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**POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL: A BALANCING ACT? LABOR  
MARKET AND NEIGHBORHOOD EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG ADULT  
OFFENDERS REENTERING FROM JAIL**

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-Newark

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Criminal Justice

written under the direction of

Dr. Mercer Sullivan

and approved by

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Newark, New Jersey

May 2015

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Positive and Negative Social Capital: A Balancing Act? Labor Market and Neighborhood

Experiences of Young Adult Offenders Reentering from Jail

By JUSTINE MCDAVID MADOO

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Dr. Mercer Sullivan

Young adult offenders face significant challenges to successful reintegration including stigma, obtaining employment, neighborhood and community influences, family and peer relationships, educational deficits and developmental challenges. While these factors, integral in the reentry process, have been explored in existing literature, less is known about the reentry experiences of young adult offenders experiencing both the transition from jail to the community and from adolescence to adulthood.

Utilizing qualitative methods to obtain thorough narratives of these experiences, this dissertation examines how 18-24 year-old offenders balance the experiences of jail with the reintegration and developmental challenges facing this population upon their release. Specifically, this study explores labor market and neighborhood experiences following the release from jail to better understand how these individuals balance both negative and positive social capital within their communities. In this study, I conducted both pre-release and post-release interviews with 19 young adult male offenders. Participants were initially interviewed within three months of their release and participated in follow-up interviews within four to eight months following their release.

It was my expectation that the jail experience would decrease positive social capital in the labor market and increase negative social capital in participants' neighborhoods. Findings in this dissertation found that while some participants experienced a slight increase in social reputation among criminally active peers, the expectation that incarceration would enhance criminal enterprise was not supported. However, the loss of positive social capital was found within the labor market and some participants reported experiencing a "balancing act" which consisted of maneuvering between both positive and negative social capital opportunities. Findings also show how reentry experiences are often shaped by the developmental processes characteristic of young adult offenders entering into adulthood.

This dissertation addressed the gaps in empirical literature by exploring why incarceration has ambiguous effects on different types of offenders. By closely examining a specific offending population, this study contributes to criminological theory by expanding our knowledge of the heterogeneity of incarceration experiences and the deterrent effects, if any, the jail experience has on young adult offenders.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are several people I would like to acknowledge as playing a pivotal role in the completion of my dissertation. First, I would like to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Mercer Sullivan, Dr. Johnna Christian, Dr. Robert Apel, and Dr. Nikki Jones. This was a great committee to work with over the years. You all made time for me, challenged me, and encouraged me to achieve an incredible goal. Thank you for your insightful feedback from beginning to end. Dr. Sullivan, without your guidance as the chair of my committee, I would not have produced such an insightful study which has left me extremely proud of my finished product. You were one of my first professors at Rutgers and essentially, the most influential. I am beyond grateful to have worked with you over the years.

I would also like to thank the Rutgers School of Criminal Justice. I had an amazing graduate career and would not have achieved my goals without the guidance and support from all faculty and personnel. I especially want to thank Dr. Bil Leipold, Teresa Fontanez, Sandra Wright, and Phyllis Schultze. When I think of my time at Rutgers, all of you come to mind as the most supportive individuals to ever work with. As for my colleagues who became friends over the years, you all served as mentors to me at some point. Thank you Patrice, Michele, Christine, Jenn, and Liz. It has truly been a pleasure. For my Maryland friends who were present before this journey started, and those of you who I met along the way, thank you for sticking it through with me. It has been a long road but I am looking forward to enjoying “life after grad school” with all of you!

A special thanks to Mr. Fred Evans, my high school principal. Thank you for putting me in touch with some key players who ultimately gave me access to collect my

data. You are an amazing mentor and I truly appreciate your support over the years. I am also thankful for the correctional personnel, specifically Warden Green and Ms. Starkey, as well as the formerly incarcerated men whose participation made this study possible.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank my mother, Ina, for seeing success in everything I do. I am forever indebted to you for your endless love and support. Thank you for always encouraging me when the destination seemed so far away. Your own academic and professional achievements inspired me to finish this degree. I know how proud you are of me. Thank you for never losing faith in me. To my father, Hilton, thank you for setting the bar high with your own doctorate degree. I appreciate you always supporting my academic goals and always offering to provide feedback on my work. I know you are proud of me as well. I am no longer a professional student! To my sister, Jessica, thank you for being so supportive over the years. I still go over the cards and gifts you made for me throughout my years in graduate school. Thank you for always keeping me “close to home” by visiting me in New Jersey, spending endless hours on the phone with me, emailing me, and becoming my best friend. To my in-laws, thank you for accepting me and the life of a graduate student into your world. Your support and encouragement have shown me how lucky I am to have you as family.

To my husband, Wesley, thank you for supporting me from day one. You have gone through the ups and downs of this process firsthand with me. I cannot express how grateful I am to have such a wonderful partner who gave up weekends, family events, social events, and practically everything else to see me accomplish my goals. Thank you for always encouraging me, listening to me talk endlessly about this study, and for simply being you. You are the best. I am looking forward to our next journey in life together!

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“And I always feel this with straight people – that whenever they’re being nice to me, pleasant to me, all the time really, underneath they’re only assessing me as a criminal and nothing else. It’s too late for me to be any different now to what I am, but I still feel this keenly, that that’s their only approach, and they’re quite incapable of accepting me as anything else” (Goffman, 1963, p. 14).

### **Problem Statement**

The correctional population in the United States has grown significantly over the past decade. In 2002, over 1.4 million prisoners were incarcerated in a state or federal correctional facility (Petersilia, 2003). By 2010, the prison population in the United States had exceeded 1.6 million individuals (Arditti & Parkman, 2011; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011). Prisoner reentry rapidly became one of the most critical challenges facing criminologists, criminal justice practitioners, and policymakers. While significant attention has been given to prisoner reentry (Pager, 2006; Petersilia, 2003; Western, 2006), there is substantially less research on the reentry experiences of individuals who have been incarcerated in local jails. Similar to the prison population, the jail population experienced significant fluctuations over the years which received relatively less attention from criminologists, practitioners, and policymakers. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2012), the jail population has seen consistent decreases in the inmate population for the third consecutive year, dropping by 1.8% (735,601), by midyear 2011. Despite these decreases, it is estimated that over 12 million individuals still enter and exit local jails each year (White, Saunders, Fisher, & Mellow, 2012). While research has documented the various challenges with prisoner reentry, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of reentry experiences for individuals released from jail and the

mechanisms affecting their recidivism rates. This study addresses these gaps by examining the effects of jail on young adult offenders.

A larger gap exists in the understanding of why incarceration has different effects on different types of offenders. This study assesses why incarceration has such weak and ambiguous effects on recidivism among the young adult offender population. Close examination of a specific offender population experiencing a specific type of incarceration can advance our understanding of this problem by showing how the heterogeneity of incarceration experiences explicates what deterrent effects, if any, the jail experience has on young adult offenders.

Criminological research has recently identified young adult offenders, between the ages of 18-24, as a specific group of offenders (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Arditti & Parkman, 2011; Mears & Travis, 2004a, 2004b; Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005). While no longer considered to be of juvenile status, these offenders typically embody similar needs and risks found among the juvenile population. However, considering these offenders have reached the age of majority where programs and services designed to treat delinquency are no longer accessible, a paradox has emerged as to which resources are most effective in reducing recidivism among the young adult offender population. In addition to their exposure to the criminal justice system, young adult offenders are also transitioning into adulthood at far slower paces than those who have not had contact with the juvenile justice or criminal justice system. Many of the reentry resources available to this population target the adult population, yet young adult offenders may be ill-equipped to locate and enroll in such services due to a host of issues that are unique to their particular age group (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Osgood et al.,

2005; Snyder, 2004). In general, reentry challenges are often experienced by ex-offenders, yet it is relatively unknown to which extent for young adult offenders.

According to Petersilia (2003), the process of reentry “includes all activities and programming conducted to prepare ex-convicts to return safely to the community and to live as law-abiding citizens” (p. 3). The reentry of an ex-offender consists of a multitude of challenges such as securing employment, locating stable housing, returning to disadvantaged communities, and reconnecting with family members and social circles. Overcoming these challenges is critical to the success of ex-offenders’ reintegration into society. Securing employment, one of the most challenging tasks for ex-offenders, often plays a significant role in whether or not an ex-offender will reoffend. “Employment helps ex-prisoners be productive, take care of their families, develop valuable life skills, and strengthen their self-esteem and social connectedness” (Petersilia, 2003, p. 112). However, with recent changes in criminal justice sentencing policies and the stigmatizing effects of a criminal record in the labor market, many ex-offenders encounter substantial difficulties securing steady employment following their release. Research shows that legal barriers, limited employment skills, educational deficits, inadequate community resources, and the mark of a criminal record are prevalent among the ex-offender population and contribute to overly high unemployment rates (Pager, 2003; Petersilia, 2003; Weiman, 2007; Western, 2006; Western, Kling, & Weiman, 2001; Wilson, 1996).

Another significant challenge facing ex-offenders is the stigma they acquire from their experiences in the criminal justice system. The stigma of acquiring a criminal record affects all aspects of their lives upon reentry, particularly in the labor market. According to Western (2006), the stigma of a criminal record takes on a “legal significance” (p. 112)

which automatically bans employment in certain job sectors. Consequently, the stigma associated with incarceration can have various effects in the labor market for ex-offenders (Goffman, 1963; Henry & Jacobs, 2007; Lebel, 2006; Link & Phelan, 2001; Pager, 2003; Panuccio, Christian, Martinez, & Sullivan, 2012). Understanding the effects of stigma is important because overcoming stigma may be an essential factor in the reintegration process (Lebel, 2006). Criminal justice research has explored the effects of a criminal record in the labor market, yet a limited understanding of the relationship between stigma and ex-offenders remains (Hirschfield, 2008; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010; Pager, 2003; Petersilia, 2003; Western, 2006; Western et al., 2001). Given the auspicious possibility that overcoming stigma may be effective in the reintegration process, it is imperative to investigate the relationship between stigma and ex-offenders.

Research shows the stigma of a criminal record greatly reduces employment prospects, particularly for black males who are the most disproportionately incarcerated group of offenders. “The barriers these men face in reaching economic self-sufficiency are compounded by the stigma of minority status and criminal record” (Pager, 2003, p. 939). In addition to other aggravating circumstances, the stigma associated with a criminal record tends to be more detrimental for black males who already face a stigma based on race; labels placed upon this group may be more detrimental considering overall societal perceptions of black males. In Hirschfield’s (2008) work, he found that labels “appear more acute among minority delinquents” possibly due to the fact that “black offenders are more often stereotyped as deviant or dangerous” (p. 579). Although other minority groups may experience forms of discrimination, young black males remain the most challenged minority group in terms of securing stable and meaningful employment

(Anderson, 1999; Western, 2006; Western et al., 2001; Western & Pettit, 2005; Wilson, 1987; Wilson, 1996). The marginalization of black males is particularly relevant to this study as the majority of participants were young black males returning home to the same or similar neighborhoods they resided in prior to incarceration.

After being released from a correctional facility, most young adult offenders return home to the neighborhoods they resided in prior to incarceration (Hipp & Yates, 2011; Hipp, Petersilia, & Turner, 2010; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Patillo, Weiman, & Western, 2004; Petersilia, 2003). These neighborhoods are often plagued with social factors that may have significantly increased their risk of criminality in the first place. Research suggests that the risk of recidivism is often higher in neighborhoods with limited employment opportunities and increased levels of social disorganization (Anderson, 1999; Mears, Wang, & Bales, 2012). In addition to stigma and race, some young adult offenders face challenges in the reintegration process as they return to neighborhoods plagued with extremely poor resources including the lack of sufficient drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, supportive groups, strong family ties, and stable employment prospects (Petersilia, 2003; Western, 2006; Western, Kleykamp, & Rosenfield, 2006; Western et al., 2001; Wilson, 1987; Wilson, 1996). Many of these neighborhoods lack positive social capital which is essential to the success of any individual returning home from incarceration.

Social capital includes “organizations presumed to provide civic goods and services” (Wacquant, 1998, p. 26). Studies have indicated that high levels of social capital, or positive social capital, lead to greater success among the incarcerated population due to the wealth of resources available to community residents (Hipp &

Perrin, 2006; Hipp & Yates, 2009; Wickes, Hipp, Sargeant, & Homel, 2013). Positive social capital provides residents with access to sustainable and legitimate resources and services. However, many of the neighborhoods which ex-offenders return to lack positive social capital. Instead, they often have high levels of negative social capital which greatly affect the success of the individuals who rely on neighborhood resources as their main source of support upon release (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Patillo et al., 2004; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Sampson & Graif, 2009; Sampson & Laub, 1993a; Sampson & Laub, 1993b). Negative social capital refers to access to resources which may include illegitimate means of sustaining themselves. While resources may not necessarily be limited in all of the neighborhoods ex-offenders return to after incarceration, most of these neighborhoods have low levels of positive social capital and high levels of negative social capital.

Although social capital is rarely measured conceptually (Sampson & Garif, 2009), it was critical in this study to identify and assess the two forms of social capital, positive social capital and negative social capital, throughout the data collection and analysis processes. One of the expectations in this study posited that young adult offenders' involvement in the criminal justice system would create conflicting viewpoints on the stigma acquired from a criminal record. The expectation was that while some ex-offenders' incarceration experiences would enhance criminal enterprise and credibility within social circles of criminally active peers (Kreager, 2007), employers would be more likely to stigmatize ex-offenders for the same involvement (Pager, 2003; Western, 2006). Thus, offenders would have to maneuver between the two types of social capital, positive and negative, as they reintegrated into the labor market and local neighborhoods.

This study found that while some participants experienced a slight increase in social reputation among criminally active peers, the expectation that incarceration would enhance criminal enterprise was not supported. Incarceration did, however, have detrimental effects in the legitimate labor market. It is also important to note that some participants reported the experience of a “balancing act” which consisted of maneuvering between positive and negative social capital opportunities. This balancing act is rarely identified in criminal justice research. While the stigmatizing effects of incarceration may have only had a significant impact in the labor market, this study identified other significant factors which affected desistance in criminal activity, as well as explored the different effects incarceration had on different offenders’ reentry experiences.

This study enlarges our understanding of the effects of incarceration on young adult offenders by exploring the effects of stigma, the roles of positive and negative social capital, the effects of life circumstances on employment options, and the transition into adulthood during the period of reentry. While studies have explored the impact of a criminal record for ex-offenders seeking employment in the labor market, research has not yet identified the full range of effects and experiences affecting the population of young adult offenders. This distinct population is likely to experience incarceration in ways far different from juvenile offenders and older, adult offenders. They are also likely to have different experiences in jail than in prison. The following research questions were utilized in this study as the foundation for uncovering the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to understand the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders leaving jail. The following research questions were explored:

1. What is the mark of a criminal record in the “streets” and how do offenders balance this with the mark of a criminal record in the labor market? What roles do positive and negative social capital play in this process, and how do offenders maneuver between the two types of opportunities?
2. How do life circumstances following the release from jail mediate the effects of incarceration as offenders pursue legitimate versus illegitimate forms of employment?
3. How are reentry experiences shaped by the developmental processes that are characteristic of this particular age group?

