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# Reintegration Process of Previously Incarcerated African American Women Older Than 50 Years

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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2019

Abstract

Reintegration Process of Previously Incarcerated African American Women Older Than  
50 Years

by

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MS, Walden University, 2010

BA, Mount St. Mary's College, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Human and Social Services

Walden University

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## Abstract

Successful reintegration of ex-offenders is difficult for most, evidenced by high recidivism rates. Ex-offenders face a broad range of obstacles once released from prison, including personal, social, and employment barriers. This study was an examination of the issues that contributed to a successful or unsuccessful reintegration as reported by ex-offenders. Participants included 10 ex-offenders who participated in interviews regarding the conditions that they believed were necessary for successful community reintegration. The conceptual framework for this study came from the ecological perspective, also known as the person-in-environment theory. Data collection involved one-on-one interviews with the participants. Data analysis was conducted through a line-by-line analysis of the responses, which resulted in disclosure of themes and patterns about their life experience. The key findings from the study suggest that older African American women, once released from prison, need additional support to reintegrate into their communities. Key findings include a need for housing, employment, and community involvement. The social change implications of this study may provide for positive social change if professionals working in the criminal justice system with older individuals are made aware of the hardships this population faces, such as finding housing and employment. The information from this study could be instrumental in how reintegration specialists, social workers, and policy makers create reintegration plans and programs for women in addition to creating programs that are specifically geared toward meeting the needs of older women.

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## Dedication

Before I thank my family, I would like to give thanks to my savior Jesus Christ for giving me the strength to complete this dissertation. I dedicate this dissertation to my late mother and father, Vonceseal and Junior Arnell Brent, who sacrificed so much for me to go to college and finish my education. I would also like to thank my sister, Sherry LaVerne Brent. Sherry, you were the tiny seed for my research and my friend Dennail Jones. This study is also dedicated to my son and daughter, Ava and Isaiah Cubit, the joy and light of my life, whose smiles and laughter kept me motivated to complete my goal of obtaining my doctorate.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

When previously incarcerated individuals older than 50 years return to their communities, the process of rebuilding their lives begins. To reconstruct their lives, they must overcome challenges, such as seeking housing and employment as well as reconnecting with family and friends. The process of reintegration may be easy for younger ex-offenders, but older ex-offenders may experience a more arduous journey back to society. Gill and Wilson (2016) argued that reintegration after incarceration is difficult due to a lack of matching individuals with their specific needs once released. Gill and Wilson called matching an individual with their needs a “service need fit” because their research showed if there was increased fit for those reentering, recidivism is less likely, but they found that half the participants in their study were not receiving the services they said they needed.

From the moment of release from prison, African American females face many challenges while trying to rebuild their lives. The timing of their release is often the first problem they must overcome. If released between midnight and 6:00 a.m., individuals are less able to access transportation or find shelter because those services may not be readily available. Northcutt Bohmert (2016) stated that transportation is vital to women who have been released from prison because these women must actively seek jobs and housing, and attend medical appointments. In trying to reestablish a stable foundation, access to reliable and affordable transportation whether by bus or auto is a challenge (Northcutt Bohmert, 2016). A lack of reliable transportation, according to Northcutt

Bohmert, could result in an increased level of stress, decreased employment performance, and absenteeism from work. Northcutt Bohmert further conveyed that 49% of the women in the study experienced transportation problems, and more than 25% of the respondents drove without a driver's license. The reentry transition for those without a reliable source of transportation can be a challenge.

Although many of the essential services are closed for those released after hours, community programs and individuals who support ex-offenders who are reintegrating are available. Fox (2016) argued that community members are an untapped resource who can be used in desistance. Using community members to help with reintegration validates the ex-offender's position in the community by establishing self-worth and dignity in the ex-offender. The relationship that materializes between the ex-offender and the community members can be significant because it encourages belonging, optimism, and reciprocity in the ex-offender (Fox, 2016).

When community members and ex-offenders work together, it is a form of restorative justice, which Daly (2016) defined to address crimes and disputes among the victim, ex-offender, and the community. These disputes are addressed through meetings with impartial individuals, wherein, in some instances, the ex-offender pays restitution. Restorative justice is a strengths-based approach, concentrated on building on the assets of the ex-offender and encouraging positive social change (Hunter, Lanza, Lawlor, Dyson, & Gordon, 2016).

According to Hunter et al. (2016), four aspects make this strengths-based approach work: (a) resilience, (b) transformation, (c) empowerment, and (d) civic engagement. Fox (2016) discussed that of the four aspects of the strengths-based approach, civic engagement is the greatest need because reintegrating ex-offenders' civic engagement eliminates the feelings ex-offenders have of isolation and a lack of support; civic engagement also involves aid with simple transition skills.

Kerrison, Bachman, and Paternoster (2016) argued that the age at which a woman is released from prison determines the likelihood of desistance from crime. Older women showed more of an interest in reentry goals than did younger women because older women have undergone an identity change. The transformation of identity in older female ex-offenders occurs when the ex-offender realizes that the physical burdens of aging pose a complication when attempting to commit a crime. An older adult sees the present danger of committing the act and will likely desist, whereas a younger person will likely commit the crime due to a lack of both reflection about the future and the experience of physical burdens.

Many African American women who have spent a significant amount of time in prison return to a world where modern technology now exists. A person younger than 35 years may be able to navigate reintegration, but a person older than 50 years who has spent a considerable amount of time in prison could have difficulties because they are unfamiliar with new software and accessing the Internet. Jones, Coleman, and Leierer (2017) found individuals who served protracted prison terms were not in touch with daily

life. A respondent in their study stated that it was difficult for her when she was released because technology was new, and it was hard for her to acclimate to a new way of living (Jones et al., 2017). Having a better understanding of how African American female ex-offenders reintegrate would enable family, friends, and professionals to help this population adjust to life outside of prison.

Stanley (2016) stated that African American women face many challenges prior to incarceration and, once released, the same problems still exist, but the stigma of being in prison is now attached. Some of the challenges that African American women face were noted as addiction, abuse, unemployment, and poverty (Stanley, 2016).

Furthermore, homelessness is a reality for many women who leave prison if they do not have family or social support (Nyamathi et al., 2016). Ex-offenders often return to prison because of their inability to stop using illegal substances and abusing alcohol. Some of the reasons why relapse occurs are a desire to numb pain; a lack of resources, such as social support and finances; and negative life circumstances according to (Nyamathi et al., 2016). Relapse also occurred when these individuals associated with others with substance abuse problems. Therefore, if ex-offenders have meaningful family and friendship bonds, they face lower recidivism rates. Mancini et al. (2016) concluded that African American women commonly have community support and have fewer misgivings about reentry because of their family and friendship bonds.

The Bureau of Prisons (2017b) reported that 12,703 inmates (6.8%) make up the female prison population in the United States. Statistics on the age of inmates ranging

from 51 to 55 years was noted as 14,903 (8.0%), which includes the male population (Bureau of Prisons, 2017a). The Bureau of Prisons, as of September 2017, did not give specific statistics on the female African American, non-Hispanic population older than 50 years, nor do the statistics indicate what percentage of the African American population is male or female. In an outcome evaluation report, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR, 2013) reported that 29,750 (26.4%) of the female prison population was African American. The CDCR followed a cohort of offenders prior to and after realignment. The cohort demographics showed that 25.7% of the female offenders were older than 45 years, whereas offenders in the age group of 50 to 54 years made up 8.1%.

The CDCR (2014) found an older female population in the prerealignment group. The demographics in the prealignment cohort showed that 26.1% were African American. Although providing some statistical information, the report did not include specific racial or age categories of the total population of offenders at the time of release.

Higgins and Severson (2009) estimated that by 2020, inmates older than 50 years will constitute 21% to 33% of the prison population. As offenders age, whether in prison or once released, their capacity and motivation to commit crime diminishes (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012). Reasons for the decrease in criminal activity include health problems and physical limitations, and an increasing awareness of ways they have harmed themselves, family, and friends.



Current literature on older female ex-offenders is limited, with many of the studies focused on reintegration as it pertains to youth and young adults. Although incarceration of older adults is decreasing due to changes in sentencing guidelines and the release of inmates who have aged in prison, assisting this population with successful reintegration requires additional knowledge about their experiences. This new knowledge should include information regarding post-prison support, employment, housing, and community engagement.

The potential social implications of Higgins and Severson's (2009) study included improving release planning for inmates, providing coordination between social and medical services, as well as preparing communities for their return. Higgins and Severson suggested that older adults experiencing reintegration could benefit from social and psychological assistance, but offering tailored services requires additional research concerning their perceptions regarding what they would find beneficial. Holtfreter and Wattanaporn (2013) conducted a study on female offender reentry and concluded that reentering women benefitted from prerelease decision making, community supervision, and after-care assistance.

The following portions of this chapter include information on the background and gap in the current literature regarding older, female, previously incarcerated individuals. Also included is a statement of the problem and purpose of the study, along with the research question and theoretical framework that I used to understand the problem and to

collect data from the participants. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the nature and significance of the study.

### **Background of the Study**

Although previous researchers have focused on the experiences of men and women once released from prison, less information is available regarding older African American female ex-offenders and their reintegration process. Most research on former offenders focuses on the likelihood of continued involvement in criminal activity once released from prison, their recidivism rates, and the stigma of having a record (Thompson & Cummings, 2010). Although these issues are important when attempting to understand the reintegration process, the literature rarely includes specific references to older African American women.

Studies related to reintegration document the lack of discharge preparation, barriers to reconstructing meaningful lives, and differences experienced by males and females attempting to reenter their communities. Mellow and Christian (2008) argued that a lack of discharge planning and preparation was frustrating to ex-offenders, and they noted the necessary resources were often unavailable because of outdated material and program closures. In addition to a sparsity of resources, Stojkovic (2007) reported that older ex-offenders face personal adjustment issues contributing to their frustration in the process. These issues include the inability to adapt to a new society after an extended time of incarceration, which depends on the resources available at the time of release.

Although an awareness of the general barriers to reintegration (e.g., employment and stable housing) exists for older adults, additional challenges, such as finding and continuing physical and mental health care, as well as building relationships, also complicate achieving their goals. Because of their age and the possible length of time in prison, older ex-offenders may have lost contact with family members, or relatives might have become indifferent or choose not to have contact with them (Stojkovic, 2007). Reestablishing family and social supports is a difficult barrier to overcome and can make reintegration problematic for this population.

The large population of aging ex-offenders presents many challenges, and my review of the literature revealed minimal research focusing specifically on older African American women and their reintegration process. Stojkovic (2007) suggested that successful reintegration requires examining the issues older people face, including indignities, such as elder neglect and abuse. Shantz and Frigon (2009) found that women reentering the community face barriers associated with their health and age.

Once a female prisoner has served her time, outsiders assume that she will have the knowledge to advocate for herself and successfully reenter society. For some, that may be the case, but older adults may need additional support (i.e., advocacy on their behalf). This current study can be a tool that advocates use to gain a better understanding of the needs and perceptions of previously incarcerated older African American female offenders.

With changes in mandatory sentencing, prison overcrowding, and early release programs, older offenders need specialized assistance with reentry (Johnson, 2014). By examining and understanding social service provision to this population, decision makers can develop improved programs specifically designed for their resettlement. Ahmed, Angel, Martell, Pyne, and Keenan (2016) found that having gender-sensitive programs focused on primary needs such as housing, recidivism, and health issues could make transitioning easier for this population.

### **Problem Statement**

Existing research on individuals reintegrating into their communities following a period of incarceration has been focused on young and middle-aged ex-offenders. In addition, research on older adults includes examination of their experiences while incarcerated, but not on what steps corrections organizations take to prepare them for reintegration, or what happens to these individuals once released. Scholars have discussed reintegration programs to help previously incarcerated individuals; however, little is known about the specific reintegration experiences of older persons. Because older ex-offenders make up a significant portion of the correction system, the experiences of this population need to be taken into consideration to assure they receive appropriate services, and the communities to which they return will benefit from helpful information as well.

### **Purpose of the Study**

My purpose in this qualitative narrative study was to collect narrative data describing the reintegration experiences of previously incarcerated African American women older than 50 years who served 2 to 3 years in prison. The reintegration stories of these individuals will aid in understanding if a need exists for an age-specific reintegration program in California. I designed the study to explore patterns and themes in individual stories related to the reintegration process. The use of the life story approach offered an opportunity to research older adult reentry from an ecological perspective that took into consideration personal and family events, along with social variables affecting reintegration.

### **Research Question**

I used the following research question to gather pertinent data on the target population: What are the reintegration experiences of previously incarcerated African American women older than 50 years?

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

The ecological perspective, also known as the person-in-environment theory, is the conceptual foundation I selected to guide the study. Germain (1973) first applied the ecological perspective to social work practice, wherein the emphasis was on the ecosystem. Focusing on ecology, the adaptive fit of individuals with their environments is to examine interpersonal and organizational environments to establish whether adequate supports are available to support well-being (Germain, 1973).

Higgins and Severson (2009) used the person-in-environment theory to examine the role of social workers in the reentry of previously incarcerated persons. Its basic premise is for ex-offenders to become a part of the community and successfully reintegrate by meeting their needs through the utilization of available resources. The person-in-environment theory had a similar use in this present study, wherein access to resources in community settings was the unit of analysis. In addressing the research question, I selected a qualitative narrative approach, in which the participants discussed their reintegration experiences through the main themes underlying the paradigm, including adaptation, coping measures, and coercive power.

Although the person-in-environment theory was the foundation of the study, I considered other theories, including containment and general strain theory. Describing containment theory, Reckless (1961) contended that some influences increase or decrease a person's criminal behavior. Influences (e.g., limitations on a person's behavior, being involved in meaningful activities, and case management) should aid in reintegration. Containment theorists further posited that offenders would comply with the requirements placed on them and seek out their services for reintegration (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2007). Older ex-offenders might comply with their restrictions or requirements but could face difficulty in seeking services to help their reintegration.

The basis of general strain theory (Agnew, 1992) is that individuals experience strain when they did not meet their goals. Some goals might include the ability to obtain money or maintain a relationship. Whatever causes the strain, the individual might resort

to committing a crime to reach their goals to alleviate their strain. Older ex-offenders might experience some strain with reintegration, but I did not investigate whether strain played a role with reentry; rather, the focus was on the experiences of reintegration.

### **Nature of the Study**

I selected the multiple case study design for this study because this design allowed collection and analysis of data from several cases. Anderson, Leahy, DeValle, Sherman, and Tansey (2014) used multiple case study design to study public rehabilitation because the design allowed for cross-analysis to identify common themes that appeared in the study. This cross-analysis allowed Anderson et al. to create categories that described common themes that appeared in the cases. Multiple case study design was a fit for this current study because of its focus on a particular phenomenon: the reintegration of older ex-offenders. Further, by using multiple case study, generalizations can be applied to the study because including more cases in the study would allow for greater variation, and the interpretation data would be more persuasive (Anderson et al., 2014). Last, using multiple case study was noted as a common approach for increasing external validity or generalizing the findings (Anderson et al., 2014).

I used qualitative narrative inquiry with a multiple case design to explore the narratives of African American females older than 50 years who were released from prison and attempting to reintegrate into their respective communities. The sample consisted of 10 female participants released from the CDCR between January 2016 and December 2018. Narrative methodology required one or more persons to participate in

the study and, given the population, 10 participants was a realistic number to require. I explore this topic further in Chapter 3.

The phenomenon that I investigated through this narrative study was the similarities or differences among given participants' (a) prison experiences, (b) prison preparation for reentry, and (c) their reintegration experiences. The data gathering process came from individual face-to-face, semistructured interviews from individuals who are receiving services from a nonprofit organization that met the study criteria. I analyzed the data using the plot structure developed by Yussen and Ozcan (1997). This process involved examination of characters, setting, problem, actions, and resolution in chronological order. I included a more detailed discussion regarding the analysis of data in Chapter 3.

### **Definitions**

The following are definitions of key terms used in this study.

*Older offenders:* Inmates and former inmates involved in the criminal justice system who are older than 50 years (California Senate Subcommittee on Aging and Long-Term Care, 2003).

*Prerelease planning:* Prior to release from prison, prison staff create assessment plans with referrals to providers who provide reintegration services (Wheeler & Patterson, 2008).

*Reentry:* Ex-offenders use programs to reintegrate into the community following release from prison (Wheeler & Patterson, 2008).



### **Assumptions**

A number of assumptions underlie this study:

- The narrative approach was an appropriate way of collecting information to answer the research question.
- The participant sample was appropriate; therefore all the participants had experienced the same or similar reintegration experiences.
- African American women older than 50 years who participated in this study answered interview questions in a truthful manner that provided an accurate depiction of their reintegration experiences.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

A specific aspect of the research problem was age and its effect on reintegration.

The ages of ex-offenders affected their ability to find employment and adequate housing. I focused on African American female ex-offenders older than 50 years because this issue was a possible contributing factor to recidivism.

The delimitations of the study included collecting data only from African American females older than 50 years with felony convictions leading to their incarceration. Participants in the study were from one state. Having served time in the CDCR was another requirement for involvement in the study. I included only participants released between January 2016 and December 2018 prior to the interview who were able to describe their perceived barriers to employment, housing, and social services. Those released recently would have greater recall of the events.

### **Limitations**

In the course of the study, I made reasonable efforts to reduce personal biases. However, limitations might result from my use of the multiple case study qualitative design because of a limited number of participants. Due to the small sample size, reliability and validity issues might have occurred (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). As is the nature of qualitative studies, a small size is not generalizable and because of the use of the multiple case study design, the findings could be open to other interpretations or oversimplified, which may lead the reader to make erroneous conclusions about the population being studied (Roy et al., 2015).

Thus, the multiple case study approach presents some limitations in terms of generalizing the findings of the study, diversity of participants, and researcher bias. The participants were a nonprobability sample. Its limitations included its failure to meet the presumption of an even distribution of characteristics within the study population (Yang & Banamah, 2014). A nonprobability sample included quota sampling, wherein I interviewed a specific number of individuals from a certain demographic. A second limitation of the study was the lack of diversity among the participants. The sample size was small, consisting of only 10 participants. The sample size (e.g., age, length of time of incarceration, and whether the participant had completed parole or probation) were contributors to the limitations of the study.

The third area that might have limited the findings was bias that could have come in different forms. The first might be my role as researcher, with a perceived power

difference between the participants and me (Noble & Smith, 2015). According to Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach (2009), power differences can affect the information collected for a study. For instance, the participants in the study have an interest in the research topic and they have a need to tell their stories to help the researcher, but the researcher should question if the participant's interest in the study is due to the possibility of earning money or receiving a gift (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). The researcher has personal motivations that may include his or her personal goals such as earning a degree, conducting research for publication, or receiving funding for the study (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). In both scenarios, personal motivations of the participant and the researcher can create a perceived power difference because the researcher may believe that the participants are in control. Because they have the information the researcher needs, a participant may believe that the researcher is in control because of the expectation of a gift or cash.

Several other types of bias (e.g., the order of questions and leading questions) may be present. Bias in the order of questions may appear due to the way the questions are presented to the participant. In this study, general questions (such as those used to gather demographic information) were presented first in an attempt to counter the effects of this bias; specific questions then followed. Leading questions suggest what answers should be and could appear by attempting to speak for the participant (putting words in their mouths) or suggesting what the answers to the questions should be. To prevent

leading questions, I ensured that the questions asked were neutral. I allowed each respondent to completely answer each question and not interrupt or inject any comments.

Roulston and Shelton (2015) discussed potentially distorting the interpretation and analysis of data as another form of bias. Confirmation bias occurs when a researcher selectively collects and interprets data that support his or her existing hypotheses or beliefs. To address these potential biases, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that researchers should keep the research question in the forefront of their minds and not wander from the intended inquiry. During my research, I provided concise, direct questions and obtained feedback from the participants, which reduced these biases.

I took reasonable measures to address limitations (e.g., diversity) by opening the study to all individuals who fit the research criteria. As I conducted data analysis, I made a conscious effort to avoid imposing any of my previous experiences with ex-offenders onto the participants. Further, as this was self-reported data from the participants, the self-reported data were limited because the data could not be independently verified; thus, I analyzed the collected data at face value.

### **Significance**

The study may contribute to advancing knowledge concerning older ex-offender reintegration in several ways. Gaining a better understanding regarding prerelease services for ex-offenders and their reentry into the community requires research on prison-to-community transition with older adults. The results could have important implications for practice in the form of bringing individuals and communities together

following the release of ex-offenders from prison. Providing information to create a cohesive picture of previously incarcerated older adults' reintegration experiences could help ease the transition from prison to the community.

Participants' narrative firsthand accounts of the reintegration process for older African American ex-offenders shed light on what they believe is needed for successful reintegration. Also, decision makers could bring attention to reintegration policy and the exclusion of the population in current studies. Last, the knowledge obtained from older adults experiencing reintegration better equips communities to handle this population.

As professionals begin to understand the needs of this population, they can create quality training and skill-set-development programs supporting ex-offenders in becoming an asset to their communities. Higgins and Severson (2009) commented on the anticipated surge in older adult offenders that social workers will need to serve. Properly trained social workers have an opportunity to redesign services for the reintegration of older ex-offenders. Thus, social workers could advance their work with returning offenders. Although at this time it is unknown what social changes might occur from this study, potential outcomes may include a reduction in the recidivism rate of older offenders as well as a better understanding of the needs of this population.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced issues of reintegration for African American women older than 50 years. The background of the study included a brief introduction in which I discussed previously incarcerated older African American females reintegrating into their

communities. I provided a statement of the problem and related the difficulties of the reintegration process for previously incarcerated African American females older than 50 years because they lack adequate support systems once released. In addition, those with a felony conviction cannot request social service assistance. Describing current research on reintegration, I noted the absence of literature related to older adult reintegration.

I discussed the conceptual framework of the study—the person-in-environment theory—including a description of how a person’s individual needs and social and physical environment influenced the participants’ ability to reintegrate back into their communities. I also discussed the origin of the theory, along with how the conceptual framework of the ecological perspective plays a role in the person-in-environment theory and social work practice. I developed the research question to address the stated problem and explore experiences of previously incarcerated older offenders. While presenting the limitations of the study, I also presented a definition of terms as well as the assumptions and delimitations of the study. Last, I addressed the significance of the study and the potential for social change.

Chapter 2 is an examination of the literature on reintegration of previously incarcerated older persons, along with discussion of my literature search strategy and theoretical foundation. The literature review serves to illustrate the gap in literature on this topic. With consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches, the review includes analysis of the relevant work of primary theorists and researchers.

Chapter 3 includes a detailed description of the methodology, role of the researcher, research design, and the data collection methods, as well as the data analysis for this study. Chapter 4 encompasses a presentation of the collected data, and Chapter 5 contains the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

My purpose in this study was to examine and identify experiences of previously incarcerated African American women older than 50 years while attempting to reintegrate into the community. The results highlight themes, patterns, and commonalities encountered during the reintegration process. Understanding the reintegration experiences of ex-offender African American women from their perspectives is fundamental to understanding their needs, as well as raising awareness about the issues and informing public policy. Clearly, the insufficient literature within the knowledge base is problematic in attempting to understand the specific needs and opportunities for these previously incarcerated older African American women to reenter their communities. As discussed in Chapter 1, depending on their age upon release from prison, offenders have certain expectations as to what life should be like. Some expectations include finding employment, obtaining housing and transportation, as well as reconnecting with family and friends. Currently, documented information regarding previously incarcerated African American women pertains to the growing prison population, the increasing cost to care for this population, and the safety of those incarcerated in relation to prison design (Stojkovic, 2007). I focused specifically on African American women older than 50 years who were marginalized once released from prison. My intent was to demonstrate the relevance of why improved understanding of reintegration experiences of this population was important.



Numerous perspectives contributed to synthesizing the information regarding the crisis facing the reemerging older ex-offender. To fully understand this problem, I examined the problem in four sectional increments: (a) reentry views of women older than 50 years, (b) reducing health risks during reentry, (c) the reality of reentry for ex-offenders, and (d) making the transition back to society.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I located studies for this literature review in the Walden University Library by searching databases, including those for psychology, sociology, and criminal justice. Within a 5-year limitation with respect to publication dates of peer-reviewed articles, the search involved using a variety of resources including Google Scholar, EBSCO, and SAGE Publications, as well as data from the American Psychological Association, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the CDCR. This chapter includes a review of information primarily from peer-reviewed journal articles located in the criminal justice periodicals database, Google Scholar, and Academic Search Premier.

To investigate the experiences of previously incarcerated older persons, I searched keywords, such as *reentry*, *reintegration*, *elderly reintegration*, and other terms used in the criminal justice system. Multiple databases had a combination of various terms used to search for articles. To refine the research even more, I used the following terms: *African American women*, *post release*, *offender reentry*, *elderly prisoners*, and *ex-offenders*.

In the Walden Library, through the various databases, a combination of the terms *reintegration* and *prison* were useful in identifying peer-reviewed journals regarding reintegration of offenders who experienced incarceration for an extended period. The combination of the terms *reintegration* and *prison* also produced articles pertaining to the aftereffects of post incarceration from the perspective of the ex-offender.

The terms *reentry* and *aging* were also useful in locating articles, but many of the articles retrieved were in the medical field and medical rehabilitation area. As there is a lack of information relating to older ex-offenders reintegrating, I also conducted an Internet database search in order to supplement the peer-reviewed sources.

Because of lack of information on the reintegration of previously incarcerated older persons, I used other sources, such as conference papers, expanded topics surrounding older adults in prison, and considered older peer-reviewed articles. Current literature for this review was extremely limited for older female, African American, previously incarcerated ex-offenders identified in the problem statement. The nominal amount of information and salient material found for this study emphasized a clear need for additional research in older adult reintegration.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Edmonson and Irby (2008) defined a theoretical framework as the guiding theory to use in directing a study. To understand the experiences of previously incarcerated older persons, the person-in-environment theory was the primary framework for this study. The person-in-environment theory involves a person's environment as a determinant of

meeting the needs of the individual and could be useful in two areas: social work and occupational recruitment decisions. For purposes of this study, the person-in-environment theory followed the social work perspective developed by Germain (1973).

The seminal author of the person-in-environment theory, Germain (1973), used the ecological perspective as the foundation for conducting studies in the field of social work. Germain developed the life model practice to focus the adaptive possibilities of individuals in their environments (Rotabi, 2008). Continuing to conduct research in ecology, Germain explored biological, cultural, and social perspectives that included minors and older adults. Germain continued to refine ideas regarding the ecological perspective, and along with Gitterman, expanded and refined the ecological perspective to include families, groups, and organizations (Germain & Gitterman, 1996). The theory evolved from the ecological perspective to that of regarding whether a community was favorable or inadequate to meet the needs of its members.

Aday (2003) offered the theoretical proposition that if no balance between the environment and the person existed, then it was possible maladaptive behaviors might occur and have a negative effect on aging inmates. Balance for those reintegrating into the community included adapting, handling life stressors, and the ability to cope with their new environment. As later described in further detail, person-in-environment concepts played a critical role in whether an individual successfully reintegrated.

The person-in-environment theory includes an assumption that a person's physical environment influences her or his behavior (Germain, 1973). For example, the

environment includes both social and physical elements. If reintegrating individuals lose contact with their social environments, family members, and friends, reintegration may prove difficult because of a lack of social support. The physical environment, regarding housing or the availability of medical services, also plays a role in reintegration, as the possible lack of these services might affect a person's behavior and general health (Harding, Morenoff, & Herbert, 2013).

Higgins and Severson (2009) used the person-in-environment theory for a study in which the theory was a biological metaphor to describe individual environments. According to Higgins and Severson, individuals become compatible with their environment when resources exist and a potential for growth and satisfaction. There are similarities to the current study insofar as both were focused on reentry and older adults.

Whereas the Higgins and Severson (2009) study was focused on the role of the social worker, I aimed this current study at examining the experiences of older persons and their reintegration outcomes. Both studies included a focus on the same age group and the lack of resources to support successful reintegration for the target population.

The rationale for using the person-in-environment theory stems from the idea that the person and the environment are not two separate entities (Higgins & Severson, 2009). Each entity—the person and the environment—interacts with the other. To understand how a person functions, including an understanding of the individual's environment, as well as families, neighborhoods, and economic possibilities is necessary.

While searching for a theory for the present study, it was helpful to examine the ecological perspective and understand how older adults connect socially once released from prison. Considering some ex-offenders have lost contact with those on the outside, establishing and reestablishing relationships is an important component to their reintegration success. Connecting socially includes the neighborhood in which the ex-offender will reside as well as connections to institutions, family, and the community. The person-in-environment theory incorporates some psychological and sociological views, which encompass considerations of human development through social relations and social cognitive thinking (Germain & Gitterman, 1996).

The research question presented in this study served to provide data to examine the issue of reintegration of previously incarcerated older offenders. This question was built on existing reintegration literature and was aimed to include a segment of society, rarely written about in prison literature except with regard to the cost of medical care, death and dying, or housing older adults in prison. The person-in-environment theory builds on current theoretical constructs by using basic concepts such as adaptation, self-esteem, and self-direction, to explore the reintegration of older persons (Higgins & Severson, 2009).

As existing reentry programs work from the idea of being needs-based, the assumption is reentry difficulties stem from ex-offenders' deficiencies in finding service providers in their respective communities. An important goal of reintegration is to have each ex-offender create a plan that connects personal needs to community service

providers who meet those needs. In this study, use of the person-in-environment theory builds on existing theory through further exploration of the basic needs of reintegrating older ex-offenders.

### **Structure of the Literature Review**

The core areas of this literature review were focused on issues of release and reintegration, to include (a) reentry views of women older than 50 years, (b) reducing health risks during reentry, (c) the reality of reentry for ex-offenders, and (d) making the transition back to society. While I made every attempt to be as exhaustive as possible, the limited literature base or resource pool caused me to seek and adopt an alternative methodological strategy.

### **Metasynthesis Approach**

I decided to focus on the metasynthesis approach, which is a nonstatistical practice used to integrate and interpret the findings of multiple qualitative studies (Polit & Beck, 2006). In this approach, researchers combine studies to discover common themes and elements of a specific shared experience. Polit and Beck (2006) argued that researchers pursue phenomenological, grounded theory, or ethnographic studies when their goal is to change the findings of a previous study into new conceptualizations and interpretations. Using metasynthesis to gather insights that may have otherwise gone unnoted, supported the inclusion of perspectives that are important to the reintegration of aged convicts.

## **Release and Reintegration**

As stated, three studies have afforded the greatest opportunity in understanding problems facing the demographics of this study: Higgins and Severson's (2009), "Community Reentry and Older Offenders: Redefining Social Work Roles"; Crawley and Sparks's (2006), "Is There Life after Imprisonment? How Elderly Men Talk About Imprisonment and Release"; and Shantz and Frigon's (2009), "Aging, Women, and Health: From the Pains of Imprisonment to the Pains of Reintegration." From these main sources, the overarching understanding of the reintegration process for older adults may best begin to be understood.

In the interest of brevity and to focus more clearly upon the paradigm at hand, one must acknowledge as a given that being older and in prison has been difficult, and the population has difficulty coping with the prison regime (Crawley & Sparks, 2006). Those who have served long prison sentences often suffer lasting effects of imprisonment, such as institutionalization, aging, and a decline in their physical and mental health (Shantz & Frigon, 2009). These academically accepted basic premises give credence to developing further insights to this underrecognized population.

A similarity among the previously mentioned three studies is each had a focus on the need for programs to deal directly with the reemerging convict. As Higgins and Severson (2009) noted, providing a link to the appropriate community resources is an important part of assessment and case management in social work and important in sustaining older adult offenders in community settings. Crawley and Sparks (2006) went

one step further in their agreement, by tying the existing problem of health concerns to the lack of community support. The researcher's analysis further supported the position that this phenomenon included those outside of the borders of the United States. The health and social needs of older prisoners on a broader scale are neither met nor understood, consistent with their reentry concerns and needs. The research of Crawley and Sparks (2006) showed that older prisoners were often bewildered and frustrated by the reentry process. As their release dates drew nearer, they did not understand what they were supposed to do, or what, if anything, had been arranged for them once they were released. Becoming institutionalized has a greater occurrence in the older prison population (Higgins & Severson, 2009). Thus, when reintroducing offenders into society, prison personnel must consider older adult ex-offenders have limited understandings about life outside of prison, and what, if anything, it holds for them.

A commonality among these studies is the observation that inmates commonly have serious concerns centered on discharge planning. They have apprehensions about where they would live, how they would get there, and with whom they would be living. They are also fearful for their personal safety and about where they will get medical care (Williams & Abrales, 2007).

As the number of inmates that qualify as older (as outlined by the parameters of this study) grows, so does the need for societal and community-based programs to assist this population. Researchers indicate that the expected older prison population will grow to a full 20% of all incarcerated individuals by the year 2030, totaling over 70 million



men and women (Higgins & Severson, 2009). With so dire a future waiting, the issues of reintegration after incarceration could become an emerging pandemic crisis.

**Reentry views of women older than 50 years.** Women who are reentering society are more qualified to address the challenges of reintegration than are those who have not endured the process; therefore, it is only reasonable to defer to the accounts of their lived experiences. Repeatedly, their stories reveal the need for a better understanding of the requirements necessary for successful reintroduction, an overriding fear of the unknown, and, primarily, a concern for their health in the outside world (Cobbina & Bender, 2012).

The effects of institutionalization do not disappear when prisoners walk out of the gates of the facilities. The effect of institutionalization continues to have a significant effect on ex-prisoners' lives in their communities. Binswanger et al. (2011) illustrated that fears of not being able to receive continued healthcare are concerns for ex-prisoners. Participants in the Binswanger et al.'s (2011) study discussed encountering substantial barriers while trying to obtain medical care. Some of the barriers reentering adults face are not knowing how to access services that are available to them. Those suffering from chronic illnesses face extended wait times and are often not able to refill their prescriptions (Binswanger et al., 2011). It was further noted that extended wait times at medical facilities was a source of frustration and a barrier to seeking health care (Binswanger et al., 2011). Once released from prison, one ex-offender reported waiting

90 days for medication, then after spending 2 hours waiting for the medication, she was told there was a delay (Binswanger et al., 2011).

Crawley and Sparks (2006) noted a similar response from participants in their study, describing a transition from incarceration to freedom that entailed having inadequate support impeding the participants' abilities to receive care once released from prison. The participants suggested establishing a link between the prison and medical facilities to make follow-up appointments, to provide help for prisoners who are unaware of how to seek services without assistance.

Not all of the ex-offender's issues are limited to chronic physical ailments. An estimated 30% of incarcerated older offenders suffer from some form of mental illness, and the preponderance of those individuals will reenter society on release (Hochstetler, DeLisi, & Pratt, 2010). Offenders question the legitimacy of releasing mentally ill parolees into a community ill-prepared to accommodate them. According to Binswanger et al. (2011), one offender asked why a mentally ill person would sit and wait every day to see a health care provider only to be told to wait again.

Women face numerous challenges during the entry process. Cobbina and Bender (2012) argued that if adults are optimistic about their release, they are less likely to recidivate. Many incarcerated women have a stronger mindset about reentry because upon release, they wanted to be in a position to care for their children (Cobbina & Bender, 2012). In addition to becoming a role model, women want to provide a positive outlook for their children, which encourages them to remain free from criminal activities

(Cobbina & Bender, 2012). Cobbina and Bender (2012) found as women recognized they were aging, their desire to be involved in criminal activity lessened. Parole is pivotal in shaping a positive attitude when released from prison. Cobbina and Bender (2012) found women usually return to prison for rule violations and noncriminal offenses. While on parole, there are rules that offenders must follow to avoid returning to prison. Participants in the Cobbina and Bender study had a positive outlook regarding parole and about their lives after prison.

**While** Cobbina and Bender (2012) discussed how parole was a positive influence for women reentering society, participants in Johnson's (2014) study had a different view of parole and reintegration. Johnson's participants discussed the difficulty of obtaining employment whether or not they were college graduates, and how employers viewed them once the employers learned of the participants' incarceration. According to Johnson, one participant stated it did not matter that she was college educated after the employer discovered she had a conviction. Although the employer believed she was a suitable candidate and wanted to hire her, the conviction disqualified her from becoming employed. Another participant in the study spoke about seeking employment and the pressure she believed she was receiving from her parole officer to obtain employment (Johnson, 2014). This participant was not truthful on her application, refusing to acknowledge her arrest history. The employer hired her, and she worked at the company for 4 months. The receipt of a background check caused the participant to lose her position, as it documented her criminal record.

Both Johnson (2014) and Cobbina (2010) highlighted the participants' difficulties in establishing positive relationships with their parole officers. In the Johnson study, participants discussed how parole officers pressured and threatened them to find employment. Cobbina found inadequate communication between the ex-offenders and their assigned parole officers. According to Cobbina, the lack of responsiveness and communication on the part of the parole officer plays a significant role in the reentry process.

Cobbina (2010) stated that due to their large caseloads, parole officers show a lack of attention to the offenders. In addition, Cobbina described reports concerning encounters with parole officers being so uncomfortable that the participant did not want to speak. Home visits often required them to squat and cough and comply with the administration of a urine test. The officers would check their current residences and verify contact phone numbers. After issuing a receipt for the next appointment, parole officers would leave without any further discussion (Cobbina, 2010). In another instance, after acknowledging the need for mental health and outpatient drug treatment, one parolee described how the parole officer handed her a list of facilities and gave her a deadline to have everything completed (Cobbina, 2010). The parole officer did not offer assistance by calling the facilities to see if there was space or if the facilities were near the participant (Cobbina, 2010).

One prominent issue women discussed once released from prison, was their finances. Many of these women did not have a positive outlook regarding their financial

future because they were not employed. A contributing factor was the monthly supervision fee some states require parolees to pay along with restitution (Johnson, 2014). In California, ex-offenders can pay restitution while they are incarcerated or upon release (Johnson, 2014). The monthly \$30.00 parole supervision fee caused hardship for parolees because they did not have it, even though it was part of their condition for parole (Johnson, 2014). According to Johnson (2014), 28% of the women in the study stated the monthly supervision fee was a hardship, and 33% were behind 1 to 3 months. Some participants could ask their family members for assistance, but most elected not to ask as their families were also facing financial hardship (Johnson, 2014).

Further, 76% of the participants who were employed stated they did not have enough money to pay their bills (Johnson, 2014). According to Johnson (2014), older women participants seemed to agree that they did not need much and paid their parole fee before anything else. For example, a 64-year-old parolee stated she would pay the parole fee before she purchased food because she did not want to go back to prison (Johnson, 2014). Another 64-year-old parolee stated as long as she pays her rent and parole fees and has groceries, she does not care about other expenses (Johnson, 2014). The women in the Johnson study had various views of reintegration, but a common theme was the economic challenges they faced once released from prison.

**Reducing health risks during reentry.** Women reintegrating are not limited to just economic hardships. Receiving and obtaining medical services is also a barrier to reintegration. Prior to incarceration, this population was likely to receive inadequate

medical services that included dental and vision services. Ahmed et al. (2016) argued that correctional institutions have the capability to help offenders with mental and medical health care. Correctional institutions also have the capability to help and offer treatment to offenders who discover health issues during their period of incarceration.

The facilities provide basic services for offenders, but once released, the ex-offender's access to health services is limited (Ahmed et al., 2016). Any benefits or progress made regarding health issues while incarcerated is lost once released because of the lack of coordination between community-based health care and discharge planning programs (Ahmed et al., 2016). Although prison facilities can provide preventive care and management of chronic diseases, women have often reported mixed views on receiving treatment in prison (Douglas, Plugge, & Fitzpatrick, 2009). In some cases, female offenders reported difficulty accessing care and medication as well as experiencing apathetic prison staff (Douglas et al., 2009).

According to Morani, Wikoff, Linhorst, and Bratton (2011), in a self-identified prerelease questionnaire 60% of the participants noted a need for medical services, which included medication, dental services, and eye examinations. Binswanger et al. (2010) found women had a higher occurrence of chronic medical conditions, psychiatric illnesses, and drug addiction when compared to their male counterparts.

Shinkfield and Graffam (2013) recognized that having a healthy lifestyle once released from prison is difficult to achieve. Receiving routine medical care once released from prison can be difficult. As some released ex-offenders do not have access to routine

medical care, emergency rooms have become the primary source of medical care once released. Erlyana, Fisher, and Reynolds (2014) argued that ex-offenders receiving proper healthcare once released remains a challenge for public health officials. Erlyana et al. asserted that uninterrupted services from prison to the community would alleviate negative health and social consequences and increasing opportunities for successful reintegration for this population would be more successful.

Ex-offenders seeking medical services from emergency rooms are not receiving long-term care for their medical issues, they are merely treating the current ailment and not chronic conditions (Erlyana et al., 2014). Emergency rooms are an access point for hospital admissions for acute care in which the patient receives short-term treatment (Erlyana et al., 2014). As such, uninsured and underinsured reentry populations have used emergency departments as their primary source of care.

Salem, Nyamathi, Idemundia, Slaughter, and Ames (2013) found women preparing to transition into society had challenges accessing healthcare. Some of the challenges included long wait times as well as a lack of health insurance and transportation (Salem et al., 2013). Transitioning women also noted they do not have access to mental healthcare, dental care, and women's healthcare (Salem et al., 2014). Participants stated when they go to medical or dental clinics, they arrive early and wait an extended amount of time to see a dentist or physician; however, although they wait in long lines, they are not guaranteed to see the dentist or physician or receive treatment that day (Salem et al., 2014).

Lack of dental care poses a barrier to reintegration because the lack of proper oral health affects an individual's ability to smile, talk, and eat. According to Salem et al. (2014), when this population of ex-female offenders does not receive adequate dental care, they are at risk for poor nutrition as stated by a study participant. The female participant stated because she did not have teeth, it was difficult to eat solid foods such as salads (Salem et al., 2014). Specialty services such as dental care only accommodate so many patients per day because ex-offenders do not have dental insurance (Salem et al., 2014). Clinics usually operate on a first-come, first-served basis that limits the number of patients that can be seen.

Cox (2012) suggested considering health as a capital investment because if a person is poor in health, a person's ability to find and maintain employment lessens the quality of life for the individual. Cox further argued that investing in women's health is a form of rehabilitation that could have positive social benefits. The Federal Interagency Reentry Council (FIRC) wanted to improve the outcomes of women reintegrating into their communities in order to reduce health risks (Buell, 2014). A subcommittee of the FIRC, Women and Reentry, developed strategies for policymakers and program providers to implement to reduce risks related to poor health for the women (Buell, 2014). The basis of the subcommittee was to encourage advocates and service providers on all three levels of government—local, state, and federal—to enhance reentry services and create strategies to improve the outcomes of reentering women.



The first strategy of the Women and Reentry subcommittee was to collect and provide information regarding federal initiatives for dissemination to providers who work with this population (Buell, 2014). The second through fifth strategies devised by the Women and Reentry subcommittee was to identify program and system barriers in addition to increasing evidence-based and research practices for women. The emphasis was on parenting, employment, housing, and acquiring other basic needs. Other plans included developing a network of local, state, and federal governments along with service providers that will commit to improving services, supplying additional resources, along with identifying reentering women as a population of interests requiring additional funding (Buell, 2014).

One part of having a successful community reintegration is reducing health risks. Reintegrating women should be able to continue to receive the medical care once released from prison. Researchers identified a need for post release follow-ups and continued linkages to dental, vision, and medical care as necessary in order to reduce health risks and support successful returns to the community.

**The reality of reentry for female ex-offenders.** Leaving prison and returning to communities that may or may not have the resources to help this population to get back on their feet is a reality check. López-Garza (2016) stated women should be cognizant of the difficulties involved with reentry as there are complications and seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Women, according to López-Garza, have a sense of anticipation of what they want and the possibilities of what they can do once they are

released. The reality of those possibilities quickly diminishes when all they have is \$200 or less in gate money (money received from the facility upon release) and no transportation or housing. A portion of the gate money received upon release pays for California state-issued clothing to wear if they have no other clothing, and if no one picks them up, they must pay for transportation, and a motel room for the night (López-Garza, 2016). Receiving no support from family upon their return increases their risks of returning to prison for parole violations.

López-Garza (2016) provided an example of what occurs to people when they are released. A participant in the study stated she arrived in downtown Los Angeles at the Greyhound bus terminal which is across from skid row. Skid row is known as an area for homeless persons, drugs, and prostitutes. As the participant tried to decide what to do next, she stated she started to cry because she knew what was going to happen. The participant knew she would violate her parole and go back to prison because she had no identification, social security card, no family, and no money for a motel (López-Garza, 2016).

Many women leave the California penal system without their California identification and social security cards. Standard practice is for prisons to destroy all documents of a personal nature if no one goes to the prison to collect the documents (López-Garza, 2016). Once released, with no identification or home address, they cannot obtain identification (López-Garza, 2016). Becoming homeless is the first reality to reentry for women released from prison. Recovery homes, halfway facilities, and shelters

are not readily available for women when they are released unless service providers made prior arrangements. López-Garza (2016) reported the lack of preplanning contributes to their return to criminal activity and increases their chances to recidivate. López-Garza found that without the help of parole officers, the women cannot find housing, thereby causing the cycle of addiction, homelessness, and recidivism to continue.

The women who are able to locate housing can start rebuilding their lives. Those with children or felony drug convictions confront additional obstacles. In California, welfare services, known as Cal Works and General Relief give cash aid and food stamps to those in need of assistance. Over the past 10 years, the laws in California have changed, allowing ex-offenders with drug convictions to receive social service benefits (López-Garza, 2016). Females seeking social services can apply for and receive Cal Works for 48 months. If the female is single and does not have her children, she can receive General Relief in the sum of \$221 per month, but if someone else is caring for her children, she is not eligible for Cal Works or General Relief (López-Garza, 2016).

Cal Works and General Relief are not the only public benefits older adults can apply for if they qualify. According to Harding, Wyse, Dobson, and Morenoff (2014), there is also Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Section 8 housing that can provide long-term security. However, SSI is difficult to obtain because medical proof is required when applying for the entitlement, and long waiting lists delay finding and securing Section 8 housing (Harding et al., 2014).

The reintegration of older adults into a community setting is often challenging, especially if they have spent a significant amount of time in prison. If they have been in prison for an extended amount of time, the issue of institutionalization makes it difficult for them to survive outside of prison (Maschi et al., 2014). The reality for the older reintegrating adult is limited financial resources, lack of family support, health and mental problems, in addition to the possibility of homelessness.

**Making the transition back to society.** The transition to the community requires overcoming obstacles and moving beyond setbacks. Without prior planning and family support, post release individuals experience harsh realities because they are unaware of the need to budget gate money and apply for social services. Harding et al. (2014) conducted a comparison study, which revealed the differences in outcomes for those who had support when released and those who had no support. The first comparison was between Lenora, an African American woman in her 50s and Jennifer, a Caucasian female in her late 30s. Lenora was energetic, motivated, and had a long employment history (Harding et al., 2014). Lenora was on the right path to reentry as she enrolled in school, took training classes at Goodwill Industries, and was a part of the reentry initiative in Detroit (Harding et al., 2014).

Lenora became frustrated that she could not find full-time employment, so she relapsed, but she later went to inpatient drug treatment. Due to the relapse, she was unable to complete school and moved in with her nephew who lost his home to foreclosure. Her plan was to move to a homeless shelter (Harding et al., 2014). Lenora

tried her best to make a successful reentry, but she did not have the support needed to be a success.

Once released from prison, Jennifer had substantial support from family and friends. Jennifer's sisters purchased a trailer for her and provided money to help with the space rent, and she received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food stamps and Medicaid for support (Harding et al., 2014). She also regained custody of her youngest son who received \$125 a month in food stamps and SSI payments on behalf of his father (Harding et al., 2014). Jennifer actively sought out what benefits she could apply for to obtain economic stability (Harding et al., 2014). In comparing the two narratives, it is obvious one person had more assistance than the other. Jennifer did not relapse; she qualified for benefits because she was illiterate, she suffered injuries from a car accident, and her son contributed to their economic stability (Harding et al., 2014). Lenora, although resourceful, was not successful at reentry as most of the resources she connected with were short-term solutions such as reaching out to charitable organizations, obtaining employment from halfway homes, and financial aid from school (Harding et al., 2014). It is evident that women released from prison who have a strong social support system and have access to the resources needed on a long-term basis give former prisoners a chance at successfully starting over.

Recovery homes or transitional housing is one avenue that could lead to many women reentering the community with success, but these homes are limited in number. In

Southern California, there are recovery homes that allow ex-offenders and their children to live together while they rebuild their lives. Certain half-way housing complexes allow women to stay in a community-based facility where they can go to work and maintain relationships with their family. Other providers offer skills in industries such as food services for those recently released from prison.

Heidemann, Cederbaum, and Martinez (2015) found the common theme among women living in recovery homes was finding their place. Participants in the study stated they were tired of living in institutional settings and with other people, often strangers (Heidemann et al., 2015). The participants were aware that the possibility of home ownership may not happen due to barriers such as making a living wage, their age, and certain disabilities, which prevented them from working, but they still associated success with establishing independent living quarters (Heidemann et al., 2015).

Harding et al. (2013) named three common places where ex-offenders are most likely to live: motels, transitional housing facilities, and homeless shelters. Scroggins and Malley (2010) found programs that offer temporary housing assistance do not always allow children to reside with their parent. The length of time a person stays in transitional housing also varies. Johnson (2014) noted the average length of time was 6 months in certain states, while Harding et al. (2013) found persons residing in some homes from 1 to 2 years. No matter the length of time they stay in transitional housing, most women still consider themselves homeless (Johnson, 2014).

The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 (HEARTH) defined homelessness as a not having a fixed residence or sleeping in undesignated resting places. The HEARTH definition included people who could lose their home within 14 days. HEARTH went one step further than Harding et al. (2013) and Johnson (2014) by including homelessness as not only referring to those housed in shelters, but also unsheltered environments, treatment programs, and temporary housing with family and friends.

Lee et al. (2016) argued adults older than 50 years now make up more than half of the population that experiences homelessness in Oakland, California. Their sample consisted of 79.7% African American women older than 50 years who experienced homelessness due to institutional cycling. Lee et al. described institutional cycling as the process of jails or prisons releasing ex-offenders to shelters, and the women cycle between jails and shelters as a survival strategy.

It was noted by Lee et al. (2016) that women who cohabitate have the highest social support and avoid becoming homeless. In addition, women with a strong social network are more likely to accept help. However, relying on social support does not always have a positive outcome as the women may experience financial or sexual victimization by their friends, partners, or families (Lee et al., 2016).

As older adult women make the transition from incarceration back to society, they will encounter social challenges that may be difficult to overcome because of their age and the length of time spent in prison. The transition is not easy, but if they are able to

establish social support networks and positive connections to the community, they increase the chances of a successful transition back to society.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In this chapter, I described the theory of person-in-environment and presented a review of literature relevant to older adult reintegration. The major themes in this chapter included research related to the views of reintegrating women older than 50 years, the need to reduce health risks during reentry, and the realities many ex-offenders confront during their transition back to society. Based on the length of time they have spent in prison, ex-offenders experience difficulties while reintegrating back into the community. Post release individuals have little or no income, lack stable living arrangements, and have a challenging time finding employment. Reintegration for previously incarcerated older people requires a partnership with the community and funding from local and federal governments; however, there is a lack of specialized reentry services for older adults.

After spending a significant amount of time in prison, once released, ex-offenders face the stigma of incarceration that includes shame and difficulty in family reunification, and they may not have access to medical and mental health services. Offender reentry programs are available to prepare ex-convicts to return to communities to live as productive citizens. These programs are intended to begin working with the offenders prior to release so that the ex-offenders are immediately connected with services once released and receive long-term support and supervision as they reintegrate. There is



ample documentation addressing how those younger than 50 years reintegrate, but limited information exists on older adults.

The literature review did not reveal the current success rate of older adult reintegration. Not known is what level of achievement indicates success, the needs for improvement, and what support this population has once released. Further undetermined is what percentage of this population seeks assistance from faith-based organizations or local or state-funded agencies. Lastly, the question remains whether a viable discharge plan is in place for this population once released. Further research on how older adults population reintegrates will fill the gap in the literature and extend knowledge in the discipline.

Reintegration opportunities for previously incarcerated older African American women require a partnership between those seeking to reenter and the community. This chapter was a review of the literature related to ex-offenders older than 50 years seeking to reintegrate. Included in this chapter was a discussion about barriers to reintegration and community reentry and the perspectives of the older ex-offenders. Chapter 3 covers the study's methodology, including research design, the role of the researcher, and issues of trustworthiness.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

A growing need exists to understand how previously incarcerated African American women experience reintegration into society. As African American women age in prison and return to their communities, it is important to understand how this population readjusts to society and what their perspectives are concerning the process. My purpose in this study was to describe how previously incarcerated African American women older than 50 years make meaning of their transitional experiences. Understanding the reintegration experiences of previously incarcerated older African American women from their perspective is essential to understanding their needs. Further, it is important for communities to be aware of their needs to accommodate this rapidly growing population. This study was an exploration of how older, previously incarcerated, African American women feel about returning to their preincarceration life.

This chapter includes detailed discussion of the research design and rationale for conducting the study. Also included is my rationale for the qualitative approach and how the narrative life story effectively addressed the research question. In addition, I explain the selected methodology, discuss my role as the researcher, and address how I attended to issues of trustworthiness.

#### **Research Question**

As discussed in Chapter 1, the research question for this study was as follows:

What are the reintegration experiences of previously incarcerated African American women older than 50 years?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The central concept of the study was to examine age-specific individuals who have spent 2 to 3 years in prison. I explored and evaluated the participants' post incarceration process and what services they accessed upon release. Reintegration entails many adjustments that some previously incarcerated individuals may have a difficult time making. Those who experienced incarceration for an extended period have to learn self-care and how to cook and clean. Adapting to their former lifestyle may be problematic for those who have health issues (Stojkovic, 2007). In addition, this population, depending on the crime committed, could face hostility from the community.

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), the purpose of a qualitative design is the process acts as a roadmap, which stimulates and guides the researcher in answering the research question. In this current qualitative study, I used the narrative approach to collect data by way of stories told by the participants. By using an interview format, I prompted participants to talk about their experiences in order to elicit information that answers the research question.

Narrative research is a form of life story research with a focus on the personal meaning and autobiography of an individual's life as told by the individual (Chase, 2007; Cohler & Hostetler, 2004). The tradition of narrative research is to hear about social and cultural norms while examining the individual's identity (McAdams, 2001). Narrative research describes how individual and social factors interplay. The intersection of these factors shapes both an individual's development and cultural norms, as recognized in

fields such as anthropology, psychology, and sociology (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013).

According to Chase (2007), narrative research is distinguished from other forms of qualitative research because it reflects human emotions and thoughts as well as the individual's interpretations of their world. There are five analytical lenses in narrative research used to see different perspectives. The first lens is used to stress the importance of the meanings or interpretations given by participants regarding their personal experiences. Through narratives, the uniqueness of each person is highlighted and contrasted with common properties. Narratives echo the voice of the speaker through both content and the way the researcher tells the story. The most important aspect of narrative research is the reporting and analysis of the story's participants share. The researcher, in a sense, becomes the narrator along with the person who is telling the story. Researchers as narrators develop meaning out of the material under study. While developing their voice, researchers assemble others' voices and realities, producing results that reflect individual and social issues.

Using the life story method was the best research strategy for this study. As previously discussed, research is needed in this area to gain further understanding of older adults previously incarcerated African American women and reintegration, in terms of both their needs and their perspectives. The lack of qualitative studies on older adult reintegration suggested this study could add to the literature by identifying themes and patterns that emerge through the interviews. Use of the narrative research strategy creates

an open form of dialogue to allow the participants to describe their lives using their words.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My goal for this dissertation was to provide an examination of the pathways previously incarcerated older individuals take to reenter society and the challenges they face post release. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument and takes an active role in face-to-face interactions with the participants. Part of my role as the researcher was to be an astute observer and attempt to understand the lived experiences of the participants through their stories while simultaneously collecting data. Also, as a researcher, maintaining rapport with the participants is important as it builds relationships and supports empathy. The researcher learns to be open and nonjudgmental.

According to the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), the subjects for this study qualified as a special class because of their age and minority status. The designation as a special class for those participating in the study created some ethical concerns. These concerns included the population having expectations of assistance from me and the possibility that some of the participants may have suffered from an undiagnosed behavioral health disorder, creating a need to reduce the research burden on the participants. The research burden for the participants could have been in the form of the time it takes them to participate in the study or the inconvenience or discomfort it may cause.

To address the potential ethical issue of expectation of assistance from me, I recommended to the participant that she should speak to a counselor regarding any assistance she may need, and I also reminded the participant that there are agencies that are able to assist with food and clothing. There was the possibility that the participants might have had an undiagnosed behavioral disorder. Because I was not qualified to determine whether a person has a behavioral disorder, if the issue arose, I would have suggested that the participant consult with a counselor, psychologist, or geriatric psychiatrist.

Professional competence dictates that a person be trained, have the knowledge, and be licensed in making a diagnosis; therefore, I suggested the participant seek licensed help if necessary. Participating in the study could potentially have been a burden for some participants due to the duration of the interview and timing inconvenience. I explained the approximate length of time of the interview to the participant and I asked whether they were available for the allotted time for the interview. If they were not available, I attempted to find a date and time that was more convenient for the participant. If a mutually convenient time for the interview could not be set, I released the participant from the study. The burden should be alleviated by the incentive they received from participating in the study. If there was an ethical issue that appeared difficult to resolve, I referred to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations and my dissertation committee for resolution to ensure I did not violate the participants' rights. In

addition, I did not have a personal connection to or relationship with those participating in the study other than for purposes of this study.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The target population consisted of postincarcerated African American females older than 50 years who had been released for at least 2 years but had spent 2 to 3 years incarcerated. Participants had to reside in southern California and not be in the custody of the CDCR at the time of their participation in the study. Those participating in the study had to be free of supervision, not on parole or probation, but seeking employment opportunities and reintegration services using local provider networks and the CDCR.

The sampling method used in this study was a form of purposive sampling known as critical case sampling. Critical case sampling was effective in this study because it is a form of exploratory qualitative research appropriate to situations with limited resources and a small number of participants (Palinkas et al., 2015). If I could show a phenomenon occurring in one area, then the occurrence might be happening in other places. Although critical case sampling does not encompass statistical generalization, this method can be useful in making logical generalizations regarding the participants in the study (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Selection of the participants included the following criteria: Participants had to (a) be at least 50 years of age, (b) be released from prison between January 2016 and December 2018, (c) be under no supervision such as parole or probation and live in

southern California where the study was conducted, (d) have been incarcerated for at least 2 to 3 years, and (e) have been convicted of a felony.

For many reasons, studies regarding reintegration have been focused on younger persons and their struggles to readjust to society, rather than on older adults. With few studies representing an older reintegrating population, I was interested in the narratives of older adults who have experienced life in long-term imprisonment and have had to adjust to a new life once released. Except for the criterion that their crimes were felonies, the specific crimes committed did not have an adverse effect on participating in the study, nor did the length of time spent in prison.

Criteria for identifying participants came from various sources such as nonprofits and organizations whose purpose and mission is to work with individuals who are reintegrating. These sources for the research used flyers to contact subjects regarding participation in the study. The flyer (see Appendix A) was used to inform potential participants about the study and ask if they were interested in becoming involved. The flyer contained pertinent information such as the requirements for participating in the study. The self-selection process was the most effective approach for participants at different nonprofits and organizations who work with ex-offenders.

Selection of participants from nonprofits that have case managers was different. In addition to posting flyers, the case manager was asked to use the flyer to discuss the research project with potential participants who they believed fit the criteria for the study. Once selected, the individuals met with me to review and sign the informed consent form



and set interview dates. I conducted 10 interviews, and each interview lasted from approximately 30 minutes to an hour.

According to Merriam (2009), in a qualitative study no rules exist for sample size, as the size depends on what the researcher wants to know and what will be useful. Once the data became redundant and saturation was reached, I stopped recruiting additional participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Seidman (2006) agreed with Lincoln and Guba (1985), noting that when the interviewer starts to hear the same information from the participants, an adequate number has been reached to make up the population. Qualitative researchers do not follow set guidelines in relation to sample size (Merriam, 2009). As such, the number of participants for this study was 10, based on reaching saturation of the data.

Recruitment of participants took into account their privacy and confidentiality rights. Actual recruitment of individuals entailed posting flyers at organizations and nonprofits whose purpose and mission are to work with individuals who are reintegrating. Participants were offered a \$10.00 gift card plus information pertaining to a community resource (i.e., Immanuel House located at 22810 Alessandro Blvd., Moreno Valley, CA 92553, (951) 653-3000) to assist with their employment, housing, and counseling needs in exchange for participating in the study.

Identification of the participants took place at nonprofits and organizations that work with individuals who are reintegrating. Personnel from the nonprofits and organizations selected individuals who they believed fit the criteria of the study and

might have been willing to participate. Based on the information and the guidelines for the study, personnel at the facilities were able to identify individuals who might be willing to participate. I made the final determination as to whether the potential subjects met the identification criteria for inclusion. There was the potential for selection bias in this study due to the participants volunteering to be in the study. In order to address selection bias, I attempted to include as many participants as possible that matched the criteria and discussed possible selection bias in the results.

Participants in the study were able to contact me by email or telephone if they needed to schedule, reschedule, or cancel their interviews. Those taking part in the study indicated how they preferred to be contacted, either by telephone or email. I contacted the participants based on their individual preferences.

According to Thomson (2011), the relationship between saturation and sample size is that sample size influences saturation, which occurs during the data collection process. In the current study, purposive sampling involved theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation occurs during data collection, when no new data bring additional insight to the research question.

Mason (2010) also discussed how saturation occurs when no new data emerge. While Mason mainly discussed the concept of saturation, Thomson (2011) addressed saturation in a more direct manner. Thomson agreed with Mason, stating that saturation occurs when no new or relevant data occur, but Thompson described additional criteria for saturation as validating the variations and the relationships among the established

categories. Thomson further argued that if a researcher ignores saturation, he or she risks inadequate development of patterns and themes that would affect the findings based on a lack of reliability and validity.

### **Instrumentation**

To collect information for this study, the primary instrument was an interview guide (see Appendix B). With the participants' permission, I audiotaped and later transcribed their responses to the questions. Further, the basis for instrument development are sources derived from the literature review. Holtfreter and Wattanaporn (2013) argued that reentry is a process, as opposed to an outcome, and this present study encompassed examination of the process of reentry for older African American women.

Glesne (2006) maintained that when interviewing is the only method of data collection in qualitative studies, re-interviewing the same participants helps to establish validity. Member checking, as described below, and follow-up interviews were useful in confirming emergent findings. In this study, in order to establish validity, I used member checking to determine if the information obtained was accurate and reflected the participant's worldview.

### **Research Procedures**

I anticipated interviewing the participants one time. In discussing the study, I ensured the participants met the established criteria while explaining what to expect during the interview. I answered any questions the participants may have had regarding the interview process. At this time, I anticipated the interviews would last approximately

30 minutes to an hour. Data was recorded using audio equipment. Prior to interviewing the participants, I obtained informed consents from the participants. I ensured the participants had sufficient opportunity to decide whether or not they would like to participate in the study. There were no instances of coercion or undue influence in order to get the subjects to participate. I made every effort to ensure the potential subjects were given a free choice to participate in the study. The informed consent form served to communicate to the potential subjects the purpose, procedure, risks, and benefits of the study.

I provided the participants with a full explanation of the study during the debriefing process and offered a debriefing statement reviewing the purpose of the study. During the debriefing, I made my contact information available to them should they have follow-up questions or want a copy of their transcript. I also informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and they received a resource guide to assist with their community reentry.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected from the interviews with participants coming from local nonprofits and organizations that work with ex-offenders. There are various sources in Southern California that work with persons who are reintegrating. For example, the CDCR, which provides rehabilitative services for those who are reintegrating could be a source for collecting data and the nonprofit, A Time for Change Foundation, provides reintegration services similar to those offered by the CDCR. The

only difference between the two organizations is that the state operates the CDCR, and the Time for Change Foundation is a nonprofit organization.

I collected the data from the participants until the face-to-face interviews were complete. Follow-up interviews, if needed, took place after a review of initial transcripts. I collected data during semistructured, audio-recorded interviews. Using Microsoft Word technology, I transcribed the audiotapes by hand.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

In this study, the purpose of data analysis was to identify patterns and themes in the stories participants told about their lived experiences. During data analysis, I looked for themes to identify the participants' experiences from the time of release from prison to the present. I looked for stories that reflected their shared experiences. According to Riessman (2008), thematic analysis is a common form of data analysis in narrative interview studies because researchers are interested in what participants say. Thematic analysis serves to keep the story of the participants intact as opposed to breaking the story into pieces (Riessman, 2008). Johnson and Christensen (2008) noted that coding keeps the story together, allowing the researcher to chronologically reconstruct the different stories examined during the analysis.

The procedure for coding involved developing and creating a master list of the codes, using inductive reasoning. I reviewed the transcribed data line by line and divided the data into segments. When I identified significant segments, I assigned the segments a code. Inductive coding reflected identifying frequent patterns found in the data to develop

categories through direct examination of the data. I then hand-coded the data and used Atlas.Ti, a Windows-based program, to organize the coding, written text, and audio information.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

I employed member checking to establish trustworthiness (Koelsch, 2013). Member checking allows the participants to correct any errors and interpretations they perceive as incorrect. I offered participants the opportunity to provide additional information when reviewing their transcripts (Lincoln & Guba 1985). According to Maxwell (2005), member checking or feedback from study participants is the most important way to rule out misinterpretation of the meaning of what the participants say and their perspectives of what happened. In order to verify the accuracy of the data and to gather additional information if needed, I reviewed the material with the participants either in person or via telephone. The results included feedback from the participants. I offered them a complete summary of the findings from the study.

I used thick descriptions of the data as a method of establishing trustworthiness. Goldberg and Allen (2015) described thick description as an illuminating way to connect the theory and results and noted that the job of the researcher is to integrate descriptive and interpretive explanations of the findings. Thick descriptions in qualitative studies make certain the feelings, emotions, and voices of the participants are represented (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). I presented verbatim quotations from the participants'

expressions regarding their reintegration experiences, so the reader can experience their authentic voices.

### **Ethical Procedures**

In this study, there were two ethically sensitive areas: previous incarceration and age. I explained the confidential nature of the study and assured participants that no one would have access to their information except for my dissertation committee members and Walden University's IRB. In addition, I explained my methods to protect their identity and information by securing the data in a locked safe, and on my computer, which is password-protected. I removed all information identifying the participants prior to transcription of the audiotapes and I rechecked prior to completion of the final document. I also explained the requirement to maintain all data, including audiotapes, for at least 5 years after the completion of the study. Each participant had the opportunity to review her personal transcripts and analysis of her interviews during member checking.

Should any participants have experienced discomfort or anxiety during data collection, I reminded them of their ability to exit at any time without fear of reprisal. Throughout the research process, I reinforced the voluntary nature of their participation and offered names and contact information of the Walden University representative with whom they could speak about the research. Prior to conducting research, I received IRB approval from Walden University to begin research.

### **Summary**

Throughout this chapter, I provided the details of the methodological strategy that was used to explore the reintegration experiences of previously incarcerated older African American women as they reentered society. I included my explanation of the narrative research design and my role as the researcher. I provided sample selection criteria as well as procedures for data collection and analysis. In concluding the chapter, I explained how I addressed ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness. The findings of this study are included in Chapter 4, along with recommendations and conclusions in Chapter 5.



## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

In this qualitative study, my focus was on older African American women and their reintegration process. My purpose in this study was to examine the lived experiences of older African American women as they reenter society. To learn about their experiences, I collected data which described the reintegration experiences of previously incarcerated African American women older than 50 years who served 2 to 3 years in prison. The research question in this study asked: What are the reintegration experiences of previously incarcerated African American women older than 50 years? To address the research question, I used the qualitative approach. Specifically, I conducted this study using critical case sampling, which is a form of exploratory qualitative research used when there are limited resources and a small number of participants. The Walden University IRB approved the application for this study (approval 06-27-18-0045738).

Chapter 4 includes a description of the setting in which data collection took place, the demographics of the participants that were relevant to the study, and an examination of data collection that includes the number of participants as well as the frequency and duration of data collection. The data analysis includes discussion of the categories and themes, along with any discrepant cases. Chapter 4 also includes evidence of trustworthiness in addition to a discussion about the credibility and transferability followed by the results of the study and a summary of the chapter.

### **Setting**

I conducted the study interviews in Colton, California, in a private office at Togetherness Evolves All Mankind (T.E.A.M), which is a nonprofit organization that works with ex-offenders in the community. T.E.A.M allowed me to conduct interviews in an area located toward the back of the office at the end of the hallway, which allowed the interviews to be conducted privately without interruption. The office contained two chairs, a desk, and a small couch. Each recorded interview lasted no more than 90 minutes.

### **Demographics**

All participants in the study were African American females ranging in age from 50 to 66 years and each participant had spent at least 2 to 3 years incarcerated, but they had been released for at least 2 years prior to participating in the study. All participants reported that they were currently in the process of reintegrating and reestablishing their lives in the community. There was a total of 10 participants in the study. The marital status of the participants included eight participants who were single, one divorced, and one married. The education level of the participants ranged from ninth grade to a master's degree and nine of the participants reported having children, with one reporting no children. Employment status included seven participants as employed and three as unemployed. Table 1 shows the demographic information provided by the participants.

Table 1

*Demographics of Study Participants*

Participant	Age (y)	Marital status	No. of children	Highest education	Employment status
1	50	Single	1	Some college	Employed
2	55	Single	3	High school	Unemployed
3	61	Single	2	GED	Unemployed
4	53	Divorced	6	Ninth grade	Employed
5	58	Single	0	Masters	Employed
6	55	Single	3	11th grade	Employed
7	63	Single	5	Some college	Employed
8	52	Single	3	High school	Unemployed
9	66	Single	2	High school	Employed
10	51	Married	4	Some college	Employed

**Data Collection**

I collected data for the study from 10 volunteer participants via one-on-one interviews in a private office in Colton, California. The interviews were held at different times to accommodate the participants and their schedules. The participants were interviewed once during the study with follow-up questions asked during the initial interview session. I assigned a number to each participant that I placed on all consent forms, transcripts, and feedback forms that related to that participant in lieu of using the participants' names to ensure confidentiality of the participants. Each interview lasted no more than 90 minutes and was digitally audio-recorded with the consent of the participant. After the interviews, the digital audio recordings were uploaded to my

computer where the recordings were password-protected. There were no variations in the data collection plan as presented in Chapter 3 and there were no unusual circumstances encountered during data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

I transcribed all data and the data collected were the responses of each participant who volunteered in answering the following research question: What are the reintegration experiences of previously incarcerated African American women older than 50 years? I used hand-coding for data analysis along with the software, Atlas.Ti, which allowed me to see emerging themes such as housing, employment, education, and family reunification.

I used the digital audio recordings and the transcripts to create qualitative data transcripts using Microsoft Word. Thereafter, for the first transcript review, I hand-coded the transcripts to become familiar with the language in the transcripts then I separately analyzed each transcript using Atlas.ti software. A code book was created in the software using Word Cruncher. The code book included all words from the transcripts, but by using the sort function in Atlas.ti I was able to narrow down the words and create a list of code words for each transcript. I narrowed the words down and clustered the words, whereupon categories and themes began to emerge from the transcripts. Using Atlas.Ti, in each transcript, I began to identify quotes and with the use of the code book, I reduced researcher bias since the software served to organize the data analysis and reduce quotations that were not relevant. I also used the word-search feature in Atlas.Ti to

identify themes in the quotes. I used thick description to keep the breadth and depth of the meaning of what the participants' said about their reintegration process after being released from prison.

The first phase of the analysis process began with transcribing each interview and comparing the transcript with the audio recording of the interview. I compared the transcript to the audio recording to verify the accuracy of the transcript. The second phase of the analysis involved listening to the audio recordings again, but this time, I was listening for any cues that reflected a change in tone or mood or extended pauses in answering questions. As I listened for pauses or changes in tone, when detected, I highlighted and color-coded relevant codes that occurred in the interviews. The transcripts are the literal words that the participants expressed during the interviews. I did not correct the transcripts for language or grammatical errors.

There were sections of the transcripts that reflected different themes and those themes, after review, were highlighted and organized using the Atlas.ti quotation manager, which allowed for further understanding of the context of the quote. I reanalyzed each theme identified (as noted in Table 2) with the research question for further analysis and placed the identified themes in subcategories.

Table 2

*Themes and Subthemes From the Transcripts*

Primary theme	Secondary theme	Tertiary theme
Employment	Finding employment	Employment training
Housing	Finding housing	Paying for housing
Parole assistance	Not helpful	Lack of information
Relationship with parole officer	Better relationship	Attitude of indifference
Relationship with family	Difficult for family	Feelings of not being accepted
Community resources	No knowledge of resources	Community programs do not work

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness for the study, I used two strategies to verify the credibility of the data: triangulation and member checking. I used triangulation to corroborate certain themes that were described by the participants and member checking involved all of the participants to verify the accuracy of their digitally recorded audio. After the interviews were completed, I transcribed the audio recordings into individual transcripts for each participant. I met with the participants to have them to verify the accuracy of the information that was derived from the recordings.

Transferability in this study was achieved by using detailed, thick descriptions of the participants' experiences while reentering society. To ensure dependability and confirmability, I used triangulation to ensure the dependability and reliability of the study. I met with the participants to allow them to review their transcribed interviews and

asked the participants to authenticate the reliability of their interviews. During this time, I asked the participants if there was anything in the interview they wanted to omit, change, or add. None of the participants had any changes to the transcript presented to them and they were satisfied with their transcripts as presented.

## **Results**

The semistructured interviews allowed the participants to give insight into the phenomenon of reintegration once released from prison. The research question addressed the lived experiences of previously incarcerated African American women over 50 and their reintegration experiences. In order to answer this question, several interview questions were asked (see Appendix B). These questions encompassed (a) demographical information, (b) satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the reintegration process, (c) relationship with parole officer, (d) experience in finding employment, (e) family reunification, and (f) community resources.

### **Demographical Information**

All the participants gave descriptions of their marital status, education level, living arrangement and whether or not they had children. African American females older than 50 years made up 100% of the participant pool and none of the participants were on parole or probation. Participants were from California and resided in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. All the participants were born in California and ranged in age from 50 to 66 years in age.

### **Theme 1: Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction with the Reintegration Process**

During the interviews, I asked the participants how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the reintegration process. Participants 1, 4, and 5 were satisfied with their reintegration. Participant 1 (P1) believed that her reentry to the community was easier than some because she did not spend a long period in prison.

P1: I think if I had been there any longer, it would have been a lot harder for me, but it wasn't too hard for me.

P4: They made it kind of easy for me.

When asked how reintegration was easy, P4 said:

P4: My family did not want me to return to prison so they called everyone before I got out and made sure I had a plan in place. That's what made it easy.

P5: I was satisfied with the reintegration process because my parole officer gave me resources to various organizations that could assist me with getting gainful employment. I already had money when I was released to get a car so that I could look for work.

Participants 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 had a difficult time with their reentry.

P2: I wasn't satisfied because I couldn't get a job. I have a record, so I couldn't get a job, so I basically had to find a job for myself. I had to self-employ myself.

I asked P2 what type of self-employment she did.

P2: I was doing hair, selling dope; that's mostly it.

P10 was not satisfied with her reentry and she recounted her dissatisfaction:



P10: I was released and had no help. I tried not to go back to what put me in prison, but I got to eat. I put in applications, waited but no call so I had to hustle for my money.

I asked P10 how she hustled for her money; she said she did not want to talk about it.

P3 and P9 also had a difficult time with reentry:

P3: I had a hard time getting into the training program for a job and seeking a good job and trying to get my kids back, so it was no programs put in place to reunite me with my kids and I felt like I was having problems with that. They didn't give me any guidance on how to make those things happen.

P9: My pastor had to help with my reentry, so it was hard. I felt it was a strain on him maybe it wasn't, but I felt like it was a burden because he took me in and having an extra mouth and all. I did all I could to help but I could see the strain. My pastor said the state should be helping you and all I could say was yeah, they should be helping me. The pastor and his family are good people; I just feel like I am in the way.

P6 had a difficult time finding a job because "people look at you differently when they know that you have been in prison." P8 had a similar view to P6 as she stated:

P6: I was out every week putting in applications everywhere. One guy said there is a gap in your history and I told him I was in prison. His entire face changed so I knew I didn't have a chance and he never called me.

P7 expressed her dissatisfaction by expounding:

P7: When I was released it was like an early hour. No one was available to pick me up at the bus terminal that I was dropped off at. I felt like I was losing on my first day out. I was not familiar with the transportation system and the security guard thought I was homeless. Well, I was homeless at that time I had just been released. The prison did not prepare me for release. Within a matter of hours, I had to check in with the parole I had no idea how I was going to get to the parole office. Hell! Where was the parole office?

### **Theme 2: Relationship With Parole Officer**

The relationships that participants had with their parole officers played a role in their path to reintegration and those relationships varied from good to not-so-good. The participants spoke openly about their experiences in reintegrating and how, in their opinions, the parole officers assisted with reentry or were seen as just another authority figure.

P2 and P3 both stated they did not see much of their parole officer because they believed the parole officer was waiting for them to make a mistake so they would return to prison.

P2: Actually, I didn't see my parole officer that much. Really, my parole officer felt like if I'm not going to come and look for you all the time. I'm just going to wait until you go back to jail. You violate your parole then I will see you. Other than that, he really didn't care.

P3: My parole officer, I didn't see my parole officer as often as I would have liked to help educate me on what I was looking at as far as getting out. He just basically did the minimum part of his job which was just checking in on me to make sure I was staying out of trouble and seeking a job and seeking training and I had a roof over my head. I feel like he did not give me any guidance as far as programs to reintegrate into society. So, he was just basically doing the minimum status quo to fulfill his report.

P2 and P3 dealt with parole officers who seemed indifferent to their reentry but Participants 1, 5, 6, and 10 spoke about the good relationship they had with their parole officers. P1 answered in one sentence as she recalled:

P1: It was an okay relationship. I usually have good relationships with people.

P5: My parole officer was good because I did what I was told as far as getting a job and reporting to him once a month as well as him coming for home visits.

P6: My parole officer and I are honestly quite close.

I asked, What made your relationship work? What made you close to your parole officer?

P6 declined to answer what made her relationship work with the parole officer.

P10 felt like her parole officer wanted her to succeed and that motivated her to do better while on parole.

P10: From the moment I met my parole officer I knew we would be ok. She asked me what do you want to do with your life and how can I help you? She actually took the time to listen to me and give me information about how to get assistance

in the community. She was like my personal cheerleader. I'm glad she was supportive and understanding.

Participants 4, 7, 8, and 9 did not have a good relationship with their parole officers.

P4: I had to switch parole officers because I just felt he was a little racist against me.

P4 did not go into further detail why she felt the parole officer was being racist toward her.

P7: It was a horrible relationship lack thereof. She only likes and cared about her male parolees not her female paroles. She wouldn't give me any kind of help. I asked her for food vouchers; I didn't know there were resources available to me. I found that out through other fellow parolees that I would hear talking about it while I was in the parole office in the waiting room and this is how I would come across certain programs or resources that were available. She would never tell me when I would ask her about vouchers, she would say oh we are out. Sorry we're out. We're out. When in fact she could have given me \$75 for food or hygiene, she never did.

P8 went to the parole office to check in and after she checked in to see her parole officer, she was arrested for violating parole.

P8: I always kept my parole appointments I was on time and my drug tests always came back clean. I was on my way to getting my life back. I had a job, a place to stay and I was meeting with social workers to get my kids back. I admit I wasn't

the perfect person but I did nothing wrong and it's hard to prove you are innocent when everyone thinks you're guilty. When the officer put handcuffs on me all I did was cry because I didn't know what I did. Well, after sitting there for hours I was told I was going back for prostitution. I wasn't tuning no tricks. I went to work and came home. Come to find out, someone made a false report about me and I almost lost everything. I don't trust nobody now.

P9: I'm 66 years old, a lot has changed and I can't say I really have help. I asked my PO [parole officer] you got a program for an old lady? And do you know that he said don't expect special treatment. I was shocked so I just shut my mouth and sat there. What type of person can't see I need help?

### **Theme 3: Employment**

One aspect associated with successfully reintegrating is finding and maintaining stable employment. The 10 participants expressed their joys and challenges in finding and maintaining gainful employment. Many participants attributed their criminal record as the reason why they were having problems finding employment. Only three participants reported themselves as unemployed.

P1: Finding employment was definitely harder than before due to the background even when you know the management would be very interested in me, but they do a background check and then, you know, they are no longer as interested. Wait. I was able to find jobs that were good for me, ah you know, I was really able to talk to management about it, uh yeah, just having that sit down like hey this is what it

is, this is what I am willing to do ah, you know that's not me, this is me and it came from a real genuine place so management you know felt like it came from a real genuine place and hired me any ways.

P2: It was horrible because I was not qualified, I didn't have the skills. I'm not qualified because I got a record, so it was just no one after another. No. No. No.

P3: Everybody turned me down because the moment they found out I was incarcerated it was a no and I felt like they didn't give me a fair chance to pursue the jobs that I looked at. I would have been happy just cleaning the floors, but I didn't get the opportunities or the chance to prove myself in the workforce because I had been incarcerated.

P4: It was really difficult since I have a long story, a criminal story, I guess. It took me a very long time to find a job. I don't know how long.

P5: It was hard at first finding employment. Before I got a permanent job, I worked a few temporary jobs. After those temp jobs I got a job a month after I was released. That is the same job now that I have worked for the past year.

P6: It was very difficult. It took two months to find a job. It seems like a short time, but it was hard. I had no transportation, no money for transportation. I guess I was lucky because honestly someone at the job knew me and gave me a shoot.

P7: Oh my God. Actually, it was the grace of God. I knew people that knew people. I went to employment agencies, so it was challenging. Well I had a job actually for me it was I knew someone inside the prison system that actually lined

me up a job once I got out. So, for me, I basically paroled to some other job. I just had to apply, and interview and I did, and I did get the job, so I would say a few months after paroling.

P8: Ross! Ross! Ross! I hate that store. I went there for an interview and the manager liked me and hired me. She said they were going to do a background check and I said there are something in my background I need to tell you about. The manager said don't worry about it I am sure you will be fine. I worked faithfully for three months. I worked overtime, I came in early, I took shifts when people did not come to work. Then I get called to the back by the same manager that said everything would be ok. I got fired. I asked why she said it was your background check. I said I tried to tell you, but you didn't want to hear it. Here I was I thought I was on my way but back at the bottom again. I felt that was so unfair.

P8: I'm not giving up. I am still looking for a permanent job. I have had a few temp assignments and they call all the time but it's not like having a permanent job. I think I will be hired permanently by one of the companies I work for. They just have to see I am a hard worker and I want the job.

P9: I am still unemployed, but I think I will have part time job soon at the senior center. My pastor has a friend that will hire me. I hope he does because no one else is calling. I truly thank my pastor for everything he has done for me. If I get

hired, this will be a great start for me. I went to church and I was really listening when the pastor said it is your season. I have to believe that my time has come.

P10: When I got out of prison my husband told me to rest and he would take care of me. Well, resting is not for me, so I started looking for a job. I wanted a desk job, so I got a job as a receptionist. It took me about a month or two then I got the job. It was a joy to know that someone had confidence in me.

#### **Theme 4: Family and Friend Reunification**

Four of the participants in the study discussed how family support played an important role in their reintegration process and how they felt they were not judged for being incarcerated. Six of the participants did not fully reunite with their family members, and relationships with friends had also changed. Some participants stated how some of their family members no longer wanted to have relationships with them and those participants that have children wanted to reconnect with their children even if they had visitation once a week. The participants had one commonality, which was they wanted to be successful and they wanted to stay away from environments that could influence them to return to their previous lifestyle.

P5: My family and friends seemed to be happy once I got home. It seemed that no one judged me.

P6: I feel that they were all happy to see me and that I was out, but I still feel that some of them judged me for being in prison.

P7: It was like I was never gone. I was only gone for 13 months.



P10: I know it was hard on my family, especially my husband, but my family and a few friends came to visit me. My husband was my lifeline he kept me going when I thought I couldn't make it.

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9 did not have family support once they were released from prison. One participant stated it was hard on the family or the participant had changed and she did not want to live her former lifestyle.

P1: I would say that it was hard for some of my family and friends. Reunification should not be that hard for family, but it was. As for my friends, with some friends there was never any reunification after I got out. I did not want to live that lifestyle anymore.

P2: Well, some of my friends they probably moved away or something. I don't even know; haven't seen them. The other ones that are here, they changed their lives some how, you know, got married or something and so I don't see them anymore and then my family, they are busy, but I see them, but not that much.

P3: It was very difficult because I had changed and they had changed and we are just taking it step by step. So, some people don't want to have anything to do with me because they did not visit me in prison, you know, some family turned their backs on me. So, I feel like if we can have programs where families can kind of stay together while people are incarcerated and not make it such a scary place especially when you are not in there for anything dangerous it would be a more successful time to reunite with family and friends.

P4: My family doesn't want nothing to do with me and my friends. Well they are as bad as me so I try to stay away.

P8: No family and no friends. It's just me in the world.

P9: I remember when I first got out I was staying with my kids, but I did not like them telling me what to do so that did not lead to a good place. I told my pastor about my situation and he took me in. The relationship with my kids is a work in progress. I never considered myself having a lot of friends but I know people at the senior center and that's good enough for me.

### **Theme 5: Community Resources**

Many of the women did not know there were resources in the community. Some did not know how to access resources and a couple did not use community resources. Of the 10 participants in the study, only three used community resources to assist with their reintegration.

P1: They just offered services; one was offering services to pay for school for you to get started in a trade there was a list of trades that were applicable, so you could choose one of those trades I think one of them was like CNA on that list. Also, getting your CDL license was on their things like that. They would pay for it to help you . . . you know to get into a trade what was the whole purpose.

P5: I used community resources to get a job. My parole officer gave me a list of places that could help me with my resume and preparing me for an interview.

Places like this gave me tips on what companies in the area were hiring. I also saw jobs posted on job boards at resource centers that helped a lot.

P6: Yes. I used community resources, but I would say the prisons could do better to help you find a job when you are released.

Participants 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10 gave brief answers to the research question posed to them which was: Describe how you used community resources or reentry assistance programs.

P2: I haven't used none of that.

P3: No ma'am. I didn't use anything.

P4: No, I did not know they existed.

P7: I didn't because I didn't know any were available to me. I just roughed it.

P8: The prison tried this new program to get you ready to go back out. They gave me a brochure with information on where to go when I get out and make calls; the place no longer exists. It was a waste of time.

P9: The only resource I wanted was my food stamps and my monthly check. I was not concerned with much else. Those places are just talk.

P10: I did not use any community resources. I did not feel that I needed to use them.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 included discussion of the findings of the study. This study involved interviewing 10 participants and examining their responses to develop themes

surrounding the topic of reintegration of older African American women. Through the responses of 10 female study participants, I identified emergent themes regarding reintegration. The study participants identified employment, relationship with parole officer, relationship with family members, and community resources as issues that effect reentry. A fundamental idea these women have about reintegration was having viable employment and housing that would allow them to be independent. Some of the participants felt they were inadequately prepared to transition to the community independently because they needed assistance other than what their families offered. In addition, the findings in the study reflected that relationships between parole officers and the participants were, for the most part, not positive. The participants felt the parole officers could have done more to assist with their reentry.

Chapter 5 is a presentation of the interpretation of the findings which were presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 also includes an explanation regarding the limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and the chapter concludes with the potential effect for positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this qualitative narrative study, I investigated the reintegration experiences of 10 previously incarcerated African American women older than 50 years who served 2 to 3 years in prison. My purpose in this study was to collect narrative data describing the reintegration experiences of previously incarcerated African American women older than 50 years who served 2 to 3 years in prison. I intended to examine reintegration of older African American women and their views about their experiences on reintegration into their communities after being released from prison.

My study contained formerly incarcerated individuals, who were not on parole, to describe, in their own words, postincarceration life. The key findings that emerged from the analysis of the interview data revealed (a) women in their early to mid-50s need assistance to meet their basic needs; (b) there is a lack of knowledge about community resources or transition programs; (c) the relationships with their parole officers play a role in their community success; and (d) having supportive network of family, friends, and the community eases the transition.

Examining reintegration of older African American women from their perspectives gave me a better understanding of what this population experiences on a day-to-day basis. How they described their feelings of being judged and rejected while seeking employment and how those experiences effected their reintegration indicate a need for transitional programs and further assistance for those reentering the community. In this chapter, I explained the key findings that emerged in this study and a comparison

of the literature review in Chapter 2. This chapter also includes a discussion of the limitations of this study, recommendations and implications based on the findings of this study, and suggestions for future research.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The literature review in Chapter 2 was focused on four areas of reintegration: (a) reentry views of women older than 50 years, (b) reducing health risks during reentry, (c) the reality of reentry for ex-offenders, and (d) making the transition back to society. The findings of this study confirm and extend the knowledge in the area of reintegration by affirming what previous researchers had written about with regard to the reintegration process for older women, but my study results were not in line with what previous researchers stated about healthcare as the participants in this study did not seek medical treatment once released.

Through the literature review, I examined the reentry views of women older than 50 years who were released from prison and reentering society. My research aligned with Cobbina and Bender (2012) as the participants displayed a fear of the unknown once they were released from prison. The fear of the unknown could be seen when the participants discussed having somewhere to call home, wondering how they were going to meet the daily challenges they encountered, and how they tried to obtain and maintain financial stability.

Although my literature review included discussion of the fear of not being able to continue with medical care as Binswanger et al. (2011) discussed, participants in my

study did not consider medical needs a significant issue. Although my population was small, the participants said the care they needed while incarcerated was minor and was not continued once released from prison. Binswanger et al. (2011) discussed the substantial barriers to obtaining medical care, including those who had chronic illnesses faced extended wait times and were not able to refill their prescriptions. Crawley and Sparks (2006) held a similar position to Binswanger et al. (2011) by describing the transition from incarceration to freedom that entailed inadequate support impeding the participants' abilities to receive care once released from prison. However, the participants in my study did not have chronic health problems so there was no discussion regarding their health or healthcare issues.

Cobbina and Bender (2012) argued that if adults are optimistic about their release, they are less likely to recidivate, and incarcerated women have a stronger mindset about reentry because upon release, they wanted to be in a position to care for their children, become a role model, and provide a positive outlook for their children, which encourages them to avoid criminal activities. The participants in the current study had views that are in line with Cobbina and Bender (2012). The women wanted to reconnect with their children and some of the participants that did not have custody of their children were in the process of trying to obtain custody. The participants noted that their children were important to them and they wanted to have a better life for themselves and be a part of the lives of their children.

In this study, the relationships the women had with their parole officers either aided or hindered their reentry. Some participants had parole officers that were supportive, while some participants reported the relationship with their parole officer was difficult as the parole officer had low expectations for them to succeed. Cobbina and Bender (2012) found parole is pivotal in shaping a positive attitude when one is released from prison and women usually return to prison for rule violations and noncriminal offenses. One participant in the current study almost returned to prison for a noncriminal offense as she was falsely accused of a crime, while others reported a lack of information received from the parole officers added to the difficulty of reintegration.

My study results confirm what both Johnson (2014) and Cobbina (2010) stated regarding the participants' difficulties in establishing positive relationships with their parole officers. Johnson (2014) discussed how parole officers pressured and threatened parolees to find employment and Cobbina (2010) found there was inadequate communication between the ex-offenders and their assigned parole officers. The lack of responsiveness and communication on the part of the parole officer plays a significant role in the reentry process (Cobbina, 2010). Some of the participants in the current study felt their reentry was difficult due to the relationships they had with their parole officers.

The reality of successful reentry is maintaining stable employment, but this is not possible if there is a lack of education and job skills. The study participants expressed frustration with their inability to be gainfully employed once released from prison. The participants felt that employment would lead to self-sufficiency such that they would not



be dependent on family and friends for survival. The participants believed that there should be a transitional program that helped them once they were released. Johnson's (2014) participants discussed the difficulty of obtaining employment whether or not they were college graduates, and how employers viewed them once the employers learned of the participants' incarceration. A participant in the current study discussed a similar incident in which she believed that she had the job until she disclosed her past and the employer's view, in her opinion, changed and she did not get the position. The disclosure of incarceration by ex-offenders to potential employers does have some effect on whether or not an employer will hire them. Employers are required to perform background checks, but some employers believe in second chances and some of the participants in this study were able to secure employment once they returned to their community.

For some older women, making the transition back to society is challenging due to two immediate needs, housing and employment. Harding (2014) found in a comparison study that there was a difference for those who had support when they were released and those who had no support. In the current study, I found women that had a spouse or some type of family support did not believe that reentry was a challenge, but those who did not have support, such as P2, felt the need to return to their prior lifestyle to survive.

In the community where I conducted my study, there were not many recovery homes or transitional housing and those homes and housing programs that do exist, do allow women with younger children to live together while the mother reestablishes her

life. In my research, I did not locate transitional housing that was specifically designed for older persons. Many of the participants in this study had older children who no longer needed the support of their parents and some participants no longer had custody of their children. A program that caters to those who are older is not in existence at this time, which makes reintegration a challenge for the older adult.

Heidemann et al. (2015) found women consider reentry to be successful when they establish independent living quarters. The participants in this current study also felt that having a place of their own would equate to reentry success. Harding et al. (2013) stated there were three common places where ex-offenders stay once they are released from prison: motels, transitional housing facilities, and homeless shelters. The women in this present study did not report staying in motels or shelters as they initially stayed with family and friends when they were released. Although the ex-offenders initially had somewhere to stay, they knew this was temporary and they needed to find their own housing. Those who do not have a support system may experience institutional cycling. Institutional cycling, as described by Lee (2016), occurs when jails or prisons release ex-offenders to shelters and the women that are released cycle between jails and shelters as a way to survive. It is also noted that institutional cycling occurred with African American women over 50 who were homeless in Oakland, California (Lee, 2016). The women in the current study did not cycle between jails and shelters because they had a family member to assist them in the early stages of their release.

Pre-release planning, which includes employment planning for women reentering the community, should start prior to being released from correctional facilities so communities that have reentry programs can coordinate employment services for women that are released. The general findings of this study revealed African American women older than 50 years face economic challenges and they face significant barriers, such as obtaining stable employment and housing. The participants in the study are only asking to be better prepared before they are released from prison and, once released, to have a transitional program available for them. This study should provide further insight to the needs of this population.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In Chapter 1, I discussed the limitations of the study and what I did to establish trustworthiness. I used member checking, which allowed participants to correct any errors and interpretations they perceived as inaccurate. Additionally, the participants had the chance to offer additional information after review of their transcripts (Lincoln & Guba 1985), and the participants were able to review the transcripts with me either in person or by telephone. I also used thick description, described by Goldberg and Allen (2015) as an illuminating way to connect the theory and results, in addition to making certain the feelings, emotions, and voices of the participants are represented.

I used carefully worded open-ended questions to eliminate bias and prejudice toward the participants and, with the assistance of the dissertation committee, the interview questions were reviewed to help with reliability and credibility. The 10

participants in the study were all African American females that served 2–3 years in prison. Since there was a low number of participants in the study, coupled with having one gender and one race, the results of this study cannot be generalized.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was not exhaustive in the area of reintegration of older African American women and post-incarceration adjustment. There were many topics that were not covered in-depth in this study, but future researchers in reintegration should take the next steps, which are to explore the rapport between the parole officer and offender, look at older women who were not successful reintegrating and the reasons why, and examine how the older adult functions in the community once released from prison.

In this study, some of the participants discussed the relationship they had with their parole officers. Some of the participants noted they had a good relationship with their parole officer, while others felt the parole officer was waiting for them to make a mistake and return to prison. Parole officers play an important role in the reintegration process as they can promote growth and prosocial behaviors in individuals. Further qualitative research may be needed to explore the views and attitudes of parole officers about their job and the effect of their relationship on those reintegrating, in addition to training on how to work with older adults.

Another area for further exploration is older women who do not successfully reintegrate and the reasons why. A study focused on women who experienced difficulty reintegrating once released and were rearrested due to potential hardships is

recommended. Hearing and learning about their stories would provide information on what works and what does not work with the reentry process. Some participants in this current study were using alternative methods to make a living and, although no one at the time of this study had been rearrested, their alternative methods could cause them to recidivate.

A second recommendation would be a longitudinal study to examine how older adults function in the community once released from prison would provide valuable information in the areas of housing, employment, and community adjustment for professionals working with this population. This type of study could provide information in the areas of reintegration that needs the most attention and strategies could be developed to overcome those challenges and be implemented and, a final recommendation would be a comparative study between age groups, older and younger, individuals reintegrating would show similarities and possible differences between what these two groups face when reintegrating.

## **Implications**

### **Positive Social Change**

The results of this study may encourage positive social change if professionals working in the criminal justice system with older individuals are made aware of the hardships this population faces, such as with finding housing and employment. Creating a program that could be a one-stop-shop for older persons to obtain the information and assistance needed to successfully reintegrate would be a step toward positive social

change. Should this type of resource be created, the staff and professionals that work there should be trained to identify those who need extra assistance in the community, to identify the potential physical and mental health issues of formerly incarcerated individuals may have, and to provide assessment and treatments prior to release from prison. This type of program would work with those inmates prior to their release to the community with continued assistance post-release.

The findings of this qualitative study may promote further research in the area of reintegration for older persons by examining the needs of older female offenders. This study fills the gap in the research by further exploring what African America women over 50 experience during reintegration. The study participants expressed that being prepared for the outside world prior to being released and being provided with assistance once released would make the reentry process manageable and strengthen their chances of having a successful reentry.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The participants in this study expressed that they were not prepared to be released to the community because they were not in a pre-release program and, once they were released, they felt they had no support. One participant recalled how when she was released no one was available to pick her up from the bus terminal and how other passengers at the terminal thought she was homeless. My first recommendation is to have mandatory pre-release preparation classes for those who are about to be released.

My second recommendation is to offer gender-specific programs for women with a focus on older females. This type of gender-specific programming would lessen some of the shock these women face when dealing with new technology and changes in the community, as well as to identify what resources are available regarding housing and employment. Gender-specific programming would expand their knowledge about the reintegration process and prepare them for reentry with realistic expectations.

Another recommendation is to create a one-stop-shop in the community that assists with reentry. This type of program would have a list of geographical resources that are current and accurate for women that are returning to the community. Mental health providers would be on site to help with the psychological effects of being incarcerated and making the transition back to the community. These mental health providers could also include family counseling to bring families together. Also included in this program would be job search preparation with access to employers who will hire those with a criminal record. This program would have information on how to apply for jobs and resume preparation. A one-stop-shop would prevent ex-offenders from going to multiple sites for information as transportation could present a problem for those making the transition back to the community.

### **Conclusion**

This study was an exploratory examination of the reintegration process of formerly incarcerated African American women older than 50 years who spent 2–3 years in prison. The study was an examination of what their lives were like once released from

prison and what made them successful after they were released from prison. This study consisted of 10 participants who were incarcerated in the CDCR, were not on parole, and resided in Southern California. The participants all had different reasons for being incarcerated and different lived experiences, but the participants were consistent in their opinions of what it takes to successfully reintegrate once released from prison. The participants were in agreement about the challenges they faced when released as well as how preparing them for reentry prior to being released would help them be successful once back in the community.

Older African American female offenders are researched less than are male offenders and it is noted that research regarding older individuals reintegrating is also limited. The conclusions in studies about male offenders cannot be generalized to the female population because males and females have different needs. Further research with older women regarding reintegration is warranted because there is limited information. The present study supports research that has been conducted with female offenders and adds to the literature by addressing the issues regarding older persons and reintegration and what they need to be successful at reentry. Learning about older African American women and what it takes to successfully rejoin their communities after being incarcerated and offering this population the services they need in an easy and efficient manner, would give these women a successful start on their reintegration journey and possibly reduce the recidivism rate.



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## Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Post Incarcerated Females Eligibility Requirements:

African-American females over 50 years of age.

Must not be on parole or probation

Must have been released from prison between January 2016 and December 2018

Looking for individuals to participate in interviews regarding reentry in the community once released from prison. Earn \$10 by participating in a confidential interview discussing your experiences seeking reentry in the community.

Please contact Eva Brent

(909) 800-\*\*\*\* or

[eva.brent@waldenu.edu](mailto:eva.brent@waldenu.edu)

**RE-ENTRY STUDY  
LOOKING FOR  
PARTICIPANTS**



## Appendix B: Protocol for Interviews/Interview Questions

Interview Details: Previously Incarcerated African American Females over 50 Years of Age

Interviewer:

Participant Name:

Date and Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

### **Preinterview Verification:**

1. Verify informed consent letter is signed, dated, and collected.
2. Give participant a copy of the executed informed consent letter.
3. Remind participant she can request a copy of the results of the study if she wishes to have a copy.

### **Demographic Interview Questions**

1. Where were you born?
2. What is your marital status?
3. Are you currently employed?  
If so, what is your current occupation and for how long?
4. What is your highest level of education?
5. Can you describe your current living arrangement?
6. Do you have any children? If so, how many?
7. Does the child or children live with you?
8. What is the custodial status of the child?
9. If you do not have custody, how often do you see the child or children?

**Interview Questions**

1. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the reintegration process?
2. Can you discuss what type of relationship you had with your parole officer?
3. In your words, describe the medical treatment you received while in prison and the medical care you have received since your release.
4. Describe how you used community resources or reentry assistance programs.
5. What would you most want to change about the reentry process?
6. How do you personally define reentry success?

**Reintegration Questions**

1. What was the first major decision you made after getting released?
2. Describe your experience in finding employment and, if you are employed now, how long did it take you to find employment once you were released?
3. Can you describe what reunification was like with your friends and family?
4. Tell me about your community before and after your incarceration. Is the community the same or has it changed in your opinion?

**Reintegration Reflection Questions**

1. Tell me how your age has had any impact on your reentry.
2. Looking back, in what ways do you think you have changed since your release?

When you reflect on your life, what would you say were the most important things you experienced and what was an important turning point?