confidence and self-esteem are more likely to be damaged in such a negative environment. Ideally, programs would employ only caring, sensitive workers, capable of building self-esteem, empowering women to face the difficult tasks ahead of them. Again, participant surveys may be helpful in order to identify and address problem employees.

Finally, adding programs specifically for mothers to reconnect with their children may be beneficial for all parties involved. Since most incarcerated women are mothers (Miller et al., 2014), and more mothers than fathers will assume primary parenting roles

after incarceration (Mapson, 2013), it seems imperative that mothers be given an opportunity to begin rebuilding positive bonds with their children before they take over parenting duties again. This was a concern for the majority of the mothers interviewed in this study. If children are such a strong motivator for women to desist from criminal behavior, it seems intuitive that programs allowing mothers to bond with their children would be beneficial for everyone involved. Cobbina and Bender (2012) agree with this stance and assert that contact with children can decrease the likelihood of reoffending for women.

To give women the greatest chance at success after release, increasing their education level would have the greatest impact. Lack of education makes it harder to get a job, which leads to lack of income, possible homelessness, and feelings of desperation. Desperation leads back to crimes of survival. Since women are at increased risk of homelessness after incarceration (Asberg & Renk, 2015), and tend to be less educated than men (Mapson, 2013), it seems intuitive that we must offer ways for women to become educated. Bringing back Pell Grants for prisoners is a necessary step. Education costs less than incarceration and benefits the entire community (Lagemann, 2015).

Recommendations for Further Study

If we are going to design and implement programs aimed at improving outcomes for females, we must conduct future research that examines their specific needs as well as their perception of treatment and reentry programs (Olson et al., 2016; Pritchard et al., 2014; Willging et al., 2016; Wright, Van Voorhis, et al., 2012). This approach will help

to replace the “male as norm” approach that has historically been used to treat women with a gender-specific approach that is designed to meet the needs of women.

Research examining the opinions and perceptions of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women is largely absent in research literature. However, the opinions and perceptions of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women are relevant. Since the factors that contribute to a woman’s success may be different from a man’s (Doherty et al., 2014; Olson et al., 2016), further research relating to this topic is warranted. They are the actual individuals living in the environments, and participating in the programs meant to help them. If we begin to listen to those who are willing to talk, we may be better able to serve this marginalized population.

Conclusion

This study was an exploratory phenomenological study examining the perception of formerly incarcerated women regarding what made them successful after release from prison. The eight participants involved in this study all served at least 9 months in prison, and had no arrests for at least 3 years after release. They served time in various United States prisons for various crimes.

Although they had different life experiences and opinions that varied on many topics, participants were fairly consistent in their perceptions of what it takes for a woman to be successful after release from incarceration. They described similar challenges that must be faced upon release, as well as similar opinions on how women can be better served by entities whose mission is to help them succeed on the outside.

Female offenders as a whole are researched far less than male offenders, and research involving successfully reintegrated women is extremely lacking. Findings from studies involving male offenders cannot be generalized to a female population.

Therefore, further research with this population is warranted. The current study supports similar research conducted with female offenders, and adds to the literature addressing issues surrounding successful reentry of this population to the community.

If we understand what it takes for women to be successful when they reenter the community after incarceration, and we offer women the services in a way that reaches them, we can give them and their children a stronger foundation to stand on, and reduce recidivism for this population. Women can no longer be seen as bystanders in a male dominated world, and female offenders can no longer be treated like male offenders simply because they are the minority population. In this male dominated culture, the needs, issues, trends, and problems specific to female offenders can no longer be overlooked.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Open-ended questions will be used to elicit responses that will be rich with detail.

Questions are based on the research questions, and then expanded to allow for elaboration and exploration of responses.

Research Question	Subquestions	Follow-ups
RQ1: What are the lived experiences of successful reintegration as a formerly incarcerated woman before, during, and after incarceration that influenced successful reentry into the community?	<p>IQ1: (rapport) How long has it been since your release?</p> <p>IQ2: (rapport) Can you tell me about your current situation? For example, do you have children, where do you live, and are you employed?</p> <p>IQ3: What experiences did you have while incarcerated that contributed to your success after release?</p>	

Research Question	Subquestions	Follow-ups
	IQ4: What experiences did you have during reentry that contributed to your success after release?	<p>3a. (probing) How do you think your experiences were different than the experiences of women who were rearrested after release?</p> <p>3b. (probing) What were the biggest challenges you faced during reentry?</p> <p>3c. (probing) If you have children, what challenges did you face related to parenting, and how did you overcome them?</p>
RQ2: What coping mechanisms or traits do formerly incarcerated women feel were important to their successful reentry to the community?	IQ5: What personal traits do you have that contributed to your success upon release?	<p>5a. (probing) How did these traits or coping mechanisms help you during reentry?</p> <p>5b. (probing) Do you have any personal traits that may have made your reentry more challenging? If so, explain.</p> <p>5c. (probing) How do the personal traits you just discussed differ from the personal traits of women who were rearrested after release?</p>

Research Question	Subquestions	Follow-ups
	IQ6: In general, can you describe what factors help women reenter society successfully, and what factors threaten their success?	6a. (probing) How can prison programs, reentry programs, and community resources better assist women when reentering society?