## **Research Methodology**

In order to understand the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders leaving jail, an ethnographic approach was taken in this study. Qualitative research was essential in determining the unknown effects of incarceration. Statistics alone cannot explain these experiences. Therefore, qualitative research was critical to our understanding of what factors positively affected deterrence, what factors negatively affected deterrence, how life circumstances affected deterrence, and how the transition into adulthood affected deterrence. The goal of this methodological approach was to analyze narratives of young adult offenders’ experiences prior to, during, and following incarceration. Interview data resulted in significant findings which explored the role of

stigma in the labor market and within neighborhoods, the roles of positive and negative social capital, the effects of life circumstances on an ex-offenders' pursuance of employment, and the different types of reentry experiences affected by the transition into adulthood.

An interview instrument was used for the collection of data. Open-ended questions and probing throughout interviews were the primary methods of collecting narrative accounts of young adult offenders' incarceration and reentry experiences. The selection process included a non-probability, purposive sampling strategy which consisted of recruiting young adult males in the Maryland/Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, between the ages of 18-24, who had been convicted and incarcerated in a local jail. The study included two stages in the interviewing process: pre-release interviews (while incarcerated) and post-release interviews (after incarceration). A total of 19 participants completed both pre-release and post-release interviews. In the first stage of interviews, participants were interviewed within three months of their release date. The second stage of interviews occurred within four to eight months following a participant's release date. The purpose of the short time frame for post-release interviews was to capture the early reentry experiences of these individuals as this time is considered critical in our understanding of the risks of recidivism that occur shortly after an offender is released from jail or intermediate confinement.

### **Overview of Study**

This study begins with a review of the literature pertaining to the effects of incarceration. Chapter 2 examines what we know about the concept of deterrence, the effects of stigma in the labor market and neighborhoods, the effects of positive and

negative social capital, and the developmental challenges facing young adult offenders as they reenter society within the theoretical context of labeling, social disorganization, and life-course theories. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology. This chapter discusses the research goals associated with this study, sampling strategies, data collection, and the data analysis techniques utilized in this study. The qualitative approach is further explained in this chapter as the essential method used to achieve the desired research goal of understanding the effects of incarceration. Chapter 4 presents the results found from the three research questions which served as the foundation for this study. Chapter 5 analyzes and interprets these results. This analysis explores the unanticipated results found in this study and provides a thorough interpretation of how incarceration affects different types of offenders. Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, presents an overview of the study and its findings, addresses the limitations of the research, and provides recommendations for policy and future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

With over 2.2 million adults incarcerated in the United States, this population of offenders is the largest in the world. Mostly due to increasingly punitive criminal justice policies, the United States rate of incarceration is 5 to 10 times higher than rates in Western Europe and other nations (National Research Council, 2014). Significantly rapid increases in the penal population have led criminologists to revisit historically ambiguous questions:

- 1) What are the effects of incarceration?
- 2) Does incarceration deter offenders?

While studies have explored the effects of incarceration, estimating the full range of consequences for offenders is challenging (Nagin, Cullen & Jonson, 2009; National Research Council, 2014). Studies have shown that incarceration has significant implications in the labor market, in communities, and within family and social circles (Pager, 2003; Petersilia, 2003; Western, 2006). Most individuals who have experienced incarceration encounter difficulties in the reintegration process. However, while studies identify the challenges facing ex-offenders, there remains a limited understanding of how different types of offenders are affected by different types of incarceration. Sampson & Laub (2003a) argue that incarceration effects vary throughout the life cycle. As offenders increase in age, their risk of criminal offending decreases; therefore, the effects may be vastly different based on the age of the offender and stage in the life course.

This study addresses the gap in criminological literature by examining the effects of incarceration on a widely understudied group of offenders, young adults. Utilizing qualitative methods to capture actual experiences of pre-release expectations and post-

release experiences, this study enlarges our understanding of the effects of incarceration on young adult offenders by analyzing their experiences prior to, during, and after incarceration. Findings from this study show heterogeneity in post-release experiences due to a variety of experiences and circumstances specific to this offending population. The three possible effects of incarceration identified in this study include: deterrence from future criminal offending, little to no effect on criminal offending, and an increase in criminal offending. However, it is often difficult to predict which individuals will be deterred and by what mechanisms (Nagin et al., 2009; Spohn & Holleran, 2002). Working within a theoretical framework, the concepts of specific deterrence, labeling, social capital, disadvantaged communities, and young adult offenders are explored to identify the gaps within the literature. After identifying these gaps, I used qualitative methods to address the unknown effects of incarceration on young adult offenders which are thoroughly explained in the methodology chapter.

The review of literature in this chapter addressed what is currently known about the effects of incarceration. Literature on specific deterrence was reviewed to identify what we know about incarceration and its deterrent effects. Literature on labeling individuals was relevant to this study as stigma and the effects of a criminal record were critical factors explored in our understanding of the effects of incarceration. Literature on social capital was reviewed to explain the conceptual differences between positive and negative social capital. Literature on disadvantaged communities was relevant to the study as most participants' returned from jail to these types of communities. These concepts were all relevant to the experiences found among the targeted population of young adult offenders. Examining the relationship between deterrence, labeling, social

capital, and disadvantaged communities with young adult offenders was critical for identifying gaps in our understanding of how different types of incarceration affect different types of offenders.

### **Specific Deterrence**

Deterrence literature is founded on the principle of prevention. According to early criminological theories, individuals who commit crimes are rational beings who weigh the costs and benefits of their actions. In order to deter these individuals, the punishment for the criminal act should outweigh the benefits of the act (Beccaria, 1986; Bentham, 1823). This would achieve specific deterrence as the punishment would likely prevent future acts of crime by the individual. Additionally, the punishment should be harsh enough to deter potential offenders from criminal behavior, achieving general deterrence. These principles have shaped criminal justice policy for years. However, current research shows that deterrence is not achieved through incarceration alone. In fact, incarceration may have little to no effect on criminal offending (Nagin et al., 2009; Spohn & Holleran, 2002; National Research Council, 2014).

According to a recent National Research Council report, “would-be offenders are deterred more by the risk of being caught than by the severity of the penalty they would face if arrested and convicted” (National Research Council, 2014, p. 4). Therefore, incarceration alone does not deter offenders from future criminal offending. Despite numerous studies reaching similar conclusions, the relationship between incarceration and deterrence yields vastly different effects than criminal justice policy assumes (Cook, 1980; Nagin, 1998, 2013; Doob & Webster, 2003). If our current policies are not achieving the desired deterrent effect, what, then, are the effects of incarceration? Do

different types of incarceration have different effects on different populations? If so, to what can we attribute these varying experiences? How does positive and negative social capital play a role in deterring offenders?

To address some of these unknown areas, this study explored the effects of the jail experience on young adult offenders. While this population is relatively understudied, their incarceration experiences are vital to our understanding of how different types of incarceration affect different types of offenders. Examining the incarceration effects of young adult offenders enhances our understanding of how stigma is acquired in the early stages, how it affects post-release experiences, and what roles positive and negative social capital play in determining the mechanisms leading offenders towards or away from desistance. Individuals involved in the criminal justice system, particularly those who have been incarcerated, will acquire the label of a criminal record and face the effects of this label in almost every facet of life. Therefore, it is valuable to criminological theory to explore criminal labels and the earlier stages of stigma to further our understanding of the effects of incarceration.

## **Labeling**

### *Labeling Theory*

Labeling theory is the foundation to our understanding of the consequences of stigmatizing individuals. Earlier labeling theorists argued that labeling individuals as “criminal” or “deviant” would have unanticipated results. According to Becker (1963), “deviance is not a quality that lies in behavior itself, but in the interaction between the person who commits an act and those who respond to it” (p. 93). Thus, deviant behavior is behavior that is labeled as such. In some cases, the labels placed on an individual may be based on one single criminal act which results in the likelihood of this individual being

regarded as deviant in other respects. Societal responses to deviant behavior may hinder an individual from carrying on the routines of everyday life. Consequently, this may drive individuals to develop illegitimate routines out of necessity.

In Edwin Lemert's theory, he made a distinction between primary and secondary deviance. Primary deviance is the initial act of breaking the law. This occurs for a variety of reasons and is usually carried out by individuals who see themselves and are seen by others as basically conformist. However, it is not until a label is attached to the act, through the criminal justice system that the label becomes a part of that individual's identity. This is known as secondary deviance. Secondary deviance is where the individual may now internalize these labels and take on the label as a key aspect of their identity (Lemert, 1951; 1972). Lemert's theory shows the effects of labeling individuals on future criminal offending and explains how a transformation may occur within one's identity promoting future deviance.

Merton (1968) further explains how labeling individuals promotes deviance through the self-fulfilling prophecy. He explains that "the self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come *true*" (p. 195, emphasis added). Labeling an individual can also progress over time. According to Sampson and Laub (1997), labeling theory may be "the only criminological theory that is truly developmental in nature because of its explicit emphasis on processes over time" (p. 6). Labels may lead to alterations of one's identity and exclusion from opportunities necessary to desist from crime. According to labeling theorists, the way individuals are perceived by others has a direct effect on their behavior after the label has been acquired. Ultimately, labeling individuals

may pull them deeper into the system rather than halt the behavior it is attempting to prevent.

Labeling theory highlighted social responses to crime and deviance. In its theoretical development, labeling theory focused on explaining why criminal behavior continued among those who had acquired a criminal label. However, it failed to provide explanations of initial motivations towards deviance. Origins of deviant behavior were mostly ignored. Critics of labeling theory also argued that labeling theory was not a theory of criminal behavior; the theory was not supported by empirical evidence. Instead, the perspectives outlined in labeling theory were more about voicing provoking messages that were indicative of the social times. Other critics of labeling theory argued that the theory seemed sympathetic to the criminal and deviant, neglecting individual roles in criminal offending. Concepts such a “self” were never fully defined, creating ambiguity in understanding the definitions of key concepts within the theory (Goode, 1975; Gove, 1975; Hagan, 1973; Hirschi, 1975; Scimecca, 1977). While these criticisms present valid concerns regarding the empirical strength of labeling theory, the effects of social reaction is a complex process, and its effects have yet to be fully understood.

This study explored the basic arguments of labeling theory to obtain a greater understanding of how stigma affects young adult offenders. The labeling effect is likely to be different for younger offenders than older offenders. In Hirschfield’s (2008) study, he showed that the labeling effect of an arrest on young adult offenders living in severely disadvantaged inner-city communities were less significant than an arrest on young adult offenders living in non-disadvantaged communities. His study showed that communities where arrests have become a normal and expected ritual carried little stigma and did little

to harm the self-concept of an individual or social relationships. Therefore, while stigma may have greater consequences in certain environments, such as the labor market, it may have vastly different effects in communities where interactions with the criminal justice system are more prevalent. Labeling theory is critical in our understanding of how the stigma of a criminal record may have varying effects on different offenders experiencing different types of incarceration.

### *The Stigma of a Criminal Record*

Stigma has multiple definitions which have been expanded in scope over the past 50 years. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary online, stigma is “a mark of shame or discredit; an identifying mark or characteristic.” This definition has since been expanded by scholars to describe disadvantaged groups in society. These definitions expand on the exclusion of individuals, specifically focusing on the “mark” bestowed upon them. Often, stigma is viewed as a negative perception causing alienation from mainstream groups.

Erving Goffman’s (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* is a literature pioneer in the subject of stigma. In his research, Goffman identifies the various effects of stigmatization on disadvantaged groups. In particular, he identifies three types of stigmatizing conditions: (1) “tribal identities” (e.g. race, sex, religion, or nationality), (2) “blemishes of individual character” (e.g. mental disorders, addictions, unemployment), and (3) “abominations of the body” (e.g. physical disabilities). Goffman (1963) defines stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (p. 3).

Many variations of the definition of stigma have developed since Goffman. Jones et al. (1984) state that:

"Stigmatization is an extreme form of categorical inference, whereby some clue regarding membership, some physical mark, or some bit of observed or reported deviant behavior gives rise to drastic attributional outcomes. Often, we have stressed, these attributions *"engulf" the identity* of the individual; they become the filter through which his or her other characteristics are seen (p. 286, emphasis added).

In their own reviews of stigma and mental illness, Link and Phelan (2001) incorporated the component of discrimination into the Jones and colleagues definition. They identified a feature of stigma that reasoned when people are labeled and linked to undesirable characteristics, "a rationale is constructed for devaluing, rejecting, and excluding them" (p. 371). Thus, these people experience status loss, a source of discrimination, which has profound effects on their life chances. Expanding on further definitions, Stafford & Scott (1986) state that stigma "is a characteristic of persons that is contrary to a norm of a social unit" (p. 80). According to Becker (1963), the designation of 'deviant' or 'criminal' often becomes a 'master status' which tends to control the identification of individuals (p. 33-34). Understanding the effects of stigma among ex-offenders was a key component in meeting the goals of this study.

Ex-offenders often encounter immediate exclusion from society based on their experiences in the criminal justice system. According to Goffman (1963), "...criminals deal with blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty" (p. 4). In addition to the stigma that develops following arrest, individuals who have been convicted and sentenced carry an additional stigma of being incarcerated (Petersilia, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1997; Western, 2006). The "mark of a criminal record" holds significant

consequences for individuals, often affecting their ability to successfully reintegrate into society. This is especially evident in the labor market.

*Stigma, Race and Education in the Labor Market*

One of the most significant challenges facing ex-offenders is the stigma they acquire after incarceration. This stigma affects all aspects of their lives upon reentry, particularly in the labor market (Goffman, 1963; Henry & Jacobs, 2007; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010; Lebel, 2006; Link & Phelan, 2001; Pager, 2003; Panuccio et al., 2012; Visher, Winterfield, & Coggeshall, 2005; Western, 2006). Legal barriers exist in virtually every state. According to Western (2006), the stigma of a criminal record takes on a “legal significance” (p. 112) which automatically bans employment in certain job sectors. For example, ex-offenders are often banned from working in hospitals, government agencies, barber shops, and real estate (Gonnerman, 2004). These barriers create additional limitations to already limited employment opportunities.

In a study examining the effects of a criminal record, Pager (2003) sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Do employers use information about criminal histories to make hiring decisions, and to what extent?
- 2) Does race continue to serve as a major barrier to employment?
- 3) Does the effect of a criminal record differ for black and white applicants?

Pager’s (2003) study found that employers used information about criminal histories to make hiring decisions, race continued to serve as a major barrier to employment, and the effects of a criminal record differed for black and white applicants.

According to Pager (2003), “the barriers these men face in reaching economic self-sufficiency are compounded by the stigma of minority status and criminal record” (p. 939). Her study showed that “even whites *with* criminal records received more favorable treatment than blacks *without* criminal records” (p. 958). In addition to other aggregating circumstances, the stigma associated with a criminal record appeared more detrimental for black males who already experience stigma based on race.

Many ex-offenders are young black males who possess few employable skills and low levels of education. These factors, lack of skills and education, already hinder employment prospects due to the limited amount of lower level jobs available. Racial discrimination compounds the problem. Additionally, “the stigma of incarceration makes ex-inmates unattractive for entry-level or union jobs that may require high levels of trust” (Western et al., 2001, p. 414). Black males are already limited in their employment prospects. A criminal record further diminishes these prospects as it significantly hinders the success of potentially employable individuals (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010).

Although employment rates for black ex-offenders are relatively low, those who do obtain employment often receive lower wages than any other group of ex-offenders. Black males, with limited education and employment skills, are on the low end of the earnings scale compared to white males. Among black males, joblessness is more prevalent than among white males. Joblessness describes individuals who are either incarcerated or who are simply not in the labor market (Western & Pettit, 2005). For black males, with limited employment and educational skills, many find themselves unemployed, rather than working for insufficient wages. According to Western (2006), “the rise in average wages is not due to any real improvement in the economic situation

of wage earners; it is simply an artifact of less employment at the bottom” (p. 97). Low-skilled jobs that offer menial wages often attract individuals with less education, training, and skills. With the removal of manufacturing jobs in inner-cities, the amount of jobs available for black males are limited, often leaving them in positions where wage negotiations are impossible (Western et al., 2006). Additionally, the low educational level of many ex-offenders creates further barriers to securing legitimate employment.

Many young black males who return home from correctional facilities face significant challenges in overcoming educational deficits. Black male offenders are often high-school dropouts, or more significantly, non-college educated men. For non-college educated men born in the late 1960s, “a prison record had become twice as common as military service” (Western, 2006, p. 31). Time spent in a correctional facility became an expectation among many young black males at some point during their adolescence or early adulthood. These men often lack sufficient education which would likely increase their chances of obtaining stable employment and promoting social ties (Western, 2006).

According to Western (2006), a large percentage of black males in jail and prison cannot read or write sufficiently. Even the most low-level jobs require basic skills such as reading and writing. The educational deficits of these offenders offer minimal benefits to potential employers. Additionally, these deficits often went unaddressed throughout earlier childhood years. Sullivan’s (1989) work in Brooklyn showed that school involvement was often interrupted by incarceration, placing many juveniles academically behind their peers. Their lack of skills made school difficult and many of the schools lacked the required structure and encouragement necessary to promote a prosocial learning environment. Most students who dropped out were not aware of the

consequences of educational deficits until they sought legitimate employment, oftentimes later into their adolescent years.

Research shows that minorities often have the highest educational deficits. Minority youth tend to possess limited skills, are more likely to drop out of school, and often come from disadvantaged communities that offer little incentive to excel academically (Glaser & Rice, 1959; Haynie, Weiss, & Piquero, 2008; Sullivan, 1989). Programs have been implemented to address the transition from correctional facility to school, but significant programmatic challenges exist with many of these programs (Stephens & Arnette, 2000). According to Western (2006), “there is evidence that education programs can help ex-prisoners return to society” (p. 174). Educational programs that lead to lower recidivism rates consist of teaching social skills, critical thinking, reasoning skills, moral education, and strategies that help offenders handle their emotions. These programs show a possible decrease in recidivism rates and increase in employment rates for ex-offenders (Vacca, 2004). Several studies show education as a strong factor in reducing recidivism, but argue that education services must meet the needs of the individual rather than address basic educational needs for a general profile of offenders (Baltodano, Platt, & Roberts, 2005; Glaser & Rice, 1959; Stephens & Arnette, 2000; Sullivan, 1989; Vacca, 2004; Wilson, 1987).

Vacca (2004) argues, “prisoners who attend education programs while they are incarcerated are less likely to return to prison following their release” (p. 297). Educational programs are essential to the success of an ex-offender, particularly in the labor market. Ex-offenders with higher educational levels help balance out the fact that they were incarcerated. Ex-offenders may be able to overcome the damaging effects of a

criminal record in the labor market by presenting employable skills and education that show their desire to abide by conventional methods of obtaining employment.

In addition to the stigma acquired from a criminal record, the challenges of racial discrimination, and the significant educational deficits prevalent among young black males, this group of ex-offenders is the most difficult to employ (Pager, 2003; Western, 2006). The reluctance to hire black males appears widespread among employers, although it varies by industry and occupation. Since black males experience higher levels of unemployment, in general, acquiring a criminal record only heightens this disadvantage (Wheelock, 2005; Weiman, 2007). Additionally, returning home to communities with various levels of positive and negative social capital is yet another challenge facing young adult offenders.

### **Social Capital**

Young adult offenders often return to neighborhoods with exceedingly poor resources. A large percentage of these young adult offenders are black males from poor, inner-city neighborhoods. These neighborhoods often lack stable employment prospects, adequate drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, and supportive community groups (Pager, 2003; Western, 2006; Wilson, 1987; Wilson, 1996). Moreover, they lack social capital which is essential to the reentry process success for ex-offenders. Social capital is often a property of communities, but also accounts for the differences between individuals within communities. Social capital is a concept that is often defined by its function. According to Kubrin & Stewart (2006), social capital:

“provides residents with access to others in the community with economic and cultural capital, others who can serve as an indispensable resource

when seeking a job, finding housing, or searching for social services such as child care” (p.172).

The concept of social capital has evolved since Bourdieu’s (1984) initial explanation of cultural capital. He asserted that “the profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible” (p. 249). In other words, social capital must be constructed through investments strategies; they are not naturally given to individuals (Lesser, 2000). According to Coleman (1998), social capital is a variety of different entities that are productive, “making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (p. 598). It is valuable for both economic and noneconomic purposes. Individuals often grow to depend on forms of social capital in its structure of relations between actors and among actors. However, not all forms of social capital provide legitimate resources to individuals. Positive social capital closely relates to earlier definitions of social capital, focusing on providing legitimate access to resources. Negative social capital, on the other hand, provides illegitimate resources to individuals (Clemmer, 1940; Reynolds, 2013; Rose & Clear, 1998; Sykes, 1958; Wacquant, 2001). In the examination of young adult reentry, both forms of social capital are critical in our understanding of the effects of incarceration and the pathways leading towards or away from desistance.

Neighborhoods with high levels of positive social capital provide legitimate support for members of the community. Positive social capital offers legitimate access to housing, employment, and educational resources (Hipp & Perrin, 2006; Hipp & Yates, 2009; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Sampson & Laub, 1993b; Wickes et al., 2013). According to Coleman (1988), positive social capital provides access to resources and forms effective norms which can facilitate selfless actions. It constrains the activities of

criminals and inhibits crime, making it possible for members of the community to feel a general sense of safety. The norms in a community with positive social capital provide rewards for academic achievement and for forgoing self-interest in order to act in the interests of the collectivity. Positive social capital strengthens families and leads individuals to work for the public good. However, when effective norms are weakened or not in place, particularly in disorganized neighborhoods, negative social capital can flourish and adversely affect reentry experiences.

Negative social capital provides access to resources that promote illegitimate means to reintegration. High levels of negative social capital are often found in disorganized neighborhoods, most of which ex-offenders return to after incarceration (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Reynolds, 2013; Petersilia, 2003; Western 2006). These offenders return to their communities in search of resources from families, peers and community members. When communities have high levels of negative social capital, the resources available to ex-offenders become detrimental to their path towards desistance as many consider both legitimate and illegitimate opportunities (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Patillo et al., 2004; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Sampson & Graif, 2009; Sampson & Laub, 1993a; Sampson & Laub, 1993b). These communities often face additional increases in negative social capital when individuals who have obtained criminal connections during incarceration bring those acquired connections back into the neighborhood upon their return. Several studies have identified correctional facilities as schools of crime for some offenders, creating higher levels of negative social capital in already disadvantaged communities (Clemmer, 1940; Reynolds, 2013; Rose & Clear, 1998; Sykes, 1958; Wacquant, 2001).

According to Rose & Clear (1998), “it is commonly accepted that in the absence of effective controls, crime and disorder flourish” (p. 441). Communities with high crime rates often experience high levels of mobility as individuals frequently move back and forth from communities to correctional facilities. High levels of mobility create additional disorder in these communities creating higher levels of negative social capital. Consequently, removing criminals from disadvantaged communities may have a counterproductive effect. These individuals often return to their communities with more advanced criminal knowledge. As a result, negative social capital may increase due to advanced criminal enterprise (Reynolds, 2013; Rose & Clear, 1998; Sykes, 1958; Wacquant, 2001). This is especially challenging for young adult offenders who are entering into adulthood and seeking ways to avoid future involvement in the criminal justice system.

According to Sampson and Laub (2003b), “social capital and turning points are important concepts in understanding processes of change in the adult life course” (p. 302). Their studies show that significant events like getting married and obtaining stable employment can be turning points in the lives of individuals. However, many young adult offenders are not in a position to experience these life events. They have not achieved a level of independence and self-sufficiency to experience the type of turning point needed to deist from criminal offending (Sampson & Laub, 2003b; Arditti & Parkman, 2011). Instead, many are seeking immediate means of making money, both through legitimate and illegitimate forms of employment. At this stage in the life course, legitimate employment may include entry-level positions which require limited skills and experiences, decreasing the likelihood of achieving a turning point due to employment

(Uggen, 2000; Sampson & Laub, 2003b). Offenders who do experience opportunities that could be potential turning points may not necessarily be aware of their occurrence due to their participation in what Howard Becker (1960) calls “side bets”; involvement in various structural and situational circumstances may provide other forms of influences not immediately recognizable to these young men (Sampson & Laub, 2003b).

Young adult offenders often seek ways to avoid future contact with the criminal justice system. According to many studies, the most successful route would be obtaining sufficient employment (Pager, 2003; Ploeger, 1997; Western, 2006; Wilson, 1996). However, employers’ reluctance to hire ex-offenders usually leaves ex-offenders with limited employment prospects. Some young adult offenders may seek alternative forms of employment in order to achieve financial independence. High levels of negative social capital may present young adult offenders with illegitimate opportunities to make money. These opportunities may be presented through family members, peer groups, and other social acquaintances. For example, young adult offenders who have not obtained legitimate employment may consider selling drugs or participating in a robbery which would result in an immediate financial reward. These illegitimate methods of making money place young adult offenders at a higher risk for future involvement in the criminal justice system.

According to Wacquant (1998), the same organizations designed to provide resources to community members “have turned into instruments of surveillance, suspicion, and exclusion rather than vehicles of social integration and trust-building” (p. 26). High levels of negative social capital are much more pronounced in socially disorganized communities. The lack of legitimate opportunities creates a haven for

illegitimate opportunities to flourish, particularly among young adult offenders who face significant challenges in obtaining legitimate employment. These individuals have financial obligations to meet but may find themselves negotiating between legitimate and illegitimate forms of employment in their communities.

## **Disadvantaged Communities**

### *Social Disorganization Theory*

Social disorganization theory is relevant to the study of young adult offenders as many of these offenders return home to severely disadvantaged and disorganized communities. The characteristics of these communities have a significant effect on deterrence, as well as positive and negative social capital. Original theorists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess identified crime as a social problem rooted in urban ecology. Utilizing concepts from the plant ecology discipline, Park (1915) argued that cities grew from the inside out. He observed that cities consisted of individuals divided by race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status and occupation, and physical characteristics of residential structural components. Burgess (1925), continuing the plant analogy, argued that cities grew outward from the center in concentric circles starting with the inner loop, the business district in the center of a city, followed by the zone in transition, and then several zones that make up suburban communities. According to Burgess, people living in the zone in transition experienced the highest levels of social disorganization, including high rates of crime and victimization. While this theory of concentric zones may not apply to all cities, it does show that crime and disorder are not randomly distributed throughout a city. The areas most plagued by high rates of crime and

victimization will also have high levels of poverty. This is further explored in Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay's studies of juvenile delinquency.

Shaw and McKay's (1942) observations of juvenile delinquency and social structure variables within the zone in transition utilized the foundational elements in Park and Burgess' work to identify this zone as socially disorganized. According to Shaw and McKay, the organization, or lack thereof, within neighborhoods has a direct effect on juvenile delinquency. Specifically, three primary factors exist in socially disorganized communities: high rates of residential turnover, a heterogeneous population, and high levels of poverty. Shaw and McKay argued that high rates of residential turnover combined with multiple ethnic groups who mostly remained segregated from each other were associated with high levels of poverty. While they did not make the argument that poverty was the cause of crime, they did argue that poverty is correlated with other factors such as high residential mobility and heterogeneity. When these factors are concentrated in one area, the likelihood of high crime rates increases. These factors remain prevalent today, yet the inheritance of disadvantaged communities from family members must also be considered in terms of fully understanding the characteristics and structure of these communities (Sharkey, 2013).

The primary factors in Shaw and McKay's (1924) social disorganization theory, high rates of residential turnover, a heterogeneous population, and high levels of poverty, show that crime is symptom of inadequate social networks. Socially disorganized communities lack collective efficacy, a concept describing the social cohesion among community members (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). When collective efficacy is lacking, community members are less likely to know or trust one another which creates

a lack of supervision of people and property. They are also less likely to intervene in community matters which make the community more susceptible to crime and victimization (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Taylor, 2001). Young adult offenders returning home from jail often face this lack of collective efficacy combined with high rates of social disorganization within their communities.

### *Neighborhood Characteristics*

Most of the neighborhoods young adult offenders return to are plagued with crime, joblessness, and limited resources (Anderson, 1999; Mears et al., 2012; Pager, 2003; Western, 2006; Wilson, 1987; Wilson, 1996). According to Carr, Napolitano, and Keating (2007), socially isolated, disadvantaged neighborhoods are the typical setting awaiting a young offender upon release. In a study conducted by Kubrin & Stewart (2006), they emphasized the importance of neighborhood context in relation to recidivism. They argued that studies looked mostly at individual characteristics while ignoring the effects of neighborhood structures. Kubrin & Stewart identified the neighborhoods young adult offenders returned to as “hot spots” for crime. In these neighborhoods, poverty was a predominant factor which often increased while offenders were away for longer periods of time. These neighborhoods had limited resources, low levels of positive social capital, high levels of negative social capital, weak collective efficacy, and limited employment prospects (Hipp & Yates, 2009; Hipp et al., 2010; Patillo et al., 2004; Petersilia, 2003).

Kubrin and Stewart (2006) also focused their work on understanding disparities associated with young black offenders. According to their studies, young black males

returned to jail and prison at higher rates than white males, usually within one year of release. While black youth self-report higher levels of criminal involvement than white youth (Tonry & Melewski, 2008), differential effects in the criminal justice system have significant implications on recidivism rates. According to Laub (2014), the criminal justice response is linked to neighborhoods. Judicial decisions, sentencing policies, and political responses have exacerbated the representation of blacks in the criminal justice system and have had a large impact on disadvantaged communities (Sampson & Lauritsen, 1997; Tonry, 1995; Tonry & Melewski, 2008; National Research Council, 2014). The National Research Council (2014) also argue that concentrated disadvantages in metropolitan areas affect incarceration rates for some demographic groups more than others. Specifically, minority groups living in disadvantaged metropolitan areas are likely to have higher rates of incarceration than whites living in similar environments. While disadvantaged metropolitan areas have poor employment prospects and limited resources, policing in these communities may target minorities more than whites, creating larger disparities in incarceration rates. These disparities are especially prevalent with drug offenders.

Drug offenders, disproportionately young black males, encounter high rates of incarceration. Both sentencing policies and differential policing may be the cause of these increased rates, playing a strong role in determining who will be arrested and incarcerated (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; National Research Council, 2014). In addition to high rates of incarceration, these offenders face significant challenges once they leave prison or jail. Many of these offenders face addiction problems which were likely not addressed during incarceration. For those who did receive treatment while incarcerated, the likelihood of

continued treatment once they return home to disadvantaged communities is low. Due to a lack of sufficient resources, the unavailability of substance abuse services may affect desistance in criminal offending. Some ex-offenders may return to using drugs due to addictive factors while others return to selling drugs as a way of economic opportunity (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Western, 2006). Limited employment prospects further increase the likelihood of drug offending and increased recidivism rates among black drug offenders.

The lack of adequate employment opportunities in inner-cities can be attributed to decreased manufacturing jobs in urban areas and increased economic development in suburban areas. In the early 1970s, manufacturing jobs declined significantly in major U.S. cities. Prior to this decline, blue collar employment was prevalent among individuals residing in these cities. This economic shift resulted in high rates of unemployment in poor urban neighborhoods. Black males suffered the highest rates of unemployment which was further linked to deteriorating school systems. Young economically disadvantaged black males turned to criminal opportunities, particularly the drug trade as a form of economic stability. Consequently, drug offenders began to fill the prisons at higher rates than in the past. Urban deindustrialization and mass incarceration altered the structures of metropolitan areas by producing high rates of economic instability, limited resources for community members, and an influx of ex-offenders returning home from incarceration (Western, 2006; Wilson, 1987; 1996).

The neighborhoods ex-offenders return to after incarceration play a strong role in desistance from crime. Ex-offenders rely heavily on social capital, the resources in their neighborhoods, to help them reintegrate. When high levels of positive social capital are

present, support promoting legitimate opportunities and desistance in criminal offending occurs. However, when high levels of negative social capital are present, the support provided to ex-offenders promotes illegitimate opportunities leading to an increased risk of persistence in criminal offending (Sampson & Laub, 1993b). Although the reentry success of ex-offenders depends heavily on individual factors, the effects of positive and negative social capital within neighborhoods also play a strong role in ex-offenders' pathways towards or away from desistance in criminal offending (Kubrin and Stewart, 2006; Patillo et al., 2004). In addition to neighborhood effects, the reentry experiences of the young adult population are further understood through the life-course explanation of the developmental changes occurring during entry into adulthood.

### **Young Adult Offenders**

#### *Life-Course Theory*

“The life-course perspective is particularly relevant to the study of incarceration” (Huebner, 2005, p. 283). According to this theory, adolescents arrive at adult status by following a sequence of ordered stages. Typically, an individual moves from “school to work, then to marriage, to establishing a home and becoming a parent.” By completing these stages in order, stable employment, marriage and other positive life outcomes are promoted. However, incarceration significantly alters these stages of one’s life cycle, reducing opportunities for a successful transition into adulthood (Western, 2006, p. 20). For many young adult offenders, the experience of confinement alone alters their life course. However, developmental challenges, along with limited employment prospects, educational deficits, weakened family bonds, and peer influences place them at higher risk for repeated contact with the criminal justice system.

The developmental perspective identifies pathways of offenders and transitions made throughout the life course, as well as how individual ties to society can impact how one develops (Sampson & Laub, 1993a). For example, Steinberg, Chung, & Little (2004) argue that appropriate developmental stages are a result of reciprocal interactions between individuals and their social environments. They focus on the transition from adolescence to adulthood by identifying a concept called “psychosocial maturity” (p. 24). Psychosocial maturity requires development across three domains: mastery and competence, interpersonal relationships and social functioning, and self-definition and self-governance. If an individual has not achieved these skills by an appropriate age, 16 – 24 years old, the likelihood of a successful transition into adulthood decreases, regardless of involvement in the criminal justice system.

Understanding the developmental processes that individuals entering adulthood experience is especially important to the study of young adult reentry. What happens during this transition into adulthood has a significant impact on young adults’ future outcomes. For example, an 18-year-old individual graduating from high school may be considering attending college or seeking full-time employment. These life events may result in an increased likelihood of meeting conventional life course expectations. However, another 18-year-old individual, a high school dropout may be nearing release from incarceration. This individual’s life events may result in difficulties obtaining financial security and an increased likelihood of future involvement in the criminal justice system. While both individuals are at an age where society would consider them independent adults, interruptions in the life course can have vastly different effects on the transition into adulthood. Some young adults are given the tools to transition successfully

into adulthood while others find themselves incapable of reaching a level of self-sufficiency simply because they have reached a certain age.

### *Entering Adulthood*

In the edited volume, *On Your Own Without a Net*, seven populations of individuals transitioning into adulthood are examined due to the special challenges they face during this transition. Osgood et al., (2005) identify the following populations:

- 1) Youth in the mental health system
- 2) Youth in the foster care system
- 3) Youth in the juvenile justice system
- 4) Youth reentering the community from the criminal justice system
- 5) Youth in special education
- 6) Youth with physical disabilities and chronic illness
- 7) Runaway and homeless youth

According to Osgood et al. (2005), the maturation process is affected by significant challenges facing any of the seven populations. Examining psychological capacities that enable young people to successfully transition into adulthood, they identify a component, “psychosocial capital” that implies that young people need to be given the tools to “*become* healthy and productive adults” (p. 75, emphasis added). If young adults are given the resources to create and take advantage of positive life experiences, adult outcomes will also improve. However, when young adults’ lives are interrupted by challenges, for example confinement in a correctional facility, their

transition into adulthood will also be interrupted causing delays in their developmental progress in life.

Altschuler & Brash (2004) point to the importance of identifying developmental levels of young offenders in the juvenile justice system as these offenders are often lagging behind developmentally compared to non-delinquent youth. They identify sets of challenges that link both the chronological age and corresponding developmental stage of juveniles.

“As a result, what signifies ‘normal’ developmental mastery for someone in middle adolescence, for example, may not be applicable to a juvenile offender within this age range. If a 17-year-old juvenile offender possesses the values, psychosocial maturity, and self-control of a typical 14-year-old nondelinquent, he or she will undoubtedly face greater challenges returning to school, finding employment, or building positive relationships, among other difficulties” (Altschuler & Brash, 2004, p. 76).

Altschuler & Brash (2004) argue that disconnect from chronological age and developmental stages create significant challenges for young offenders. Young adult offenders are at least 18-years-old, yet many of these offenders are developmentally comparable with juvenile offenders. The implications for not distinguishing between chronological age and developmental stages create significant challenges to understanding the effects of incarceration for this population of offenders. While research shows crime rates decrease as an offender’s age increases, the incarceration experience alters the life course of young adult offenders in ways research has yet to thoroughly explain (Moffitt, 1993; Moffitt, 1994; Sampson & Laub, 2003a). One unknown area which has gained significant attention from criminologists is the young adult reentry experience.

### *Young Adult Reentry*

The experience of young adult reentry is relatively different from the adult reentry experience. Reaching the age of adulthood does not adequately prepare an individual for independence. Many young offenders involved in the juvenile justice or criminal justice system lag behind developmentally, which is often overlooked in typical reentry programs. Mears & Travis (2004a) argue that the difference between juvenile reentry and adult reentry is the psychological development associated with the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

“This premise in turn led to the recognition that the boundary typically drawn between juvenile and criminal justice systems obscures the fact that individuals do not, from a developmental perspective, suddenly become adults simply because they reach a certain age or are processed in the criminal justice system” (Mears & Travis, 2004a, p. 3).

Many young offenders “lag behind their age cohort in employment status, socioeconomic attainment, marriage formation, the establishment of an independent residence, and other markers of adulthood” (Arditti & Parkman, 2011, p. 207). These challenges are intensified by the incarceration experience and create additional delays in the life course process. Young offenders may become involved in the juvenile and/or criminal justice system at various stages in the life course, resulting in different types of reentry experiences for different types of offenders. These reentry experiences are affected by the age of the offender, state laws, and mechanisms used to incarcerate youth in the system. Since many young offenders are at different milestones in their developmental stages, compared to adults, they will likely experience variations in educational levels, mental health issues, substance abuse exposure, family support levels, employment skills, and independent living experiences. With regards to the concept of

time, their experiences will most likely differ from adults as any form of incarceration “may be experienced as an eternity for some youth” (Mears & Travis, 2004a, p. 5).

Young adult offenders face significant challenges in their developmental stages. According to Sullivan (2004),

“Youth have different developmental needs and capacities than adults and occupy different roles and ecological niches in the community. The specific challenges of reentry for youth are shaped by these developments and social factors” (p. 56).

The differences between young offenders and adults are not simply biological or social. It is a combination of these factors, along with the limited capability of being developmentally prepared for adulthood. For many young offenders, they return to communities with limited resources and often fare worse than before incarceration. Sullivan (2004) argues that “by their early 20s, substantial proportions of males in inner-city areas have some experience of incarceration” (p. 57). The confinement of juveniles disrupts families, communities, and the normal trajectories in life. “Whereas adults confront similar postrelease problems, reentering youth may have additional problems due to little experience with living independently” (p. 67).

Arditti and Parkman’s (2011) phenomenological analysis on nine formerly incarcerated men between the age of 18 and 24 showed that the reentry process was a developmental “paradox” for this group of offenders. Several contradictions were outlined in their findings, including contradictions about employment, maturity, and dependence on family members. A key finding in their work showed the disconnect between the importance of securing legitimate employment to achieve independence and the limited ability to do so based on criminal histories. They identified several

components of establishing independence including: self-sufficiency, prosocial interpersonal relationships, self-definition, and self-governance. They acknowledged that this process is difficult for even the most advantaged youth. Young adults who spent this developmentally critical period incarcerated, compared to non-incarcerated young adults, encountered significant challenges gaining proficiency in these tasks, ultimately delaying maturation stages and increasing the risks of recidivism. This problem indicates life-course theories are particularly relevant for understanding young adult reentry as the timing in which an event occurs has significant meaning for the impact of that event on the subsequent life course (Elder, 1985; Sampson & Laub, 2003a).

In May of 2003, the Urban Institute convened a special meeting of the Reentry Roundtable. Five papers were commissioned for the meeting, each focusing on a different aspect of juvenile and young adult reentry. The results from the papers showed that young offenders have unique reentry pathways. For some youth, they will enter into and then leave the juvenile justice system. For other young offenders, they will enter the adult criminal justice system and may either leave as juveniles or as young adults. Mears & Travis (2004a) identified at least seven distinct youth reentry populations. The variations of these populations show that different types of incarceration for different types of offenders will result in different types of reentry experiences. While the transition into adulthood is often affected by maturation processes and life course interruptions, families and peers play a significant role in this transition, as well as in overall reentry experiences for young adult offenders.

### *Families and Peers*

Families are a critical component in the entry into adulthood, as well as the young adult reentry process. Studies show that both positive and negative family involvement is directly related to juvenile delinquency. While young adult offenders are 18-years-old or older, much of their delinquency began in their juvenile years. Family relationships are a critical aspect in understanding persistent deviant and criminal behavior (Sampson & Laub, 1993a). In our attempt to understand the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders, family context must be considered a significant variable in the life course pathway.

As young adult offenders transition from jail to the community, they are exposed to various levels of positive and negative social capital, particularly in the family context. High levels of positive social capital include strong social bonds that promote supportive networks for young adult offenders. High levels of negative social capital include weak social bonds, family turmoil, and family criminality. When young adult offenders return home to family structures with high levels of negative social capital, their risk of recidivism increases. Young offenders who come from hostile homes, have little supervision, and are exposed to drugs and violence in the home are likely to drag behind developmentally (Guterman & Lee, 2005; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; McCord, 1983; Sampson & Laub, 1993a; Simons, Simons, Chen, Brody, & Lin, 2007). The presence of high levels of negative social capital and developmental challenges affects the likelihood of successfully reintegrating into society and desisting from criminal activity.

The expectations family members have of its members also play a strong role in the reentry process. Anderson's (1999) ethnographic work in Philadelphia explored the lives of young people in inner-cities by examining how the "code of the streets," or the level of respect an individual had attained, affected delinquency. He identified two types of families that young offenders belonged to: decent families and street families. Decent families were families who adhered to mainstream goals but could "code switch" to mirror street families' values as a means of survival. Street families lived by a "code" which rejected mainstream goals and promoted harsher methods of achieving goals, including using violence as a standard method of problem solving. Based on the high levels of disorganization and negative social capital within these communities, Anderson was able to show how different types of family expectations directly affected youth criminal offending.

Exploring the role of family structure in the reentry process is critical to our understanding of the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders. In a study looking at the effects of child abuse and neglect, McCord (1983) showed that higher rates of delinquency were found in juveniles who had experienced neglect, abuse, and/or rejection. Parenting practices are instrumental in the development of an individual. According to Sampson & Laub (1993a), harsh parenting, low supervision, rejection, and weak attachments are significant risk factors. Parental deviance and criminality are also high risk factors because they disrupt the family process of social control and increases delinquency in youth (Nurse, 2002). In Simons et al. (2007) work, they linked four psychological characteristics that predict conduct problems. These characteristics include: low self-control, hostile view of relationships, anger/frustration, and acceptance

of deviant norms. Parenting practices during early childhood are critical as they affect the presence or absence of these psychological characteristics. Given that most of the study participants in this study exhibited similar characteristics to the ones outlined in Simons et al. (2007) work, the role of family is especially important in our understanding of how positive and negative social capital within the family context shape pathways towards or away from desistance.

The absence of fathers in family structures is another important aspect of family life to consider in the context of young adult reentry. This absence is an example of negative social capital as it is seen as a loss of resources for many young adults. In Wilson's (1987; 1996) study, he identified the absence of fathers as being a heavy burden on families. Mothers were often left to provide financially, as well as emotionally for their children with limited resources and assistance. Joblessness and incarceration were prevalent within these families and led to decreased marriage rates, especially among black families. Studies looking at fragile families show how incarceration pulls fathers away from their kids. On one hand, incarceration can be a turning point for some men. Confinement can often serve as a "wake-up call" for some men who realize the effects of their actions on their families. Some use the experiences of incarceration as a way to change the course of their lives (Sampson & Laub, 1993a). On the other hand, some men completely disengage from their families as various factors such as education, employment, the relationship with the mother, and the distance of the correctional facility, make contact and communication more difficult (Patillo et al., 2004; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). In addition to families, peer groups play a strong role in shaping pathways towards or away from desistance for young adult offenders.

Peers are one of the most, if not the most influential risk factor for young offenders (Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion, & McCord, 2005; Kreager, 2007; Mears & Travis, 2004a; 2004b; Ploeger, 1997; Rios, 2009; Sampson & Laub, 1993a; 1993b; Sampson & Laub, 1997). During the transitional shift from adolescence to adulthood, peers play a strong role in the behavior of one another. Anderson's (1999) work explored the survival strategies of youths living in predominately disadvantaged communities. He argued that peers were a lot more influential during adolescence than anyone or anything else in the lives of a young offender. While driven by the "code of the street," young offenders often rejected mainstream norms in an attempt to attain high levels of respect among their peer groups. Contrary to the negative perceptions received in the labor market, some young offenders achieved a higher social status among their peers for having a criminal record. According to Anderson, peers may see incarceration as a sign of "masculinity," strength, and power which further encourages criminal behavior.

Rios (2009) also identifies the challenges of gender expectations. Using the term "hypermasculinity," Rios explains how young men of color in disadvantaged communities typically embrace gendered practices that are harmful to themselves and others around them. Hypermasculinity is the "exaggerated exhibition of physical strength and personal aggression" which can be produced through policing, incarceration, and probation (p. 151). Crime, thus, becomes an avenue where young men, particularly black and Hispanic men, can develop and demonstrate their masculinity (Messerschmidt, 1993). Coupled with peer perceptions and expectations, this form of masculinity can lead young offenders towards pathways promoting persistence in crime.

In addition to gender expectations, another risk for young offenders is the removal from society. Gifford-Smith et al., (2005) examined the relationships of peers and the decision to remove a young offender from the community. They found that the common solution to dealing with young offenders was to place them together in some form of confinement, ultimately removing them from conforming youth.

“Such practices make meeting the needs of deviant youth more financially and logistically feasible and serve the potential function of protecting non-delinquent youth from harm or negative influence. However, the processes of deviant peer influence might well operate in educational, treatment, correctional, and community-program settings in a manner similar to those in natural settings. One potential inadvertent consequence of bringing adolescents with problem behavior together is that such strategies may exacerbate rather than diminish problem behavior” (Gifford-Smith et al., 2005, p. 259)

Separating youths may actually have a counterproductive effect as it places the most influential and easily influenced individuals together (Gifford-Smith et al., 2005). This can expose young offenders to wider criminal opportunities, particularly to those who are also in the process of entering adulthood. This vulnerable stage of entering into adulthood is further exacerbated by the need for acceptance among peer groups. Exploring the developmental and social challenges facing young adult offenders is critical to enlarging our understanding of how this population of offenders experiences incarceration.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the literature examining the relationship between deterrence, labeling, social capital, and disadvantaged communities among young adult offenders is reviewed to provide a theoretical framework for our current understanding of youth

offending and pathways leading towards or away from desistance. The literature shows us that there are significant empirical gaps in understanding the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders. While we know that incarceration alone does not prevent reoffending, the combination of factors such as the stigma acquired from a criminal record and the levels of positive and negative social capital within communities, families, and peer groups do show that different types of incarceration may well have different effects on different types of offenders. The following chapter will explain the research methods utilized in this study to achieve the desired research goal of enlarging our understanding of the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction of Research Problem

The reentry experiences of young adult offenders are critical to our understanding of the effects of incarceration. While studies have attempted to analyze incarceration effects, there remains a poor understanding of the weak, ambiguous research findings on the deterrent effects of incarceration and the unexplored balancing act between making use of both positive and negative social capital. This goal of this study was to understand *how* incarceration affected individuals as they reentered society and transitioned into adulthood. In order to adequately capture these experiences, qualitative methods were used to analyze not only the presence of significant factors, but rather the conjuncture of these factors. According to Ragin (1987), exploring how factors fit together creates a more thorough understanding of experiences than quantitative research can show. Utilizing conjunctural analysis methods enlarges the understanding of experiences, particularly the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders as they balance between positive and negative social capital. Therefore, qualitative methods reduce ambiguity in research findings and show how different factors affect different types of offenders experiencing different types of incarceration.

Chapter 1 introduced the concept of reentry as a process all convicted offenders experience once they are released from incarceration. Given the large number of ex-offenders returning home each year after incarceration, exploring reentry experiences is a key element in identifying and understanding the effects of incarceration for different types of offenders. Chapter 1 also outlined the various challenges facing ex-offenders which are explained in a theoretical context in the following chapter. Chapter 2, the literature review, explored specific challenges such as labor market exclusions, returning

to disadvantaged communities, balancing between positive and negative social capital, and transitioning into adulthood with a criminal record. This chapter explored the relevance of labeling, social disorganization, and life-course theories to enlarge our understanding of young adult offenders' reentry experiences.

Criminological literature shows that all convicted offenders face levels of discrimination in the labor market due to their criminal record and perceived threats of danger. Several studies have indicated a strong correlation between possessing a criminal record and unemployment rates (Pager, 2003; Petersilia, 2003; Western et al., 2001; Western, 2006; Wilson, 1996). However, many employment studies have evaluated the hiring decisions of employers and the effects this may have on ex-offenders. Few research studies have explored the reentry experiences of ex-offenders from a qualitative approach, capturing actual experiences from the individual's perspective (Hanrahan, Gibbs, & Zimmerman, 2005; Maruna & Burnett, 2004). The literature also identifies various challenges within the respective neighborhoods participants return to, which significantly affect desistance and recidivism rates (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Patillo et al., 2004; Petersilia, 2003). However, these studies rarely identify the balancing act between positive and negative social capital within these communities. This study addressed the gaps in deterrence literature and explored the reentry experiences of young adult offenders with the goal of understanding the effects of incarceration and the impact balancing between positive and negative social capital had on desistance from crime.

## **Research Goals**

The goal of this study was to address the gaps in deterrence literature by exploring the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders. Utilizing a qualitative approach in this study was essential to capturing accurate accounts of reentry experiences directly from individuals who had experience incarceration. The objective of this study was to contribute to criminological theory by providing a clearer understanding of the intersection between stigma, positive and negative social capital, and incarceration experiences for young adult offenders. Obtaining a greater understanding of the challenges facing this reentry population explicates incarceration effects and identifies the mechanisms which lead individuals towards or away from desistance. In order to accomplish the outlined research goals, three research questions served as the foundation for this study.

## **Research Questions**

Given the significant gaps in our understanding of the deterrent effects of incarceration for young adult offenders, the following research questions were explored in this study:

1. What is the mark of a criminal record in the “streets” and how do offenders balance this with the mark of a criminal record in the labor market? What roles do positive and negative social capital play in this process, and how do offenders maneuver between the two types of opportunities?

2. How do life circumstances following the release from jail mediate the effects of incarceration as offenders pursue legitimate versus illegitimate forms of employment?
3. How are reentry experiences shaped by the developmental processes that are characteristic of this particular age group?

### **Research Design**

The research design in this study utilized qualitative methods to capture in-depth descriptions of young adult offenders' experiences prior to, during, and after incarceration which enabled a more meaningful understanding of the effects of incarceration. The data collection structure included two phases of interviewing: pre-release interviews and post-release interviews. Pre-release interviews were conducted to capture data on employment, neighborhood, family, and peer experiences prior to incarceration. Pre-release interviews also captured data on the experiences of incarceration and offenders' expectations for post-release. Post-release interviews were conducted to capture the experiences immediately following incarceration, particularly in the labor market, within offenders' neighborhoods, and within family and peer groups.

Qualitative methods were an essential approach to looking at cases as a whole with the intent to compare cases to one another. According to Ragin (1987), comparative methods are the most appropriate methods to use to categorize the experiences of participants. This study sought to identify factors that had significant effects on young adult offenders' pathways towards or away from desistance, and then identify conjunctures between those factors in order to categorize experiences and understand why incarceration has different effects on different participants. Since statistics alone

cannot explain the effects of incarceration, utilizing qualitative methods to capture the experiences and “voice” of the individual was critical to our understanding of how incarceration affected these individuals and what factors led them towards or away from desistance.

Pre-release interviews were conducted face-to-face with male inmates who were between the ages of 18 – 24 years old and had been convicted of a misdemeanor or felony. Interviews took place at either a local correctional facility or a pre-release center in Montgomery County, Maryland. The goal of each interview was to create a “conversation” between the interviewer and participant. The purpose of a conversational approach was to ensure the participant felt comfortable sharing personal information by creating a flow of dialogue that did not have many stop-and-go interruptions of note-taking. Participants were asked open-ended questions and were able to answer in as much or as little detail as desired. Probing questions were also utilized throughout the interviews to obtain clarification on experiences and capture additional themes as they developed.

An interview instrument was used for the initial collection of data. Open-ended questions were created as the primary source of collecting information on the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders. These questions asked participants to share information on the following subjects: prior criminal histories; experiences in jail; relationships with family members, romantic partners, and peers, prior to incarceration; previous employment experiences; and, future employment plans. The questions followed a sequential pattern to connect research ideas and were worded in a generic format to enable participants to answer in whichever manner they felt most comfortable.

Pre-release interviews were conducted with participants who were nearing release from incarceration within a three-month time frame. This study conducted 24 pre-release interviews; 14 interviews took place inside of the jail and 10 interviews took place inside of the pre-release center. Following release from either jail or the pre-release center, post-release interviews were conducted within four to eight months of the participant returning to the community. Despite slight retention issues, a total of 19 participants completed both the pre-release and post-release interviews. This resulted in an approximate 80% retention rate. The remaining 5 participants had either returned to jail (2 inmates) or could not be located (3 inmates). The two participants who returned to jail were both 18 years-old; one had reportedly engaged in a fight at the pre-release center and was sent back to jail while the other participant reportedly committed a property crime which resulted in his arrest and incarceration. The three inmates who could not be located were all violent offenders ranging between 21-24 years-old. However, their crimes and age did not vary significantly from the remaining participants who participated in the post-release interviews.

Both the jail and pre-release center approved the use of audio-recording devices inside the facilities during the pre-release interviews. Each participant was also asked for individual permission to audio-record both the pre-release and post-release interviews. Audio-recording each interview ensured that pertinent information would be captured in each interview. It also allowed for conversation to flow when probing questions were initiated and resulted in more thorough responses. After the completion of each interview, interviews were then transcribed by the interviewer so the results of each interview could be further analyzed. Each transcription was compared to the original audio-recorded

interview to ensure accuracy. The results were categorized based on themes and concepts that emerged from each interview. This grounded theory approach was essential in analyzing the actual experiences of young adult offenders maneuvering through labor markets, neighborhoods, and adolescence, following their release from incarceration.

### **Sampling – Site and Participant Selection/Recruitment**

The correctional facility selected for this study is a maximum-security county jail housing over 1,000 inmates. These inmates are either at a pre-trial status (60%) or individuals convicted and serving sentences of up to 18 months (40%). For the purposes of this study, only convicted offenders were included in the initial stages of interviewing as pre-trial offenders' statuses were unpredictable and did not meet the needs of this reentry study. The facility houses both male and female inmates, with males comprising roughly 87% of the jail population. African-Americans are the largest group in the facility (approximately 54%), followed by Whites (approximately 35%), then Hispanics (approximately 9%). The facility also has a youthful offender housing unit that houses adult offenders under the age of 21 (Starkey, 2009).

The facility is managed by a Deputy Warden and conducts traditional jail functions including: arrest booking, holding individuals pre-trial, holding special populations temporarily, holding individuals awaiting transfer to a state or federal agency, and incarcerating offenders serving sentences, following conviction, of up to 18 months in the state of Maryland. The jail offers a variety of services and programs to inmates, such as assessments, individualized reentry plans, evidence-based programs, family involvement and visitation, community partners, faith-based mentors, and educational and work-release programs (Starkey, 2009). Although the facility is located

in Maryland, the population includes offenders from the greater metropolitan area of Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia.

Pre-release interviews were also conducted at a local pre-release center in Maryland. This center houses convicted and sentenced individuals, from the abovementioned correctional facility, who are nearing release within 12 months. According to the regulations of the center, these individuals are required to work, pay room and board, file taxes, and address restitution and child support obligations. Case managers work with individuals to develop individualized reentry plans that meet specific transitional needs such as employment, housing, treatment, and medical services. Individuals residing at the center are monitored electronically and are held to the highest standards of conduct and compliance. The complex houses approximately 180 male and female residents (Maryland Department of Correction and Rehabilitation, 2012).

Non-probability, purposive sampling was used at the correctional facility and the pre-release center in Montgomery County, Maryland. The sampling method selected for this study was one that most closely met the purpose and goals of this qualitative study. This sampling strategy was used based on the accessibility of individuals who were part of the target population and met the needs of this particular study. While the use of non-probability, purposive sampling presented an issue of representativeness, purposive sampling strategies were the most appropriate methods to use in order to identify and locate individuals matching the age range and release date credentials required to conduct a reentry study and understand the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders leaving jail (Hagan, 2010).

The selected sample was based on the correctional population that most closely met the needs of this study: convicted offenders between the ages of 18-24 years-old who were nearing release within a three-month time frame. Given the purposive selection of subjects meeting the needs of this study, this sample may not necessarily be representative of all offenders or generalizable to all reentry populations. However, the data collected from this sample of offenders was used for comparative purposes as it enabled the analysis of significant factors and compared experiences of pathways towards or away from desistance (Dantzker & Hunter, 2012; Maxwell, 2005). Building on the in-depth interviewing approach utilized to capture narrative accounts of reentry experiences, inductive analyses enlarged our understanding of how these individuals experience incarceration and what mechanisms led to desistance or persistence in criminal activity.

Research participants were selected from generated lists of inmates meeting the criteria for this study. These lists were provided by the reentry staff at the jail and pre-release center. The lists contained names of inmates who fell between the age group of 18-24, had been convicted and sentenced to a local correctional facility, and who were nearing release within three months. Specific groups of inmates who were excluded the study included severely mentally ill inmates who demonstrated inconsistent and potentially violent behavior. They were housed separately in the correctional facility and staff had advised that they be excluded from the research study. Female inmates were also excluded from the study, after participating in pilot interviews, as the limited number of females matching the criteria for participation in this study did not elicit a large enough number for comparative purposes. Although there were no exclusions on race in this study, it was the interviewer's expectation that the majority of research participants

in both facilities would be disproportionately minority males, based on the overall correctional facility population and current literature studies (Western, 2006; Petersilia, 2003). Whereas Whites made up approximately 35% of the population in the jail, minorities, combined, made up approximately 65%.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary. All potential research participants were informed of the purpose and structure of the research study prior to their consent. The interviewer obtained access to the correctional facility by completing a volunteer orientation training which allowed the interviewer to attend volunteer activities where inmates were located. By attending volunteer activities, the interviewer was able to build rapport among the inmates in the early data collection stages. These strategies were successful in creating a level of trust between the inmate and interviewer, as well as in sharing the components of the study with all interested inmates. The interviewer also obtained access into the pre-release center through a professional contact. In the pre-release center, announcements were made by the reentry staff during lunch and dinner times when interested participants were available. Once an inmate volunteered to be interviewed, several steps were taken.

Before a participant was interviewed for the study, a consent form was shared and reviewed to properly introduce the study and explain the interviewing process for the interested individual. The consent form clearly outlined the purpose of the study, risks and benefits involved, and the process of the interview. Participants were given the option to either review the form themselves or have the interviewer read the form aloud. Participants were then given the opportunity to ask questions to ensure accurate comprehension of the form and interview process. Once the participant agreed to be

interviewed, and consented through his signature, the open-ended questions began and narrative accounts of participant experiences were collected. Participants were also asked to provide the interviewer with several forms of contact information so post-release interviews could be scheduled once they returned to the community. The interviewer was able to confirm contact information 1-2 weeks prior to the participant being released, for the majority of participants, to ensure contact information accuracy and enhance retention rates for post-release interviews.

Once a participant was released into the community, the interviewer reached out to the individual within four to eight months of their release. The goal of this short time frame was to capture early reentry experiences following incarceration as this is considered a critical period in the transition process from jail to community. Since the post-release interviews were also voluntary, the interviewer reviewed the consent form again with research participants to ensure their understanding of the process, the purpose of the study, and address any applicable questions. Each participant was compensated with a \$25 stipend not offered during incarceration as restrictions on receiving payment were placed in both the jail and the pre-release center.

Post-release interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participant. Individuals participating in the post-release interviews were granted the same level of respect for their time and participation as they were afforded inside the jail and pre-release center. These interviews were also audio-recorded, with the permission of each participant. If, at any time, the participant wanted to skip a question or stop the interview, their requests were immediately met and their compensation was still granted, as outlined

in the consent form. Post-release interviews took place in public locations such as public libraries, fast-food restaurants, parks, or community centers.

### **Confidentiality**

Each interview conducted in this study was confidential. Each participant was assigned a code number which secured the personal information provided in this study. None of the information disclosed in the interviews was revealed to connect the research subject to the information they shared. However, the study was not anonymous. Personal information was collected, including participants' names, phone numbers, age, gender, post-release contact information, and interview responses. This information remained confidential by limiting access to research data and by keeping the data in a secure location. All research data was stored in a home office, in a locked office cabinet. The Rutgers Institutional Review Board and the research team for this dissertation study were the only parties that had access to this data, except where it may be required by law. If the results from this study are presented at professional conferences in the future, the anonymity of each participant would be protected as information shared would not identify specific participants as a source of a particular quote.

As with any research study, there are a limited number of situations where results may have to be reported. These situations were explained in the consent form to each participant and acceptance of these possible reports was agreed upon by each participant. If the participant disclosed specific details about future intentions to commit a crime or knew of someone else who was going to commit a crime, these intentions would have been reported to the authorities. Also, if the participant disclosed information indicating that they were going to harm themselves or others, this information would have also been

reported to authorities, including local police and/or the correctional staff members.

Again, this information was outlined to each participant in both the pre-release and post-release interviews.

### **Data Collection**

After the April 2012 approval from the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board, pilot interviews began in August 2012. The months of June and July were spent completing a volunteer orientation program which enabled access to the correctional facility during the times inmates were available for contact. The interviewer was able to meet important staff members who were involved in the reentry preparation of inmates. Once the interviewer became familiar with staff members and the facility, pilot interviews began towards the end of the summer.

One of the first steps taken in the interviewing process was the creation of a plan for the pre-release interviews to be scheduled and conducted at the correctional facility. After reviewing the generated list of inmates who initially met the criteria for the study, 18-24 years old and sentenced to the facility, 22 inmates were selected for pilot interviews. Once these inmates were identified, those who were presented with the option to participate in the study agreed to participate. 14 male inmates and 6 female inmates ultimately agreed to participate in the study, although female inmates were later excluded due to the limited number of female inmates available for comparative purposes. The remaining 2 inmates had been released before contact had been made regarding the study. The interviewer mapped out the inmates by housing location and determined which housing unit to visit on a particular day. The interviewer would then enter the housing unit and speak with the designated correctional officer of that unit. After explaining the

process of the study, the correctional officer would alert the inmate that the interviewer wanted to speak with him regarding a study. The inmate would exit their cell and come down to meet with the interviewer.

In a private conference room, inmates were asked to sit in a chair so the study could be explained. The conference room was located next to the correctional officer's station and was walled by clear windows for officer accessibility. The interviewer would introduce herself and give a brief overview of the study. If the inmate was interested in learning more and possibly participating in the study, the consent form was then reviewed by both the interviewer and inmate. After discussing the purpose of the study and each item in the consent form, the inmate was then asked if he wanted to participate in the study. If the inmate agreed, the interview would begin at that time. The inmate was informed that each interview would last approximately 1-2 hours.

The conference room was set up similar to an office with a desk, telephone, and several chairs. The interviewer typically entered the room prior to the interview to set up a locked, password-protected laptop, digital voice recorder, and notepads and pens for note-taking during the interview. The interviewer also selected seating which was comfortable for a conversation to occur between the participant and interviewer for approximately 1-2 hours. Once the inmate agreed to participate in the study, the consent form was signed by both parties. The participant was advised that they would receive a copy of the consent form for their records following the interview. They were also informed that they could cease interviewing at any time but would still receive a copy of the consent form regardless of their completion of the study.

Each interview began with a basic introduction of the study and explanation as to why the interviewer was interested in speaking with inmates. The concept of reentry was explained and discussed to ensure the participant understood the reason for a post-release interview. The interview questions began with the collection of basic demographic information such as age, race, marital status, and educational level. The next set of questions included open-ended questions seeking to capture the narrative experiences of participants before and during incarceration. These nature of the questions included information on prior employment, neighborhoods, families, and peers. The interviewer typically asked the questions in the order they were written unless the participant addressed certain issues and topics before the question was asked. In these cases, the interviewer made a note that certain areas had already been addressed so not to repeat the same questions. However, the interviewer would probe throughout the interview process to obtain clarification on certain issues and topics.

After the completion of each interview, participants were asked if they had any questions about the study. If they did, the interviewer would address those questions. If they did not, the interview would cease at that point. Once the interview had ended, the interviewer obtained at least three forms of contact information from the participant so a post-release interview could be conducted after incarceration. Participants would then return to their cell and await their copy of the signed consent form. The interviewer would exit the housing unit and make copies of the consent form before returning the copies to inmates. 1-2 weeks prior to release, the interviewer would visit the participant to confirm the contact information on record for the post-release interview.

Interviews at the pre-release center were structured similarly to those conducted at the jail. 15 residents were selected from generated lists based on the aforementioned criteria and asked to participate in the study. Out of the 15 inmates matching the criteria, 10 male inmates agreed to participate in the study. The remaining 5 inmates were either not interested or were nearing release within a few days, before pre-release interviews were scheduled. Those who were not interested in participating did not give reasons as to why they did not want to participate. For the 10 inmates who volunteered to participate, interviews were scheduled, consent forms were reviewed and completed, and the interviews began following the same procedures as the pre-release interviews in the jail.

Post-release interviews were conducted with participants four to eight months following their release. To enlarge our understanding of the effects of incarceration, it was critical to conduct post-release interviews shortly after release to understand how incarceration affected early reentry experiences. The interviewer reached out to each participant to schedule a post-release interview which lasted approximately 1-2 hours. The interviewer anticipated possible retention issues but utilized all forms of contact information to get in touch with participants. 19 out of 24 participants completed post-release interviews. The majority of research participants, almost 80%, was located and agreed to participate in the post-release interviews. The remaining 5 participants had either returned to jail (2 inmates) or could not be located (3 inmates).

Once the participant was located and agreed to meet with the interviewer for the post-release interview, the interviewer worked with each participant to schedule a time and place convenient for the participant. In most cases, post-release interviews took place at a local restaurant chain during non-peak hours that allowed for space and privacy. A

small number of post-release interviews took place in local public libraries or parks located nearby participants' homes or places of employment. Consent forms were reviewed with each participant during post-release interviews, outlining the purpose of the study and the interviewing process. Once participants agreed to participate, they signed the consent form and were notified of the \$25 stipend associated with the post-release interview. Participants were informed about the amount of the stipend and the stipend procedure prior to the start of the interview. This stipend was paid in cash, regardless of the completion of the interview or if questions were skipped. Most participants were open to answering each question in detail. However, in a few cases, participants either skipped questions or responded elusively to questions inquiring about current illegal activity. Those participants who shared details about engaging in illegal activity usually spoke about "people they hung around with" or in looser terms which would not implicate them personally with law enforcement.

Once the post-release interviews began, the same procedures followed in the pre-release interviews were used. Open-ended questions were asked in the order they were written unless the participant addressed these areas prior to the interviewer asking them. A digital voice recorder, a notepad and pens were used to ensure the interviewer accurately captured participant responses. Notes were also made on the locked, password-protected laptop for a limited amount of post-release interviews. The interviewer utilized probing questions as an approach to clarify responses to questions and to elicit more detailed information about particular concepts. When the post-release interview was completed, each participant was paid the \$25 stipend and asked if they had additional questions about the study. Participants were reminded that the data collected in

the study would remain confidential and be stored on a locked, password-protected laptop computer for the research team's access only. Lastly, the interviewer thanked each participant for their contribution to the study and wished them success after their release.

### **Risks/Benefits**

The goal of this study was to enlarge our understanding of the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders by capturing actual accounts of their experiences prior to, during, and after incarceration. After being approved by the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board, this study posed several benefits for participants. First, participants were able to provide a "voice" in this study which captured actual experiences from the offender themselves. This allowed the participant to understand the importance of their participation in the study. Second, the results from this study can be shared with criminologists, practitioners, and policymakers. The knowledge obtained from this study may help contribute to services and resources designed to help this population transition back into the community. Lastly, if changes in theories, services and policies do occur, the greatest benefits to this study would be a greater understanding of youth desistance and the effects of incarceration, lower recidivism rates among the young adult offender population, and the application of successful reintegration approaches for this group of offenders.

Although the benefits mentioned above were desired, there were minimal risks to participating in this research study. Participants were informed of the risks of becoming emotional or anxious during the interviews while disclosing personal experiences related to their life circumstances. Discussing or revisiting previous experiences that involved family situations and life experiences were likely to cause discomfort in some way. Each

participant was reminded that they could skip questions or stop the interview at any time if discomfort occurred. If the response was greater than the interviewer's control, correctional staff would be notified. Subjects would have been referred to professionally trained counselors, if necessary. During the post-release interviews, a list of professional counselors was available for participants who required these services. However, none of the participants acknowledged a need for professional counseling upon completion of the pre-release or post-release interviews. While it was not in the interviewer's scope of expertise to counsel participants, services were made known at the cost of the correctional facility, pre-release center, or the individual; the interviewer was not able to offer payment for counseling services for participants.

### **Validity**

Validity is a term referring to whether "the measures used accurately represents the concept it is meant to measure" (Dantzker & Hunter, 2012, pg. 188). According to Maxwell (2005), "the validity of your results is not guaranteed by following some prescribed procedure" (p. 105). Therefore, validity was a goal sought in this study to rule out specific alternatives and threats to the interpretations and explanations found within the data. The interviewer sought to ensure validity through intensive involvement with the data, triangulation of the data, and thorough comparisons of interview responses (Maxwell, 2005).

Since this study utilized purposive sampling, there was the possibility of internal generalization occurring within the research population being studied. However, the data may not necessarily be generalizable beyond this group (Maxwell, 2005). Although the themes and concepts derived from this study may be applied to other young adult

offenders existing correctional facilities and reentering society, they may not always be generalized to every young adult offender exiting such facilities and reentering society.

### **Data Analysis**

Results from this research study contribute to the field of criminology, particularly to the desistance and reentry literature, by providing a greater understanding of the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders reentering society and the factors leading them towards or away from desistance. While literature is limited in the area of reentry from jail among the young adult offender population, the results from this study fill the gap of our knowledge and understanding of the effects of incarceration from an exploratory perspective. Most importantly, the results from this study provide greater insight into the intersection between deterrence, stigma, and positive and negative social capital for young adult offenders.

Considering responses from this study were in the format of narrative accounts, specific themes and concepts were identified throughout the coding process which aided in the data analysis process. The analysis process began immediately after the first interview and continued throughout the study as an ongoing, inductive analytical process. Transcriptions also occurred as soon as each interview was completed which enabled themes and concepts to be identified early in the data analysis phase.

In order to accurately identify themes and concepts in this study, a specific type of approach was taken when coding research data. Since this study focused on the reentry experiences and the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders, a “hybrid” model of coding was used. This enabled the interviewer to select only those concepts and themes that most closely related to the research questions in this study. The “hybrid”

approach is a combination of responsive interviewing and grounded theory approaches so the interviewer did not need to code for every passage or term found in each interview. While responsive interviewing required the interviewer to examine interviews and criminological literature to determine themes and concepts, the grounded theory approach enabled the recognition of significant concepts and themes while developing theories without the use of literature. Given the purpose of this study and the qualitative methods used to collect data, the hybrid model of selecting responses most applicable to the research questions and enabling new concepts to derive from participants' interviews was one of the most effective approaches used to analyze the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Ragin, 1987).

After each interview was completed, the interviewer reviewed the responses by carefully transcribing each interview. Throughout this process, the interviewer looked for concepts and themes that related to each research question developed in this study. Those themes and concepts were obvious at times, yet subtle at other times. The interviewer developed an initial coding list that related to the research questions. While reviewing responses, the interviewer coded according to the initial coding list. The interviewer then reviewed each interview again, seeking out new concepts and themes that may not have emerged in the initial coding list. The interviewer also compared responses to specific questions and used those comparisons to form new codes. This process enabled the interviewer to carefully analyze the data for new and existing concepts and themes.

Throughout the process of coding, the interviewer also made notes and memos which enabled the organization and categorization of the themes and concepts that developed throughout the interviews. As themes and concepts developed, connections

were made with the narrative analyses to shape the grounded theory approach that was expected to occur in this study (Maxwell, 2005). After the data was coded, the interviewer began the phase of analyzing the coded data. The goal of this process was to generate a greater understanding of what the data meant. This included summarizing themes and concepts and grouping information together (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Once this occurred, the interviewer was able to identify patterns in the data which contributed to the results of this study. The interviewer purposefully utilized qualitative methods in this study to capture reentry experiences and enlarge the understanding of the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders. While quantitative approaches would have produced significant findings indicating the strength of particular variables, the preference of taking a qualitative approach was based on the holistic goals present in this study.

## **Conclusion**

Utilizing a hybrid model of coding in the data collection process enabled the use of conjunctural analysis in the data analysis process. The conjunctural analysis approach resulted in significant findings identifying a conjuncture of factors affecting the reentry experiences of young adult offenders (Ragin, 1987). The findings in this study present a theoretical understanding of the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders transitioning from jail to the community and from adolescence to adulthood. Specifically, they examine the relationship between deterrence, stigma, positive and negative social capital, and delays in the life cycle. The following chapters will expand on the findings in this study, as well as present a thorough analysis of unanticipated results, as well as the

mechanisms affecting young adult offenders' pathways towards or away from desistance in criminal activity.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

The previous methodological chapter outlined three research questions explored in this study. The findings from the research questions illustrate actual reentry experiences for participants who completed both pre-release and post-release interviews. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the goal of these research questions was to develop a greater level of understanding of the effects of incarceration for young adult offenders. The development of these questions entailed identifying the gaps in criminological literature and outlining a research plan which utilized qualitative methods to capture and analyze the effects of incarceration for young male offenders experiencing incarceration in jail. I expected to find injury to positive social capital and enhancement of negative social capital in various aspects of participants' lives, such as within neighborhoods, the labor market, among family and peer groups, and throughout the transition into adulthood. Although injury to positive social capital was found among participants' reentry experiences, the enhancement of negative social capital did not occur for most participants.

The following research questions resulted in a number of significant findings which are further analyzed in this study to enhance our understanding of actual reentry experiences for young adult offenders.. While this chapter will present the study's findings on reentry experiences, the following chapter will analyze and interpret these findings, as well as the unanticipated results found in this study, to better explain the effects of incarceration on young adult offenders.

1. What is the mark of a criminal record in the “streets” and how do offenders balance this with the mark of a criminal record in the labor market? What roles do positive and negative social capital play in this process, and how do offenders maneuver between the two types of opportunities?
2. How do life circumstances following the release from jail mediate the effects of incarceration as offenders pursue legitimate versus illegitimate forms of employment?
3. How are reentry experiences shaped by the developmental processes that are characteristic of this particular age group?

**Research Question #1: What is the mark of a criminal record in the “streets” and how do offenders balance this with the mark of a criminal record in the labor market? What roles do positive and negative social capital play in this process, and how do offenders maneuver between the two types of opportunities?**

*The “Streets”*

#### Introduction

The first research question was developed through the expectation of finding enhanced negative social capital within the neighborhoods young adult offenders returned to after incarceration and a loss of positive social capital within the labor market due to acquiring stigma. It was my expectation that participants in this study would encounter these increases and decreases upon their return home from jail and experience a balancing act between positive and negative social capital. While many participants experienced the loss of positive social capital in the labor market, the expectation that

incarceration would enhance negative social capital within neighborhoods was not found. Contrary to my initial hypothesis, this study found that a criminal record had little significance in the “streets” for participants.

#### Pre-release expectations

During the pre-release interviews, participants were asked questions about their concerns about leaving jail and how they believed they would be treated and perceived by others once they returned home. The nature of these questions sought to identify possible expectations of stigma and enhanced criminal enterprise due to participants’ recent incarceration. Most of the participants did not expect an increased level of negative social capital after release.

Ian, a first time offender, expressed little concern about leaving jail in his pre-release interview:

I’m not really worried about leaving jail because I know a lot of people who got locked up and came back home like it was nothing. I don’t think people will look at me differently. Maybe people who don’t know me but my friends and family still gonna support me no matter what.

When probed about his concern of future criminal behavior after jail, Ian explained:

I don’t think jail is gonna make me commit more crimes. I’ll probably still smoke weed but I’ll just be more careful about getting caught with it. Being here [jail] isn’t gonna change what I like to do.

Ed, another offender who expressed little concern about leaving jail, explained:

Most of the people I know have been locked up at some point. I don’t think it’s going to be too hard going back home because my people are used to this. They will see me as the same guy who left a few months ago.

Ed further explained how jail would have little effect on his future criminal behavior:

People don't come to jail and leave as better criminals. You either are or you aren't. I'm not saying I want to return here but I'm not leaving here like some crazy criminal who learned all his tricks in jail. I do what I do, with or without jail.

Greg, who did not express concern about leaving jail, explained how his peers may treat him differently once he is released:

Man, my boys think all this stuff is cool! Jail, being away, stupid stuff. That's all they know though. They will probably think I'm this tough guy coming out of jail because I've seen them treat other people like that. They don't know it's not like that unless they come here themselves. I've heard of much worse situations in jail. It's not that bad here so I don't think it will make any major changes once I'm out.

The responses from the pre-release interviews show participants having little concern about acquiring stigma and enhancing criminal enterprise upon their return back to their neighborhoods. While some participants identified possible enhancements in social reputation among their peers, most participants did not identify incarceration as a risk factor for future criminal activity. They also did not identify incarceration as a deterrent from engaging in the criminal acts that resulted in their recent incarceration. The findings from the post-release interviews further show the minimal effects incarceration had on enhancing criminal enterprise.

#### Post-release experiences

Once participants were released from incarceration, post-release interviews were conducted to explore whether or not participants experienced enhancements in negative social capital by acquiring stigma and increasing criminal enterprise. Most of the participants did not expect an enhancement in criminal enterprise due to the incarceration

experience. Post-release findings show that enhancement in criminal enterprise was not found among participants nor did participants experience significant effects of stigma within their neighborhoods.

Steve, the oldest participant in the study, explained his experiences after incarceration:

I've been locked up a few times so it's the norm for me. I've been getting in trouble since I was like, 12 years-old. I got some history in the system so I'm used to being around people like me. No one treats me differently because I've always been like this (laughs). Coming back out this time isn't that different. Same shit, different day.

When probed on his involvement in criminal activity after incarceration, Steve explained:

I'm not trying to go back to jail or anything but jail is the same ol' thing to me. You go away for a little while and when you come back out, it's the same life. I'm not saying I'm committing crimes but I'm not saying I'm not. Let's just say, nothing has changed.

Ian, who expected little change after incarceration, explained his post-release experiences:

I don't notice a difference really. People knew I was locked up but no one has acted like I'm cooler or a bum for going to jail. They were just happy to see me when I got out. I try to stay away from what I used to do but I do get high from time to time. And, of course, I drink with my boys but that's not too bad. Everything is the same to me.

When probed about how he viewed people who had been locked up, Ian further explained:

I used to think it was cool, back in the day when I was younger. I thought, wow, he did time and he made it. What a badass. But now that I've been through it, I see it as nothing. I don't mean it's easy or nothing but I just don't see the hype anymore. I don't brag to others about it and I wouldn't recommend it (laughs).

The expectation that incarceration would have increased negative social capital among participants was not found in this study. While some participants may have had the expectation that a criminal record would be advantageous, most participants found that acquiring a criminal record had little significance within their neighborhoods; they did not experience enhancements in criminal enterprise. Based on post-release responses, there are several reasons why the increase of negative social capital did not occur among participants in the study.

It was my expectation that participants would experience increases in negative social capital due to the incarceration experience. However, the findings show that participants did not experience these increases after incarceration. After closely observing the characteristics of this population, there are several reasons why post-release experiences did not meet my expectations. This may be attributed to prior criminal involvement, normalization of criminal behavior, and peer perceptions. Despite a minor increase in social reputation, acquiring an additional criminal record did not appear to significantly “mark” participants within their neighborhoods.

Prior involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice system among participants is illustrated in Table 1. As the table shows, a small number of participants experienced incarceration for the first time; however, the majority of participants had experienced incarceration at least two times. Findings show that prior experiences in the juvenile or criminal justice system affected the perceptions of incarceration for most participants by creating a normalized trajectory of incarceration in the lives of many of these men. The “norm” of incarceration among family members and peers reduced the effects of the

stigma attached to a criminal record within neighborhoods. Additionally, peers who had similar experiences contributed to the normalization of criminal behavior.

**Table 1: Number of Incarcerations for Sample Participants**

Number of Incarcerations	Number of Participants
1 (first time)	5
2-4	11
5+	3

In his post-release interview, Greg explained the effects of prior criminal involvement, normalization of criminal behavior, and peer perceptions:

Man, I've been locked up three times now! The first time, I was a little scared because I didn't know how it would be inside. But once you learn the game, you do what you gotta do to survive. I'm not saying it's easy but jail is not hard to figure out. Once you've been there, you know it ain't too crazy. Most of my friends have been locked up so it's not unusual for us.

Thomas explained how his family members contributed to the normalization of criminal behavior:

I got a lot of family who have been locked up. It's normal in my family. My uncles, cousins, even some aunts. I knew about jail before I could walk!

Ed also explained the effects of the normalization of criminal behavior:

Everyone I know has had a run-in with the law. Even if they did not go to jail, they got arrested. They went to court. That's my hood, everyone does something to get by. I knew about drugs when I was younger. My uncles got in trouble a lot so I always heard about them 'going away.' For some people, that's crazy. For me, that's life.

While criminal enterprise was not enhanced due to incarceration, some of the participants experienced a minor increase in social reputation. Greg explained how his peers viewed him after his return home from jail:

These boys threw me a party and acted like it was the best thing! They thought I was cooler, ya' know? Wanted to be like me. I didn't sweat it at first because it was good to get the love when I got back. Being around them didn't make me do more crimes though. It was just nice not to be judged.

Prior criminal involvement and the normalization of criminal behavior among participants, family members, and peers explain why criminal enterprise may not have been enhanced due to the incarceration experience. The experiences and expectancy of incarceration reduce exclusions among residents in these neighborhoods; participants did not leave jail with a more advanced criminal agenda nor were they expected to return home more criminally advanced. Instead, they were able to return to their neighborhoods with little to no change in perceptions from family members and peers.

### Conclusion

It was my expectation that participants would experience increases in negative social capital due to the incarceration experience. However, pre-release and post-release findings show that participants did not experience increases in negative social capital by enhancing criminal enterprise. The reasons for the post-release experiences not meeting the initial hypothesis can be attributed to the following factors: prior criminal involvement, normalization of criminal behavior and peer perceptions. While the predicted increases in negative social capital were not found in this study, the loss of positive social capital within the labor market was prevalent among participants.

### *The Labor Market*

### Introduction

It was expected that participants would experience the loss of positive social capital in the labor market due to their recent incarceration experiences. As predicted, this study found that most participants experienced a loss of positive social capital in the labor

market. However, experiences varied among participants who became aware of the effects of incarceration in the labor market at different times. While incarcerated, participants were asked about their plans and expectations for future employment; once released, they were asked about their employment search experiences. The comparison between pre-release and post-release responses indicated a significant discrepancy among participants regarding their perceptions of the effects of a criminal record in the labor market. While some participants were aware of the consequences incarceration would have in the labor market earlier in the study, many were ill-prepared for the responses they received throughout their employment searches.

#### Pre-release expectations

While this study explored the effects of a criminal record in the labor market, it also sought to obtain a thorough understanding of how participants perceived their employment prospects during and after their release from jail. During the pre-release interviews, several participants expressed optimism about securing employment shortly after their release; many did not express high levels of concern about losing positive social capital due to acquiring a criminal record. Many of these participants believed their young age, prior work experience, and connections to employers would result in immediate employment following their release.

In his pre-release interview, Earl explained his views regarding his employment plans:

I got friends all over. I can get a job easily. May not be the job I want but I can get one. When you know people, they will do things for you. Where I'm from, someone always knows someone. I'm really not worried.

Norman also outlined his plans for future employment:

Breaking into homes is an easy way to make money but I got plans to do more with my life once I'm out. I'm not worried about finding work because this is my time in. I know folks with lots of charges and they work at the mall now. I'll probably try there. It won't take me long.

Aaron expressed his optimism in obtaining work shortly after release:

There are so many jobs out there. I am not worried at all because I see them online here. PRC doesn't really make you get a job but you gotta look like you're making an effort. I'm online all the time seeing jobs...I got some places in mind though so once I'm out, I'm gonna get a job.

A small group of participants expressed concern over the loss of positive social capital by acquiring a criminal record. They were aware of how employers viewed applicants with criminal records. While it was a concern, these participants also expressed their desire to prove to employers that they could be trustworthy employees.

Ken explained why he did not apply to jobs while he was residing at the pre-release center:

Sometimes, these companies get a ton of applications from people like me filling them out online. How can they tell who they want? I like to apply for work in-person so I can vibe with a manager and they can vibe with me. I think I have better chances that way. If not, I'm just like everyone else on the internet. Plus, I'm locked up so I already got an X against me.

Aaron also expressed his concern about the stigma attached to residing in the pre-release center:

You gotta be upfront with these employers when you're applying. It always comes out that we live in this center. We're still inmates waiting to be released. Our record may hurt us then, especially if you got a felony. I think living here makes things worse.

In one case, a participant residing at the pre-release center was able to secure employment prior to his release. Bobby explained how his honesty helped him secure employment prior to his release:

I got this job right now at Chipotle that I love. I had to tell the manager about my record though. I told him during my first interview but I explained myself. I told him I'm a hard worker and I needed a chance. He was cool but I wasn't sure if I would get the job. The next thing I knew, I got called back for a second interview and got hired. I was real happy. I love working there and I love working with people. Plus, the food is good! I had to tell him upfront though because we have to report everything here. It's worked out for me but I hope I don't mess up. I need this job.

While most participants in the pre-release interviews indicated minimal concern about the effects of a criminal record in the labor market, some participants acknowledged the likelihood of difficulties occurring in their future employment searches. Post-release experiences in the labor market show the loss of positive social capital for most participants. While some were prepared for employer responses, many participants did not expect to experience the loss of positive social capital due to acquiring stigma in the labor market.

#### Post-release experiences

This study found that several participants experienced the loss of positive social capital in the labor market. While employment was considered important to most participants, securing employment shortly after release was out of reach for many of these young men. At the time of the post-release interviews, six participants had secured legitimate employment and thirteen participants were unemployed. Despite the fact that a small number of participants were able to secure employment, the remaining participants experienced significant challenges while seeking employment in the labor market.

Although confident that they would secure employment shortly after their release from jail, many participants faced a multitude of challenges after their release including acquiring stigma, having limited relevant work experience and professional contacts, and significant educational deficits, most of which were not considered attributes to potential employers.

After his release, Randy expressed frustration over his employment search:

No one will hire me. I've applied everywhere. Once the manager finds out I've been locked up, it's the same old story. We'll call you if there is a need. We have lots of qualified applicants to consider. Blah, blah, blah. In other words, they ain't hiring no felon. The biggest problem is my charge is violent. Attempted murder is not working for me right now. I can't catch a break.

He later explained the challenges of not having any contacts to employers. As a black male, his experiences were consistent with Sandra Smith's (2010) work on race, trust, and employment. He explained:

All of a sudden, no one knows of anyone hiring. Everyone says they got my back but nothing. I make money though but I know it's gonna land me back in jail. I've sold the bare minimum of cocaine to get by but I'm worried I'm gonna get an undercover cop and then it's back to jail I go. I'm not too worried though because it's not like I'm doing anything out here.

Adam explained his employment experience since being released:

I tried applying to places online, at first, but no one called me back. I started applying in-person so I could talk to the managers first but they would find out about me being locked up and then I wouldn't hear from them. I would call and they were always busy. No one wants to hire someone whose been locked up. I've had some side jobs here and there with landscaping but I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm not going back to breaking into homes but I need some money.

James explained how his educational deficits affected his post-release employment prospects:

I'm not dumb, just never really got into school. It wasn't for me. The subjects were boring. I was more interested in girls and hanging with my friends. By the time I realized I needed school, I was way too behind. Now I'm too old to go back. I mean, I know I'm not but I wouldn't want to now. So, I gotta figure something else out. No one will hire me without an education.

One participant, Ed, explained why did not search for employment following his release:

I didn't even bother looking for a job, to tell you the truth. I know no one wants to hire an ex-con. I wouldn't either (laughs). All they see is danger. So, I didn't bother. I moved in with my girl and went back to making money the way I know how. I'm not going to tell you outright how I do that but you can figure it out. She doesn't mind as long as I buy her nice stuff. I don't know what type of job I will ever get. I want my own business but I need to go back to school. I'm saving up.

Participants who were able to secure employment after incarceration explained how they utilized other resources to help them find work, despite acquiring stigma from a criminal record. Walter explained how he secured employment after jail:

I got a job shortly after I got out. I had a friend who worked on cars so he got me a job. I know how to fix things but my record would hurt me if I didn't know anyone. My job is good and I like it. I could make more money but for now, I'm living with my mom and saving my money. I plan on moving out next year.

Earl also explained how he was able to secure employment after jail:

It took me a couple of months and I was ready to give up. My mom and girlfriend were giving me money but I had to make my own. I didn't want to go back to selling drugs but I would have if I needed to. Luckily, I got this job at a restaurant. I applied in person and the manager didn't ask me about my record. When I filled out the application, I wrote about my charges but I still got the job. So, now I clean tables at this restaurant which isn't too bad. I make decent tips. Not enough to move out, but

enough to not take money from my mom or girl anymore. That was embarrassing.

Ken, a participant who has been incarcerated more than five times, shared his post-release employment experiences:

Man, when I was at PRC, they didn't help with anything. They would give you computer time and say look for a job online. Or, they would bring the newspaper to you and say, see if there is anything in there. They weren't helpful so I realized I had to do my own thing. I went on a few interviews while I was at PRC but it made me look bad when I told managers I had to check in with the center. They thought I was this hardcore criminal living in some halfway house. As soon as I got out of PRC, I applied for work at the mall and got the job. I didn't have to tell them about PRC, just my record. I explained the violation of probation charge and at first, I didn't think they would still hire me. But, I got a call a few days later asking me when I could start working. I said now! (Laughs). I started a few days later and I've been there for a few months now. I like it but it's not what I'm gonna do forever. I gotta figure out my game plan but I'm gonna keep this job for now.

### Conclusion

I expected to find a loss of positive social capital for participants seeking employment in the labor market. As expected, most participants reported a loss of positive social capital due to acquiring stigma. Participants, however, did not acquire stigma at the same time; experiences varied based on when a participant realized his criminal label would have consequences in the labor market. While other factors, such as life circumstances, affected employment prospects, most participants were significantly affected by the “mark” of a criminal record in the labor market. Despite this loss of positive social capital, additional negative social capital was not gained due to the incarceration experience. However, with the presence of both positive and negative social capital in many participants' lives, maneuvering between the two forms of social capital becomes critical in our understanding of the effects of incarceration on this population.

### *Positive and Negative Social Capital*

The role of social capital is critical in the reentry process. According to Arditti & Parkman (2011), “social capital encompasses the ability to secure benefits through one’s social connections, family and community ties, and other social structures such as employment networks” (p. 207). These tools are essential for both successful reintegration and adult development. In this study, however, participants often returned home to environments with limited resources and overwhelmingly high levels of cumulative disadvantage (Sampson & Laub, 1997; Uggen & Wakelfield, 2005). While it was expected that participants would lose positive social capital due to the incarceration experience, the expectation that participants would gain additional negative social capital was not found. Participants did not increase criminal enterprise due to incarceration. However, many of the participants already had a strong presence of negative social capital prior to their most recent incarceration. How participants maneuvered between both positive and negative social capital opportunities enhances our understanding of the effects of incarceration and the factors which affect pathways towards or away from desistance.

This research question found that while the incarceration experience resulted in the loss of positive social capital for most participants, those who were able to secure employment utilized their resources and contacts in the labor market to obtain legitimate work. Despite acquiring stigma and losing positive social capital, participants were able to maneuver between positive and negative social capital found within family relationships, peer relationships, and neighborhood resources to overcome the challenges facing them in the labor market. Some even experienced a “balancing act” between both

positive and negative social capital. Ian explained how this occurred in his post-release experiences:

I feel like I live a double life sometimes. My parents don't want me hanging out with certain people or doing things I used to do. They know I used to use drugs a lot so they're worried I will start doing that again. To be honest, I still smoke and drink with my boys, just not as much. But, when I'm home, I'm looking online for work so my parents see me trying. They always tell me when they see someone hiring and offer to take me there to fill out the application. Sometimes I let them but other times, I lie and say I went to apply but they weren't interested. It's not that I don't want to work. I just don't want to work at Burger King for no money. I need to work in an office or do something more productive. I graduated from high school so I can't work at a fast food joint. Plus, my boys work in the streets and they give me money. I just have to keep it from my parents.

Ian's experiences were distinctive as he struggled to balance between positive and negative social capital. Although his family provided support to desist from crime, he was unable to desist due to limited legitimate employment options and his peer relationships. The remaining participants who were unable to secure legitimate employment typically experienced high levels of negative social capital within family relationships, peer relationships, neighborhoods. While additional negative social capital was not gained due to incarceration, the amount of negative social capital already present in the lives of some participants affected their motivation to desist from crime and seek legitimate employment. These participants were less likely to maneuver between both positive and negative social capital due to the effects of life circumstances following the release from jail.

**Research Question #2: How do life circumstances following the release from jail mediate the effects of incarceration as offenders pursue legitimate versus illegitimate forms of employment?**

*Introduction*

Most participants in this study experienced a loss of positive social capital in the labor market. The loss of positive social capital affected participants' employment options, particularly in the legitimate labor market where the stigma of a criminal record was often viewed as undesirable by employers. While an increase in additional negative social capital did not occur as expected, participants' post-release employment experiences were affected by life circumstances. This study found that positive and negative social capital was mediated by life circumstances, such as family relationships, peer relationships, and neighborhoods, which affected the process of obtaining legitimate versus illegitimate forms of employment.

*Family relationships*

The majority of participants returned home to the family members they lived with prior to incarceration. In both the pre-release and post-release interviews, participants indicated that the majority of support they received came from family members. For these participants, family support was critical, particularly once participants returned home. Although some participants returned to homes with high levels of family tension, they were still afforded a place to live and provided with some form of financial support. Considering these participants were unable to sustain themselves independently, family support was critical to the reentry process. Family experiences prior to and following the release from jail played a significant role in the employment process as some participants

were motivated to find legitimate work while others were motivated to make money through illegitimate means.

### Pre-release expectations

During pre-release interviews, participants were asked about the strength of their family relationships and the expectations they held of family members as they neared release. While some participants reported strong family relationships, others expressed concern for the family situations they would return to after incarceration. One participant, Earl, explained how strong his relationship was with his family before and during incarceration:

My family visits me regularly here [in jail]. At first, I didn't want them to visit because I didn't want them to see my like this. But they told me they would support me when I first got sentenced and they have. I feel bad about disappointing them because we are all pretty close but they have been there. I know they will help me when I get out. I'm planning on finding a job though so I don't have to depend on them.

Walter explained a similar relationship with his family members:

I come from a big family where we all support each other. My family calls and visits a lot. We don't have much money but we always work together. I know they will be there for me after I'm done with jail.

James had a particularly close relationship with his mother and sister. He explained:

My mom and sister are my everything. They are the only people I really care about disappointing. I look out for my sister so I feel guilty getting locked up since I can't look out for her from in here. My mom and sister visit me in here though so I can keep up with what's going on. They always have my back.

For some participants, returning home was especially stressful due to tense family relationships. Steve explained his concern about returning home to his mother's house:

I do not get along with my mom at all! She is always on my case about something. I wish I could go somewhere else when I get out of here but I don't have my stuff set up yet. I need a job, need to save some money, and then be out. We were always fighting before I got locked up. I doubt that will change when I get out of here since we do speak sometimes and most of the time, she's yelling. It'll never change.

Greg also expressed how stressful his relationship was with his mother prior to incarceration:

My mom has never supported me. I mean, she works from time to time so she pays the bills but I hear all these guys talk about how much their family helps them and I'm like, I gotta help myself. I don't know why we don't get along but we never have. She works my nerves and I can't wait to get out her house. It's going to be hell going back there.

Most participants had realistic expectations of their family relationships post-release. Given the nature of these relationships prior to incarceration, some participants returned home to family members who maintained strong levels of support after providing consistent support prior to and during incarceration. Others returned home to tense family situations which existed prior to incarceration and continued after participants were released.

#### Post-release experiences

Once participants returned home, family relationships affected the relationship between positive and negative social capital. Family relationships were a dominant factor in the motivation to desist from crime and seek either legitimate or illegitimate employment. Earl explained how appreciative he was of the family support provided to him following his release. His family played a strong role in his decision to desist from crime and seek legitimate employment. He explained:

My family is really supportive. Even though I have a job now and I don't need their money, they are always asking me what I need. I think they're

worried I will go back to jail so they want to do everything they can for me. A lot of people don't have that. I'm grateful.

Ken, who indicated a close relationship with both his mother and siblings, explained how their support helped him secure legitimate employment:

My mother is my rock! I have done a lot of stupid stuff and she still supports me. I am in a position now where I just want to help her and take care of her like she takes care of me. Plus, I want to be a better role model to my brothers and sister. I don't want them going down the same path I did. My dad was never around so I wanna set a different tone in my family. We are all very close. That's why I am working hard at this little job, even though I don't really want to be working here forever. I had to find something better than selling drugs. I owe that to my family.

Walter explained how the strength of his family support system affected his decision to desist from crime:

They didn't treat me any differently when I came back from jail. If anything, they wanted to help me more. I always had a place to stay. I got a job quickly because we're Hispanic...we work!

While positive family support was a dominant factor among participants who had desisted from criminal activity and secured legitimate employment at the time of the post-release interview, some participants experienced significant challenges in the labor market despite having strong family relationships. These participants identified the strength of their family relationships but were utilizing illegitimate means to make money due to legitimate employment being inaccessible at the time of their release. Randy, whose mom provided a wealth of support following his release, explained:

My mom is really supportive but it's hard to get a job with my record. I have a felony charge, two in fact. My girl has been helping me with money so I'm good for now. I do my thing on the side too. My mom knows about it and she wants me to stop but she doesn't complain when I bring food home. It's complicated. I know my family wants me to do the

right thing but they're not really stopping me from doing the wrong thing either. I just don't have many legal options out here.

Some participants returned home to family relationships with high levels of tension. These relationships affected participants' pathways towards desistance as most lacked family support and were unable to secure legitimate employment. Instead, these participants utilized illegitimate means to make money after their release. Steve explained how his experiences with his mother affected his post-release experiences:

I knew I would have to go back to my mom's house once I left jail but it was the last place I wanted to go to. We spoke when I was locked up but she was always telling me how I messed up so I didn't want to hear all that when I went back home. But I didn't have anywhere else to go. Once I got out, all she ever says is how I'm a criminal now and won't get anywhere in life. She tells everyone I was locked up. I can't get away from it.

When probed on how the relationship with his mother affected his employment search, Steve explained:

I can't even look for work that much living at home. We don't have the internet so I sometimes take the bus to the library. But my mom is always on my case about something so I don't get much time to look for work. I don't even have clothes to go on interviews so when I know that's important to a job, I don't apply. Plus, I'm always stressed at home. I get money though, one way or another.

Greg also explained how his family environment affected his decision to seek illegitimate employment:

I can't stand living with my mom. She is always on my case and I get out of the house every opportunity I can when she is there. We have never really had a good relationship but since I came home, it's worse. She can't tell me what to do. I'm an adult so I am gonna do what I want. She hates my friends, when I'm not home, everything! But she don't give me no money or anything so I make my own money in the streets. I make good money and do what I want.

Tarone explained some of the challenges within his family structure which affected his search for legitimate employment:

Of course I want my own place but I do what I want here like always. My parents can't tell me anything. My mom smokes weed so who is she to tell me to stop doing what I do?

Similar to Steve and Greg, returning home for Joseph was an especially stressful situation. However, despite the tension, Joseph was able to secure legitimate employment shortly after his release from jail. He explains how his return home affected his decision to desist from criminal activity and, in this rare case, achieve specific deterrence:

I hate being home. I thought I'd have my own place by now but things are going slower than I thought. My mom and I fight a lot. She wants me to go back to selling dope because I was bringing in money. But I got this job and I'm on probation so I don't want to go back. My job don't pay much, some shoe store stocking boxes, but I don't mind it right now. I'm trying to save money and get out of here. But I feel like everyone expects me to go back to slingin' and I ain't trying to do that no more.

Jose, who was unemployed but had desisted from criminal activity at the time of the post-release interview, explained the changes that had occurred within his family structure. Although not a prevalent theme among participants' responses, Jose's return home displayed a loss of family social capital:

My life sucks right now. My family moved to a decent neighborhood because they said they were tired of me and my brother getting in trouble. So when I came out, I went back to live with them and they treat me like an outsider now. