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## Family in Context: (Re)entry Narratives of Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

FAMILY IN CONTEXT: (RE)ENTRY NARRATIVES OF  
FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY

JENNIFER E. COSSYLEON

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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*Para mi querido "grandpa" Jorge Zarco*

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## ABSTRACT

The current study is informed by narrative accounts of 39 released prisoners, who provide day-to-day understandings of how they have experienced and continue to experience community reintegration. This study digs deeper into the intricacies of returning to free society, one that often disenfranchises and labels ex-offenders, and attempts to reveal how released prisoners themselves see family as pertinent in their reentry experiences. Respondents' stories are telling of the resources they draw upon, and in particular how their families are involved in that process. Findings suggest that families at times provide material and emotional support, but may also facilitate drug use for ex-offenders. Family was also found to exert "reintegrative shame" and "disintegrative stigmatization," which was both motivational and detrimental to our respondents' hopes for rehabilitation. The present study suggests that regardless of whether family helps or impedes the rehabilitation of ex-offenders, their presence, or lack thereof greatly shapes reentry experiences. The academic literature on prisoner reentry should thus place a greater focus on the family.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PRISONER REENTRY

Nationwide, estimates indicate that 13 million women and men are either currently serving or previously served a felony sentence (Mauer 2010), with over 708,600 residents exiting from prison yearly (Guerino, Harrison and Sabol 2011). These staggering statistics mark the relevance of continued attention to ex-offender community reintegration and its implications for families across the nation. Bruce Western (2009) notes that incarcerated black men in their twenties, are half as likely to be married in comparison to similar men in free society, but are just as likely to have children. These figures indicate that the family dynamics of released prisoners may be affected by their criminal pasts and in turn could influence how released offenders reenter their families. Prior research informs us that many factors are important for “successful” reintegration including familial support, state policies, supervision strategies, employment, housing, and the availability and access to health and social service networks (Solomon, Visher, LaVigne and Osbourne 2006; Travis 2005; Travis, Solomon and Waul 2001).

However, we know very little about how ex-offenders experience reentry on a daily basis and how close associates and family members are involved in that process. Prior research depicts family as the most likely to provide financial and emotional support (Naser and Visher 2006; Christian 2005; Breese, Ra’el, and Grant 2000; Hairston 1998), yet examination has not adequately addressed how family is pertinent in the

reentry processes of released offenders. In the current study, 39 formerly incarcerated individuals provide detailed narratives of their daily experiences with community reintegration. Participant's stories are telling of the resources they have received during reentry. In particular, interviewee's talk about how their families have been and continue to be involved in their reentry processes.

I begin this thesis by outlining related literature on incarceration, prisoner reentry, and the family. Next, I introduce the methodology, the analytical strategy I used to interpret findings, and outline some limitations of the methods. I then present findings using narrative accounts as the main evidence, which indicate that interviewees' families have provided basic necessities and emotional support, but at times have also served as a trigger and facilitator of drugs. Further, participants' families instilled "reintegrative shame," which Braithwaite (1989) describes as a process that maintains "bonds of respect or love that sharply terminate disapproval with forgiveness" and "disintegrative stigmatization," which leads to out casting and deviant labeling (12). Both reintegrative shame and disintegrative stigmatization are important concepts because they have implications for perceptions of the self or identity. As Mead (1967) argues, the self is something that develops with social experience and is constructed through interactions with others coupled with a reflective notion of how others perceive us.

The present study suggests that whether family helps or impedes the rehabilitation of ex-offenders, their presence, or lack thereof greatly influences reentry experiences. As our interview data indicates, familial experiences post-release vary greatly from person to person. However, all of our respondents spoke of family and perceived their involvement

as an important aspect of their individual reentry processes. Academic literature on reentry should place a greater emphasis on the family. In practice, community reintegration may also benefit from a more family-oriented approach on rehabilitative services, including healing practices that are inclusive to the family through case management, therapy and relationship building or re-building (Sullivan, Mino and Nelson 2002).

### **A Review of Reentry Literature**

Prisoner reentry describes the dynamic process of exiting institutional confinement and returning to society. Exiting offenders likely face a multitude of obstacles, including persistent drug addictions, employment limitations (Pager, Western and Sugie. 2009) housing instability (Travis 2005) and disenfranchisement ( Maza and Uggen 2006). They also regularly leave prison with insufficient preparation as estimates indicate that upon release; more than 90 percent of ex-offenders have little or no discharge planning, very small amounts of cash, and few available resources (Kupers 1999). Community reintegration is commonly a slow transition as most individuals continue their prison sentences under community supervision. In the U.S., approximately 4.8 million adults are tracked and monitored via probation, parole or extended supervision (Glaze and Bonczar 2011), many of whom are responsible for paying at least one dollar a day while under supervision (2001 Wis. Act. 109, § 304.74(2)).

Reentry barriers including substantial debts (Levingston and Turetsky. 2007) and prolonged surveillance post- release may further magnify the difficult prison-to-community transition. Some obstacles ex-offenders face include the denial of welfare,

the disqualification for educational loans (Pettit and Western 2004), the termination of child custody rights, and the ineligibility for public housing (Travis and Waul 2003). Terms of supervision habitually include a list of rules and prohibited behaviors including abstinence from drugs and alcohol, curfews, and for some ex-offenders housing restrictions (particularly sex offenders). While many conditions of release require participation in a treatment program and mandate employment or job search verification, reentry scholars have discussed a shift in the philosophy of supervision. Joan Petersilia (2003) posits that today community supervision is not concerned exclusively with rehabilitation as it was decades ago. She explains: “the system’s perception that those coming out of prison today are a more hardcore group requiring surveillance more than services” (p. 92). Increased surveillance and the absence of meaningful assistance may partially explain why nearly 68 percent of released offenders return to prison soon after leaving, with more than 25 percent solely returning because of a technical violation of the rules (Langan and Levin 2002).

Most relevant for this thesis is the recognition that community reintegration encompasses both instrumental needs as well as emotional adjustments to life in the free world. As Shadd Maruna (2011) notes: reintegration is a process that involves “more than just physical resettlement into society after incarceration but also includes a symbolic element of moral inclusion, involving seemingly anachronistic concepts such as atonement, forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation” (p. 4). Gaining forgiveness and acceptance into the family can arguably be one of the most difficult and complicated challenges for a released offender to accomplish with both their children and family

members (Christian and Kennedy 2011; Travis and Waul 2003).

### Incarcerated Parents and their Children

In 2007, 1.7 million minor children had at least one parent in prison, with fathers comprising 92 percent of that total (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Although women are likely the primary caregivers of their children (Glaze and Maruschak 2008), long-term absence of either parent may influence a child's economic stability and strain parent-child relationships. Fifty-nine percent of parents in state prison and 45 percent of parents in federal prison reported having no child visitations during their sentences (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Most family members reported not visiting because of the long distances to the prison facility and the cost of travel (Naser and Visser 2006). An incarcerated mother's average distance from her children and family is 160 miles, and for fathers, 100 miles (Hagan and Petty 2001). This parent-child disconnect may impose lasting effects on children. Bernstein (2005) suggests that even when a responsible adult or family member cares for the children left behind, some may still experience serious trauma from witnessing the arrest of their parent and or dealing with their absence.

Much investigation suggests that a parent's incarceration affects their children's behavior and emotions (Lee 2005; Travis, McBride, and Solomon 2003). Lois Wright and Cynthia Seymour (2000) found that children with an incarcerated parent frequently felt responsible for their parent's absence and experienced anger, guilt, isolation, and or confusion. Likewise, children with an incarcerated parent have a higher risk for low self-esteem, attention disorders, diminished academic performance, disruptive behavior, and increased delinquency (Lee 2005; see also Simmons 2000 and Johnson 1995). Jeremy

Travis, Elizabeth McBride and Amy Solomon (2003) note that prolonged parent-child separation may impose long-term effects including the questioning of parental authority, negative perceptions of the police and legal system, maturational regression, and intergenerational patterns of criminal behavior. Young children may be particularly at risk as they are often unable to fully understand separation from their caregivers.

For some families, the parent-child separation lasts far beyond a prison sentence. The Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (H.R.867 1997) authorizes the denial of parental custody rights after a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months (Evans 2006). Since the average prison sentence is over 22 months, it is common for incarcerated parents to lose custody of their children (Schirmer, Nellis, and Mauer 2009). Most states have exception clauses that may be applied to these requirements if: 1) a child is being cared for by a relative; 2) the court reviews a compelling reason why it is not in the best interest of the child; or 3) the state agency has not provided to the child's family the services deemed necessary to return the child to a safe home (NCSC 2010).

The children of incarcerated individuals are a pressing reentry concern since more than half of released prisoners have children younger than the age of 18 (Travis, McBride, and Solomon, 2003). Upon release, parents may struggle to maintain their child-rearing expectations including maintaining financial stability and an established household (Brown and Bloom 2009). It is important to acknowledge that substance abuse and criminal activity may have strained parent-child attachments prior to a parent's arrest and thus incarceration can further take a toll on those relationships (Travis and Waul 2003). As Creasie Finney Hairston (2008) notes, a father's (and arguably a

mother's) lifestyle may not have been highly inclusive of spending time with his or her family making it difficult for a child and or guardian to forgive a (re)entering parent.

Prior research on women's post-release understandings largely encompasses their mothering experiences and expectations. Patricia O'Brien (2001) interviewed 18 women, most of whom were recently released mothers, and noted that respondents talked of their children as great motivators to "make it in the free world" (130), but they were also the main cause of stress and guilt due to their inability to regain custody. Venezia Michalsen (2011) interviewed a group of 100 formerly incarcerated mothers and explored the relationship between attachment to their children and desistance from criminal behavior. She similarly found children motivated released mothers to refrain from crime upon release, but nonetheless were a great source of stress due in part to poor reunification planning. Michalsen's findings echoed other research, which highlights that women often struggle to reclaim motherhood and have difficulties reestablishing authority upon reentry into their families (Enos 2001).

A mother's role is often contingent upon her ethnic identity, social status, and familial context. Patricia Hill Collins (2004) highlighted that survival, power, and identity shape mothering experiences for all women, but argued that race and class should be at the forefront of analysis. Prior to incarceration, Black and Hispanic mothers have been found to have strong child rearing support from family members and extended kin (Collins 1990). This added support, could ease the disruption of a mother's absence for women of color. However, upon reentry, all mothers may find difficulties in regaining their parental rights as affected relatives could question their worthiness and ability to



regain parenting expectations (Brown and Bloom 2009).

A father's experience post-incarceration can be similarly complicated. Jeffrey Breese, Khaz Ra'el and Kathleen Grant (2000) interviewed 21 men serving time in prison for at least their second offense and found that for those interviewed, economically providing for their families was one of the greatest challenges of reentry. Anne Nurse (2004) interviewed 20 fathers on parole and found that a father's relationship with his children was mainly contingent upon the rapport with the mother of their child. Fathers reported that their child's mother controlled and regulated access to their children. In another study of 294 men, 57 percent of fathers to minor children lived with at least one of their children before incarceration, while only 35 percent of those fathers continued to live with any of their children a year after their reentry (Visher and Courtney 2007). Researchers stress the importance of continued relationship-maintenance for fathers during and after incarceration.

#### (Re)entering the Family

Prolonged familial separation due to incarceration may weaken social bonds not only with children, but also within families (Travis and Waul 2003; Mauer and Chesney-Lind 2002). Strained relationships may be problematic as most released offenders depend on family support for successful reintegration (Naser and La Vigne 2006). Drug use and criminal activity could have been one cause of disruption before the incarceration of a family member. Thus, mending familial ties upon reentry can take time and effort, particularly for those incarcerated for longer prison terms (Lynch and Sabol 2001). Thomas Kenemore and Ida Roldan (2006) argue that improving family relationships is

among the most important for reentering individuals to “stay straight” during recovery (18). Further, Johnna Christian and Leslie Kennedy (2011) found that familial relationships post-incarceration can become “disrupted,” “transforming” or “precarious” (p. 385). For participants that experienced disruptive relationships, incarceration interrupted stable and supportive connections, which continued post-release. A transforming relationship was one that viewed incarceration as an outlet for potential change of behaviors apparent prior to arrest. Lastly, precarious relationships were characterized as ambiguous because of dissatisfaction with released family members’ past behavior, and included uncertainty about future expectations. Accordingly, researchers’ findings suggest that the familial relationships of ex-offenders are not homogenous, and lead to unique post-release experiences.

Family members of released offenders have been found to provide a variety of emotional, financial, and material support (Nelson, Deess, and Allen 2011; Naser and La Vigne 2006; Travis 2005). Spouses, parents, and children often help a reentering individual develop healthy identities beyond providing tangible support (Uggen, Manza and Behrens 2004; Sampson and Laub 1993). Recent research shows that families positively influence and support released offenders. Rebecca Naser and Nancy LaVigne (2006) surveyed 413 men twice (before and after being released) and found they many times relied on family for housing, financial support and emotional support. Shelley Listwan (2009) found that living with a family member increased the chances that her sample of serious or violent offenders successfully completed a reentry program (measured by not absconding or no re-arrest). Marta Nelson, Perry Dess and Charlotte

Allen (2011) followed a group of 49 released prisoners and interviewed them seven times during a 30-day period after release. Researchers concluded that strong familial attachment highly correlated with individual success post-release, but did note that family drug use significantly influenced an ex-offender's ability to avoid relapse from drug use and criminal activity.

Conversely, families can be detrimental to reentry success (Gideon 2007). For example, spouses and significant others may negatively affect an ex-offender's rehabilitation and reentry, when ex-offenders return home to partners who are unable to join in living a sober lifestyle (Gideon 2007). Family can be a source of stress during reentry, particularly when that family is not included in case management, preparation for release, and counseling. The second most common problem of men repeat offenders, after substance abuse, was conflict with an intimate partner (Zamble and Quinsey 1997).

Studies of prisoner reentry have not only focused on reentering individuals' experiences, but also on their families' perceptions of this process. A study conducted by Naser and Visher (2006) analyzed interviews with 247 family members of recently released men. Researchers found that family members in their sample were reportedly highly supportive of their formerly incarcerated relative and provided financial and emotional support. Eighty-three percent of the study's respondents claimed to have provided their released family member with financial assistance, even though more than half of those respondents admitted it was financially and emotionally stressful for them to do so (26). This study notes the substantial financial strains family members who help a reentering individual could undergo.

Lastly, Martinez and Christian (2009) interviewed six dyads of former prisoners and family members and explored perceived reciprocal exchanges of support among former prisoners and their families. Half of the sample of released prisoners resided in a halfway house and half resided with family. Reentering individuals who lived with family, perceived the instrumental (housing and food) and informational support (job leads, program suggestions) as emotional support. Instead of noting the material support provided, ex-offenders mentioned how their family was dedicated to their reentry by providing emotional support. In contrast, those who did not reside with family saw familial support in more tangible and instrumental ways. For instance, they recognized the efforts family made in providing necessary toiletries and money, but did not talk about the emotional support they received from family. Thus, authors argue that residential context was an important aspect in identifying support mechanisms and facilitating former prisoners' "renegotiation" of family relationships (p. 201).

Some programs have recognized the importance of family during reintegration and drug rehabilitation. *La Bodega de la Familia* is one program that offers drug treatment and support for the entire family and has been especially successful in implementing this family inclusive framework. Instituted in the Lower East Side of New York City, the program provides family-focused relapse prevention and places family at the forefront of treatment (Sullivan, Mino and Nelson 2002). It advocates improved familial relationships through case management, a 24-hour emergency hotline, longer treatment availability to substance abusers and their families, and encourages familial communication through home visits and family therapy (Sullivan, Mino and Nelson

2002).

The present study explores the complicated familial context released prisoners return to upon release. Prior research recounts that family provides housing, financial contributions, and emotional support to ex-offenders (Nelson, Dess and Allen 2011; Martinez and Christian 2009; Naser and Visher 2006; Kennemore and Roldan 2006). However, there is a dearth of research on *how* family is perceivably involved or not involved in reentering individual's lives and to what extent this helps or hinders their reentry. Much of the research on prisoner reentry has not used methods designed to bring about detailed personal narratives about the family. This study focuses on the meanings that reentering individuals give to their reentry experiences, and, in particular, how familial involvement mitigated the experience of reentry. Further, the majority of reentry studies have explored characteristics and outcomes of *men* during reentry and have largely ignored women's perspectives. The current study provides personal perspectives on familial involvement during reentry processes and extends inquiry on prisoner reentry to include women.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CURRENT STUDY

This paper is a subsection of a larger reentry study conducted with Darren Wheelock, Ph.D. and Heather Hlavka, Ph.D. at Project RETURN, a non-profit reentry agency in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We explored a variety of topics pertaining to ex-offenders including employment experiences, housing, laws as barriers, relationships with family and friends, as well as future aspirations and goals. An agency-led purposeful sampling strategy proved to be most appropriate due to the pre-established relationship between the organization and the interviewees. This prior rapport likely gained us the trust necessary to ask interviewees various sensitive questions about their criminal histories, overall reentry experiences and relationships with family and friends post-release. Project RETURN has a longstanding reputation of assisting ex-offenders to find employment, housing and educational opportunities. It is located on the northern side of Milwaukee and sponsors AODA meetings (Alcohol and other Drug Abuse), an employment readiness program, parenting courses, and anger management sessions. Most client participation is voluntary, with the exception of AODA sessions, which may be included in requirements of extended supervision.

My colleagues and I conducted and recorded 39 in-depth interviews with the permission of study participants. These transcripts were transcribed verbatim. All interviewees lived in the area of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which has an overall estimated

population of 586,910 (U.S. Census Bureau 2009). Due to the relevance of environmental circumstances to which respondents were subjected (Martinez and Christian 2009), I will briefly discuss the disproportionate incarceration rate of African Americans and Hispanics (Pawasarat, John. 2009). Yearly, the incarceration rate for African Americans is ten times higher than that of Caucasians and more than *double* of the national average (Mauer and King 2007). Specifically, of the 22,985 adults released to Milwaukee County from 1993 to 2008, 67 percent were African American, 23 percent were White, and eight percent were Hispanic (Pawasarat, John. 2009). Recent findings indicate that 90 percent of the African American population in Milwaukee's Metropolitan area lives in the north side of the city (U.S. Census Bureau 2008), which is precisely where we began our inquiries on reentry experiences.

### **Research Questions**

This thesis supplements past research on prisoner reentry by providing a detailed account of how released women and men experience reentry on a daily basis. The current study also adds to the dearth of research on how ex-offenders' perceive their families as present in mechanics of reintegration and in what ways family shapes those perceived experiences. Broad research inquiries include: 1) How do ex-offenders experience reentry on a daily basis? 2) What resources (tangible and intangible) do they draw from? And more specifically, 3) How is family a resource for ex-offenders? And 4) How does familial involvement influence reentry narratives?

### **The Interview**

Although we asked a comprehensive set of questions during each interview, this

thesis focuses on those pertaining to the family in the context of interviewees' reentry. We began each interview by suggesting that the interviewees provide us with a pseudonym by which we would identify their interview. We then asked informational questions about where respondents lived, their marital status, religious affiliation (if any), number of children, and hometown. Next, we proceeded to pose questions regarding reentry including: 1) Did you have visitors in prison or other contact (e.g. letters or phone calls)? 2) How [has family] been involved in your life since your release from prison? 3) Have any family members been especially helpful, supportive or harmful, if so how? 4) How has your criminal history affected your family or friends? We did not define "family" to our respondents; rather it was they who chose who in their lives fit the description of family. The majority of interviewees spoke of family in terms of parents, siblings, children, spouses, aunts, uncles and cousins. Some however extended their family to include church mentors and close friends.

Other pertinent questions included 1) Do you have support systems in your community? 2) Has anything pulled you away from crime? Most of these questions were addressed prior to probe through open-ended conversation about reentry experiences. Nonetheless, we asked each interviewee these mentioned questions for consistency and to attain clarity about prior statements. The interview questions were for the most part open-ended and conversational in nature with the purpose of gaining personal narratives and insight into respondent's perceptions of daily reentry experiences. Interviews aimed to attain a "thick description" of respondent's lives (Geertz 1973), while capturing their unique voices and perspectives.



### **Analytical Strategy**

Prior scholarship in the field of prisoner reentry informed this paper's analysis (Blumer 1969; Patton 1990) particularly the existing research on reentry and the family. This literature highlights the grave affect incarceration has on familial social bonds (Travis and Waul 2003; Mauer and Chesney-Lind 2002), the limited number of children and family members who visit an incarcerated individual (Greenberg 2006; Laughlin, Arrigo, Blevins, and Coston 2008; Flavin 2009), and the role of family in reentry experiences (Travis 2005, Nelson, Deess, and Allen 2011). Analyses were grounded in participants' experiences and perspectives (Glaser and Strauss 1967) using a qualitative analytic-inductive method of back-and-forth data coding, cross coding and theme development (Patton 1990). Meticulous attention was given to respondent's self-identified familial experiences. Themes were not predetermined; rather they were extracted from narrative interviews. The narrative approach encourages relativism and subjectivity (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber 1998), and produces process narratives shaped by lived experience and relevant personal meanings. Narrators constructed their familial reentry experiences according to their social contexts, and understandings, which offer a glimpse of their perceived identities, cultures and social worlds (Van-Langenhove and Harre 1993)- all of which illuminate and shape relationships and behaviors (Maruna and Copes 2005).

### **Limitations**

As is not uncommon in qualitative methods, the collected narratives had a disposition to reflexivity as interviewee's realities were recalled and reconstructed

(Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). Although perceived occurrences may not perfectly mirror actual incidents or experiences, recollected stories are useful for understanding how released offenders see their families in the context of their reentry, and are arguably more telling than actual events because they reflect the narrators' perceptions. As Maruna (1997) explained in his work on narratives and crime desistance, fiction is important because of how it influences the construction of identity and experience. Examining our respondents' narratives allowed us to understand how they experienced reentry processes through the family.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FINDINGS

#### **Interviewee Characteristics and Reentry Experiences**

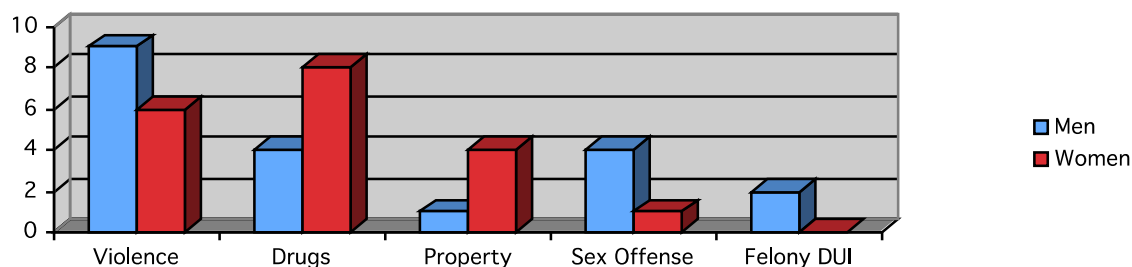
We interviewed a relatively heterogeneous group of individuals comprised of 19 women and 20 men. Their races are as follows: Twenty-six African Americans, eight Caucasians, four Hispanics, and two biracial respondents. Respondent's ages ranged from 21 to 59 with an average of 39.7 years and only eight were currently married. Nearly two thirds of our interviewees were parents to 93 children, with 41 percent having one to three children, 31 percent having four or more children, and the remainder having no children (12). Although many of the sons and daughters of our interviewees were over 18 years of age, a number of them were children during their parent's incarceration.

**Table 1. Interviewees' Race, Age, and Number of Children**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>Race</b>		
White	6	2
Black	12	14
Hispanic/Latino	2	2
Total	20	19
<b>Age</b>		
21-30	4	6
31-40	3	4
41-50	7	9
51+	6	0
<b># of Children</b>		
1-3	6	10
4+	6	6
Total	42	51

Although most of our interviewees had a felony conviction, two participants only had misdemeanor offenses. Our initial plan was to only interview individuals with felony offenses, but decided to not turn away any willing participants. The self-disclosed convictions of our interviewees included violent offenses (15), drug crimes (12) property crimes (5), sex offenses (3), and felony DUI's (2) (see Table 2), with most having more than one conviction. Respondent's time since release at the time of interview fluctuated from less than a week to over ten years, with a few of our respondents only spending a short time in jail. More than half of the interviewees (25) were subject to extended supervision at the time of being interviewed.

**Figure 1. Interviewee Convictions (most serious if multiple) n= 39**



The individuals we interviewed expressed reentry as a learning process that included familiarizing themselves with everyday interactions. Randell, a 44-year-old man, shared that many released offenders feel they “have nothing out there for them” and are not “on the same page” in comparison to those in free society. His comments are insightful because they touch on how some released offenders return to prison soon after release due to the inability to “cope” with the grim realities of reentry. Optimistically, Randell said that despite the many obstacles reentering individuals face, there are some

who are able to overcome them. Family is one resource ex-offenders embrace in order to surpass reentry barriers (Naser and La Vigne 2006; Christian 2005). This study shows that familial experiences post-release are far from universal and a family's presence post release can both help and hinder this process. Beyond providing instrumental and emotional support, families were also perceived as a form of two distinct types of shaming (reintegrative and stigmatizing) and in some cases, family members were identified as facilitators for access to drugs.

All interviewees relayed stories about their daily lives and outlined the hardships of living with a criminal conviction. Each of the narrators spoke of the difficulties they encountered during reentry, including the inability to find employment and housing. Many talked about their first experiences with release as frustrating due to having little money, no stable place to live, and few means to support themselves. Parents with children in foster care had trouble reuniting with their kids because of their lack of established housing. Although most of our interviewees' children resided with relatives during their parent's imprisonment, some remained in the foster care system indefinitely. A number of our respondents mentioned the difficulties of regaining parenting authority upon release, outside of problems with custody. Veronica, a 49-year-old woman, talked about her mothering experiences after her release from prison:

How was it coming back? Well, when I came back, I was mother. I was still the mama. And I was coming back for my kids. And that's what I was. I was coming back to take up where I left off. But the thing is, my son, he was 14, 13. Was he 13? He was 13. He like the street. He liked to run the streets. So it's like he really didn't have no guidance when I was in. He didn't have no guidance. So it was hard for me to get back in there and let him know he had a curfew.

Veronica's situation supports prior research on parenting authority post-release (Enos 2001) and shows that reentry is often a transition not only for those reentering, but also for family members.

Many respondents admitted that refraining from their "old ways" was at times challenging. Among these temptations included selling drugs or committing property crimes in order to survive. The following quote highlights the internal struggle of Jack, a 39-year-old man who declared to be choosing a path derailed from crime, although many odds worked against him:

If it wasn't for the Lord, I probably would have committed another crime. Because you know, my wife, she's doing the best she can. But we're in a situation we're they're trying to foreclose our home. You know, so I gotta get some money in the house. I have some friends that say you know you can sell drugs and we can get you this money. I'm not trying to hear that. I don't wanna do that. I'd rather continue going where I'm going... to doing-- but anybody else, I think they wouldn't have the strong backing, you know the strong spiritual backing. If you can't find a job, and you're a man-- you gotta provide for your family. What do you want me to do? How can I get it? You know, so I think that you know, they should kind of ease up on the job situation. You know, and make it a little more easier for you to be able to support your family. Because if you can't support your family legally, what other way is there to support your family? Besides... you know?

Jack saw few law-abiding options available to him given that he had exhausted all resources to pay his mortgage and was unable to find employment. He mentioned his friend suggested they sell drugs to gain funds but he did not want to hear or do that. Ex-offenders most often return to the same communities and friendships they left upon arrest, further challenging their ability to stray away from committing another crime. Jack found strength in "the Lord" to keep looking for work instead of traveling down an

all too similar road and committing another crime. But in his opinion, many ex-offenders do not have the “strong spiritual backing,” and are at times tempted to commit another crime when in need.

Jose, a 24 year-old man, admitted that the restrictions imposed on him because of his felony conviction led him back to selling drugs:

Interviewer: What about anything that has pulled you to crime?

J: My felony. Not being able to find a job. Don't have no diapers or no food in the house. Family's getting evicted again. Not being able to find a job makes you want to go out there and get money any way possible.

Interviewer: So, you've thought about that in the past since you've been released?

J: I've done it. Thank God I wasn't caught and I don't wanna do it no more because I was revoked for drinking and smoking. That's not a new charge. I could have had a new charge and I haven't. So--

Interviewer: What did you have to do?

J: I just-- selling a little bit of weed.

For many of our interviewees, meeting basic needs was an everyday struggle. Similar to Jack, Jose had financial problems and could not find employment. Jose shared he sold marijuana since his release. He “thanked God” he was not caught because he no longer wanted to resort to those measures and return to prison. This prior exchange also emphasized that conditions of extended supervision, including not drinking and not smoking are challenging restrictions. Respondents who were on probation or parole (25 total) often said they had difficulties abiding by the conditions of their supervision. Those who did not stress major difficulties post release said they were “blessed” and “lucky” since most people they knew that had left prison experienced substantial barriers upon release and often returned to prison. Regrettably in the US, many released offenders *are* rearrested and convicted soon after exiting from prison. National statistics

indicate that more than half of offenders are rearrested within three years of release (Langan and Levin 2002).

### **Community Resources**

“Well you know like they say, repeat offenders, most of the time is because they don’t have no support. They come out doing the same thing that they did before they went in...Everybody don’t have to get locked up or confined, they need help. Give them rehabilitation. Send them to treatment, not necessarily just to prison.” (Juicy, 43)

All of our respondents spoke at least briefly about the resources they relied on for assistance since their release from prison. Some of these included support from reentry agencies, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, domestic violence support groups, charities, counselors, donation centers, church pantries, homeless shelters and lastly friends and family. A number of these outlets provided informational and minor material assistance to our respondents in the form of emergency relief. But, resources also provided spaces where ex-offenders could talk about their personal hardships among people who were at times experiencing the same processes.

For some of our participants, learning from another’s experience made them want to have a different life trajectory. Sarah, a 21-year-old woman spoke about wanting a different life from one of drug abuse and crime:

I got lucky that I’m young, and I [can] learn from it now and not-- just seeing these women... there’s a woman who’s had treatment five times and she’s been using for thirty years. And I don’t want it to lead to that you know, to stop smoking weed, but use something else to replace it. I don’t want to live my life like that. It scares me. You know? I don’t want that for myself or for my daughter.

Sarah shared her fear of going through treatment over and over again and not being able



to rid herself of bad habits or even worse, gaining more of them. Although she realized that drug use was not healthy for her or her daughter, she explained how some individuals go through treatment several times and remain unable to stop using drugs.

However, even though many of our interviewees sought out resources through different means, some were rejected because of the lack of funding, their pending criminal charges, or even because of the opportunities they took advantage of while in prison. More than one of the respondents mentioned that they were ineligible for monetary assistance from state funded programs or community-based charities because they earned income while incarcerated. Our respondents also talked about noticeable cuts in government spending for reentry programs even though current calculations note that the U.S. government spends over \$187 million a year on prisoner reentry services and jail diversion programs (FY 2012 Budget of U.S. Government). These programs consist of secondary education, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, mentoring, life-skills training, and job and skills development. Although most of these programs appear worthwhile, TeeTee, a 30 year-old woman, explained how she completed treatment only because it was a mandated condition of her release:

When I got out they sent me to drug education class but it wasn't like treatment. It just tells you about drugs effects on your body. Did that for thirty days. Got a certificate. That was it. But when I got my DUI, I went to treatment. I didn't want to be there. I just did that because I had to. That didn't work. They switched me from outpatient to inpatient. Of course I had to be clean then because I was inpatient and I got off probation shortly after that. I went right back to drinking and smoking weed again.

TeeTee admits that she continued using drugs after completing treatment and only participated because her freedom was at stake. TeeTee's example highlights prior

scholarship on rehabilitation, which highlights that motivation is a crucial factor in predicting the ability to change drug-using behavior (Gideon 2010). However, TeeTee later shared what did help her modify her drug habits- caring for her teenaged child, her nieces, and having custody of her brother since her parents' recent death. She elaborates:

Now, I think it's that I have so much on my plate. I be having to focus on what I'm doing. And then by me having two teenagers in the house now. I'm telling them not to do things but then I turn around and do it? I don't know, I guess I just want to be a better example for my kids and my nieces and my brother.

For TeeTee, caring for her family pushed her to analyze and rethink her drug-using habits and added responsibilities and accountability for her actions. This study finds that families were often involved in the reentry and desistance processes of our respondents, both in a positive or negative way. For good or bad, families influenced the overall experience of community reintegration.

#### How is Family a Resource?

Reentering the family for our interviewee's was not an easy undertaking. Mark, a 47-year-old man expressed that at times rebuilding bridges with family members post-release took time and at times was impossible: "You know, like with a lot of people with your parents and family and stuff, when you get convicted, get in trouble and stuff, sometimes takes a while to rebuild a bridge. Sometimes maybe you never do." Keeping this complex prison-to-family transition in mind, familial experiences inevitably shaped the understandings of reentry for our interviewees in various ways: 1) by providing material support (53 percent) and emotional maintenance (51 percent); 2) by influencing guilt related to reintegrative shame (25 percent); 3) by adding to perceptions stigmatizing

shame (35 percent); and 4) through facilitation of continued drug use or criminal activity (25 percent). These themes were by no means mutually exclusive and most often overlapped within the same families. Overall, findings suggest that reentry experiences were mitigated by familial relationships post-release and affected reentry motivation.

**Material and Emotional Support: “They’re the Only People I Can Really Rely On.”**

As is widely written regarding material familial support (Travis 2005; Nelson, Deess, and Allen 2011), more than half of the individuals in our sample, relied on family for resources including money, rides, housing, childcare and educational needs. Many of our interviewees lived with multiple family members until they were able to find their own housing, while others remained with family for a prolonged period of time. Darla, a 28 year-old woman explains how her extended family helped her with housing and childcare, making school a possibility for her. Her aunt and uncle provided a stable place for her to stay and even helped take care of her children when she was not around:

Interviewer: In what ways are they [aunt and uncle] supportive?

Darla: Well, I stay in their house. That’s the biggest support of way. You know, there’s some days I don’t come home right away and they make sure they watch my kids because, my kids come home every weekend. When I’m in school, they make sure they eat you know... if anything happens-- if I run out of gas money, they make sure to get it to me. They motivate me to keep me in school you know?

Darla was in the process of looking for a job while attending cosmetology school. She remained hopeful about finding housing to regain custody of two of her children (eight and nine years of age). Her family helped her by providing interim housing and by looking after her kids when they visited her on the weekends. This support not only aided her financially, but it also motivated her to stay in school.

Some interviewee's mentioned that contact during incarceration was important, but even more so after release. Much of the material assistance ex-offender received from family included monetary support and assistance with transportation. The following quote explains how for Jose, familial support facilitated his reentry experiences:

They helped me out when I was in there [prison]. They help me with money so I can get you know stuff for hygiene and things so I can communicate. But, they've been more helpful since I've been out. Without them, I wouldn't be-- I dunno, I wouldn't be able to do a lot-- like they had a credit card for me. They help me get new clothes and stuff for the house when I first got my own place. When I first got out with my clothes. They always help me with my transportation. They help me use the car, so I can go look for jobs. They help me if I need bus money and they can't help me with the car and I need bus money. They-- if I need anything... It costs \$37 to get my work history for the last ten years from the social security office. They helped me with that. They're the only people I can really rely on.

Jose described family members as the only ones he can "rely on" and found their material support to be both helpful and reliable. He admitted family made reentry easier by providing him with rides and miscellaneous job search expenses. Jose's family eased his transition in material ways, but this support has also arguably been a stimulus for him, as he is aware that his family is financially invested in his recovery. Soon after sharing how his family supported him financially, Jose mentioned that his aunts and uncles do not help him because: "they got their kids coming in and out of jail." It was not uncommon for our respondents to tell stories about how their extended families were simultaneously dealing with reentry.

Conversely, interviewees' families were not always unsparing in giving their support. Sharon, a 24 year-old woman, shared that her father just recently began helping her with the cost of books after years of having little or no contact:

My dad has just-- I didn't have the money to-- because I haven't been working, to buy my Spanish book for class, which was \$176. My dad who you know, was never really very supportive and said "Well we'll get it taken care of" and called the bookstore at UWM and gave them [his] credit card number and I went and picked up my book that morning. I had a long discussion with them [parents] the other day. He [dad] told me as long as you're moving in the right direction, I'm gonna be there to help you any way I can. But, if you start turning backwards you know, I'm not gonna be a part of that--and I have a lot of support from church. So I mean, I have-- like my mom's not really involved in my life but I have like a mother figure at church who has down to the days that I'm in the ER like has been there ... my church family has definitely been a big part of keeping me going.

Assistance from family members was often conditional and at risk of being halted if participants were rearrested. Sharon explained that her father only just started helping her after she enrolled in school and had her own apartment, which she believes signaled to him that she did not plan to return to prison for the third time. However, she mentioned a mother figure from Church who helped her through medical emergencies when her parents were unreachable and how this relationship positively contributed to her experience with reentry. Fictive and actual kin extended sincere showings of concern through material resources but also through sings of emotional backing. When family helped them materially, our interviewees experienced feelings of self-worth and became more motivated.

Similar to material support, over half of our respondents gave credit to family members for supporting them in ways money and material resources could not. Yoyo, a 45-year old woman explained how having her mother and daughters close brought her through recovery:

Oh they're real supportive, real supportive of me. Since I've been out, every single day I talk to my mom. She brought me through you know? With God's help and with the help of my family, that's what brought me through, because I'm

telling you, if I didn't have them, and my daughters coming back up here living with me and-- they lived with me for a while. Then they got their own place, they got jobs. My kids came up here without nothing. Just their clothes and stuff.

Yoyo's daughters left their state of residence and went to live with her to help her through difficult times. She recognized their sacrifice and attributed her own progress with their presence: "Without my family support and my daughters being here, I think I would have probably backslid, because, you know, like, I'm like, I gotta do this for my grandson. When my grandson was born, I'm like, I can't go. I can't, I gotta raise him. I barely raised my kids." For some of our interviewees, grandchildren provided a second chance to fill a parental roll in a child's life. Children and grandchildren were in some ways motivators enrooting fortalice during reintegration.

Emotional support, similar to material support was not always unreserved, as Sally, a 47-year-old woman explains: "My mom's always been there for me. She's always been an advocator. Sometimes she had to use tough love and put me out and kind of like push me to the side and let me do what I needed to do for myself. And that's how she's been supportive." Sally said that her mother's much needed sternness and susceptibility to "push her to the side" helped her to realize that her behavior was self-destructive and pressed her to seek needed assistance.

Children, like parents were pivotal in motivating our respondents throughout their reentry journeys. John, a 49 year-old man, highlighted how his children played a substantial role in his recovery through mutual exchanges of care and affection:

And really the biggest support I have -- well, knowing that my kids are okay and that, you know, they talk to me and they still love me, you know, and that I love them very much and they know that it's a struggle and that I'm doing what I can to

-- to help and provide and, you know, be there for them. They understand my restrictions and what -- the whole game that has to be played and that aspect of it.

John's reentry was aggravated in part because he is a convicted sex offender. He was not allowed to talk or see his children without a "chaperone," as he called it. But, even though John only saw his children sparingly, knowing that they "still loved" him when many have ostracized him provided him comfort.

During his interview, John talked about the many housing restrictions he faced and how difficult it had been since "no one wants to rent to a sex-offender." But, he remained optimistic as he explained his future aspirations: "I'm just hoping at one point in time that that restriction can be lifted, where I can just be with my kids and try to be the father, you know, that they missed for the last three years." As MaryAnn Farkas and Gale Miller (2007) note, the families of sex offenders "must navigate the legal constraints and the conditions imposed on their relatives, as well as the public stigmatization and judgment of extended family, neighbors, coworkers, and others." Ex-offenders often share the stigma of their offense with their children and close family members. However, our interviewees expressed the desire to make up for lost times as an integral part of their reintegrative shaming process during reentry.

### **Reintegrative Shame: "And That's What Woke Me Up."**

Interviews pointed to both intended and unintended consequences of familial involvement including how reintegrative shame played a role in recovery (Braithwaite 1989). John Braithwaite (1989) argues that behaviors deemed socially deviant can be resolved with societal responses including "reintegrative shame" or aggravated by

“disintegrative stigmatization.” Although Braithwaite’s theory focuses mainly on the societal responses after the violation of a social norm but prior to formal sanctions including incarceration, it is fitting to apply this theory to the reintegration processes of released prisoners. Braithwaite (1989) makes this comparison even more relevant to reintegration because he highlights that “shame is more deterring when administered by persons who continue to be of importance to us” (p. 55) including family, and suggests that when “sanctions [are] imposed by relatives, friends or a personally relevant collectivity [they] have more effect[s] on criminal behavior[s] than sanctions imposed by a remote legal authority” (p. 69). Further, reintegrative shame involves the disapproval of behaviors, but offers forgiveness and respect to ex-offenders instead of labeling and stigmatizing them. Further, it encourages conversations about how a person’s criminal act affected loved ones in hopes for a second chance (Ahmed, Harris, Braithwaite and Braithwaite 2001).

The shame described in this section is one that includes forgiveness and reintegration instead of the isolation and stigmatization an ex-offender. One fourth of our respondents spoke about reintegrating into their family through a process of forgiveness and heartfelt disapproval of past behaviors. Alice, a 22-year-old woman talked about how anger was the first response from her family, but then they showed their forgiveness by supporting her:

It was initially like a lot of anger and there was like a lot of, you know, upsetness, where like I would run away from my family kind of stuff, you know, didn't want to deal with it. So there was a lot of upset. But it's like when [they] realize, well, this is [my] family. You kind of have to try to just help the person instead of be upset. So went from anger to being supportive, you know. It was a slow thing at



first, but it's like initially it's the hardest, but they kind of just stay there. They'll get mad, but then they'll support you. But I can't imagine it always working out that way.

Alice notes that the transition back to the family after incarceration is not often a smooth one. Families can feel and display anger and dissatisfaction towards a released offender's past behavior. However, in time family can be a supportive deterrent from crime as Alice highlights:

Interviewer: Could you describe things in your life that have moved you away from crime?

Alice: The biggest thing would be my family helping me, you know, to do what I want to do. You know, I'm not just out there all by myself.

Having someone on their side during reentry often helped ex-offenders feel they belonged and encouraged them to do the things they wanted or needed to do for themselves. Family served as a constant reminder of how our interviewees' prior arrests and subsequent incarceration terms affected their loved ones.

Jay a 32-year-old man, told how his children painfully witnessed his prior detainments and how they motivated him to remain on the right track:

They spent all their life with me going back and forth and writing them and stuff like that. So, I know it's greatly affected them in a way that I don't even know what the effects would be, but I know it's affected them. 'Cause I know I've been-- they know I've been a part of doing wrong and one time I got pulled over, my son's and my two daughters was in the car. They start crying like "Noo don't take my daddy" and this and that. 'Cuz they put me in the back seat to question me, it was like... they was crying hysterical. Police was like "Dang your kids is crying bad." They saw me go to jail too many times you know what I'm saying? I was like "Why you all crying?" They was like, "We don't like the police." And It's like why? "They always taking you to jail." I felt real bad like dang. So, that's one of my commitments to just stay-- stay doing right. And I tell myself to have the right mind is more important than anything because I could be successful right now and have the wrong mind and be leading myself back to prison and back to trouble. And that ain't worth it to my kids-- even--

I'm struggling right now. I don't have no job. I'm used to having money in the drug game like that so it's really humbling my pride. But, I'm dealing with it. I've been dealing with it for a while because I know it's the right thing.

Besides highlighting the difficulties ex-offenders face in finding stable employment, Jay recognized that his children have been affected by his arrest and subsequent prison terms. Jay said his children have developed a dislike of the police, a reality that is in agreement with prior research on how parental incarceration affects an offender's children (Travis, McBride and Solomon 2003). Even though Jay's relationship with his children has been disrupted time and time again, he used these realizations to keep the "right mind" derailed from criminal activity. Although Jay perceived he could still "successfully make money" through illicit means, he did not consider the repercussions worth the risk of further affecting his children.

Damian, a 49-year-old man, talked about his experience of "raising his children" from prison and how he later realized the pain it caused them:

I was stressing trying to raise my kids from the penitentiary. My second daughter, she was 14 when I left. I get out the door, she got three kids. And I blame myself because I wasn't there to protect her. You know what I'm saying? Me and my kids sat down and talk about two weeks after I got out and I didn't know they took it harder than me. You know what I'm saying? They told me about the time they was all in the room crying that they miss me. And I thought my kids were just materialistic kids. You know what I'm saying? But they really cared. And I learned. It took my youngest daughter to tell me when I was on my way out the door at Waupun, Daddy, I don't care if you don't never buy us nothing. We just need you out here. And that touched me, you know?

Because his children lacked a father figure while he was incarcerated, Damian blamed himself for not "protecting them." However, his children's selfless requests to have him near deeply resonated with him. Damian said that his children were the most valued

relationships he had in his life:

That's the most- that's the only thing I have [my kids]. That's the only thing I have. You know, like I say, I don't have nothing. Not nothing. You know what I'm saying? This is probably the only thing I bought new since I been out. You know what I'm saying? A couple clothes and something. But I have nothing. I walk around with nothing. But I'm happy. I'm happy to be free. Like my youngest daughter said, I don't care nothing about what you can do and what you have, I just need you out here. And that's what woke me up. During that time I said I was going to change my life, I can't do this no more. But my daughter ... my youngest daughter is the one that really touched me.

Families played a role in transforming ex-offenders lives by instilling reintegrative shame and by extension motivating them to maintain their sobriety and or refrain from criminal activity. Veronica a 49-year-old woman, talked about wanting her children and grandchildren to look up to her:

My kids, my grandkids. I gotta set an example for them. A grandmother in jail? A mother in jail? A mother don't belong in jail. Mothers do not belong in jail unless they actually keep on committing a crime. I'm a mother. I can't keep going to jail. I'm a grandmother. I want my grandkids to look up to me. I might not have a lot of education like some of these other grandparents might have, but I know my life is not in jail. I can't go to jail. That's what keep me out. I can't go to jail.

Veronica acknowledged that she may not have formal education, but she knew she had a positive life to live outside of prison. She desired to set an example for the young ones in her life by refraining from crime. Veronica pointed to the social stigma inherent in criminal activity and incarceration when she said: “mothers don’t belong in jail.” As Enos (2000) has noted, incarceration can certainly lead to the questioning of maternal commitment to her children. Similar to Yoyo, Victoria desired to be a better mother and grandmother by having a presence in her grandchildren’s lives. Both women found forgiveness in watching their grandchildren develop since they were incarcerated while

their own children were growing up.

**Disintegrative Stigmatization: “You Made Your Bed, Oh Well.”**

More than one fourth of our interviewees talked about their family as negatively influencing their recovery through what Braithwaite (1989) calls disintegrative stigmatization. As previously discussed, disintegrative stigmatization pushes people out of society instead of reintegrating them to society, creating a class of outcasts (Braithwaite 1989). This type of stigmatization labels and rejects ex-offenders instead of forgiving and providing them with a second chance.

Tom, 52-year-old man talked about how his family abandoned him after he was charged and imprisoned: “I didn't get any letters from anyone in my family. I got a letter from my sister when I was in MSDF [Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility], but it was a go to hell forever letter, it wasn't a supportive letter, no.” During our conversation Tom spoke about two of his siblings and said they have: “done more to make things worse” since his release from prison. These comments point to the fact that a criminal offense may bring extraneous familial repercussions. The rejection by Tom’s family negatively influenced his self-perceptions and consequently his experience with reentry.

Paul, a 55-year-old man explained how his felony conviction not only affected his image in the eyes of new acquaintances, but also in those of his family:

Interviewer: How has your criminal conviction affected family or friends would you say?

Paul: Oh, in a major way. You meet somebody and they find out that you got arrested and you're a felon and you tend to get dropped like a hot potato. And, it's really negatively impacted the way my family looks at me and views me. And, you know I used to, you know do things like manage all of my mom's money. And as soon as the rest of the family found out that I got arrested, they

changed all the passwords on all the accounts and everything so I couldn't manage it anymore. Cause they were afraid that I'd steal from her. And, so yeah, I had a lot of negative ramifications.

Paul told me that his felony conviction changed the way people viewed him and negatively impacted the way his family "looked" at him. His family no longer trusted him with maintaining his mother's finances and saw him as a potential thief. Paul's awareness of his family's mistrust in him, in many ways can be more stigmatizing than the opinions of strangers because the opinion of family and close acquaintances arguably matters more (Braithwaite 1989).

Gloria, a 47- year-old woman talked about having no contact with her family during incarceration, and how that has affected her relationship with her family since her release.

My family has zero tolerance for people like me... And people tend to think that--in my family that I'm bright and I know better and stuff. So, zero tolerance when it comes to me at all. They didn't accept my collect calls or even accept my calls when they didn't even have to pay for them. They didn't have to pay for the calls and they still didn't accept them. They talk to me now. I see my sister and my mother and stuff now. And talk to them, have dinner and stuff like that. Once I'm out and doing okay, they don't have a problem with that. But, other than that it's like hey you made your bed, oh well. So, yeah so...

Gloria's family did not accept her calls during her prison term, even when they were prepaid. She believed her family only talked to her because she was doing relatively well for herself. Gloria did not feel supported by her family during incarceration, instead she commented on how her actions were unacceptable because she should have "known better." Gloria ate dinners with her family, but said they did not materially or emotionally assist her. She repeated more than once that her family had zero tolerance for

people “like her,” indicating that she was labeled as a criminal not only by society but also by her own family.

**Facilitation: “I Can’t be Around it Because it’s Like a Bad Trigger.”**

Twenty-five percent of our interviewees admitted they deemed it counterproductive to interact with family because of the family’s connection to drugs.

Lynne, a 42 year-old woman exemplified this way of thinking:

You know, and I just don’t. I don’t find it very productive to hang out with my family. I love them to death, I just- and they love me. I know they do. But, they’re not where I’m at. So, I have to stay away from them a lot... They’re, they’re not. They love me but they are not good- they’re not a good support system at all. They are not included in my support system so... That’s really the reason why I’ve lived in transitional living because there is not a-. I’ve lived in so many of them, I can’t live in any anymore.

Lynne explained that her family is not a “good support system” because they were not “where she was” in terms of rehabilitation.” Some of our interviewees highlighted that ex-offenders were not alone in needing treatment, particularly with drug-use. For instance, family members and in particular the spouses of our respondents sometimes also suffered from a drug addiction. Randell said he chose to distance himself from family because of their drug habits:

You gotta let everything go. Sometime, you even gotta let family go. ‘Cause like in my case, most of my family members, everywhere I went, somebody was smoking marijuana, smoking cocaine and drinking. And, I can’t be around it because it’s like a bad trigger for me you know. I’ll be around it and eventually, if I keep going around it and it’s sitting there and as I get-- cause maybe this guy over here just pissed me off and ill be like okay just go on let me hit that you know? So, that’s another thing I watch out for myself.

Randell realized that exposure to drugs was a trigger for him, particularly under stressful situations or conflicts with others. He chose to “let family go” because he saw they

potentially jeopardized his sobriety and were a steady resource to drugs. This final finding is consistent with past research on the negative effects of a family member's drug use, which is a likely cause for drug relapse (Nelson, Dess and Allen 2011; Gideon 2007; Zamble and Quinsey 1997).

### **Discussion, Implications and Future Research**

This thesis provides evidence that family can be a helpful resource for released offenders via emotional and material support, but can also be a trigger for criminal activity including drug use. Additionally, family was found to be a source of reintegrative shame and disintegrative stigmatization, which significantly affected respondent's self-perceptions and overall understandings of reentry. Both types of shame had implications for reentry experiences and either promoted or discouraged our respondents. Family dynamics characterized by reintegrative shame suggested that the family might facilitate the process of reentry, through emotional and material support and can motivate ex-offenders to continue on the "right path." Conversely, family dynamics characterized by disintegrative shame suggested that the family might disrupt the process of reentry and further isolate ex-offenders during reentry.

Nonetheless, the findings in this thesis, on reintegrative and disintegrative shaming in the family, as well as disenfranchised or crime-involved families, suggests a need to conceptualize the family as a complex unit in studies of ex-offender reentry. Families are not uniformly positive or negative influences in reentry, nor can we dichotomize reintegrative and disintegrative shaming between the family and state institutions. In sum, families should be at the forefront of analyses in reentry studies;

reintegration is a familial process that includes a wide range of affected persons including children, parents, spouses and extended kin. Prior scholarship on reintegration has over-emphasized “community reintegration,” failing to define what “community” constitutes and overlooking how family is at the focal point of such research. Successful reentry has been defined in previous work as the absence of criminal activity and or incarceration, the attainment of stable employment, and the positive maintenance of drug abusing behaviors. The definition of successful reentry should include the maintenance of post-release healthy familial relationships. This thesis has gone beyond conceptions of community reintegration in the abstract sense, and encourages a focus on the family as an integral part of ex-offender reentry.

As is evidenced by the data in this study, reentering the family can be a slow and arduous process. One way this transition can be made easier is to include family on pre-release planning and post-release follow up, particularly for those resuming care giving activities (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001). Community programs, including *La Bodega de la Familia* have proven effective in providing support not only for individuals undergoing rehabilitation from drugs, but also for their families. Programs similar to these provide venues where families can resort to services including case management, 24-hour hotline for drug related emergencies, family counseling, and prolonged drug treatment (Sullivan, Mino and Nelson 2002). Family is essential in the rehabilitation processes of released offenders and should be recognized both as an instiller of motivation and support or as another mechanism for further isolation from society.

Further research should take into account gender, race, and social class as these



were not the focus of inquiry or examination. These social constructs are immensely important particularly when considering a population that is often comprised of victims of physical and or emotional abuse, prior discrimination, resource inequalities including access to physical and mental health and poverty. Research should address interconnectedness of these oppressions and their implications for reentry experiences. Since religion and relationships with God gained a substantial echo in the voices of our respondents, it is yet another topic of future research. Overall, scholarship on ex-offender reintegration focusing on the family is one way to attempt to better understand the process of reentry and an important tool for providing adequate rehabilitative services to the hundreds of thousands of individuals exiting prison each year.

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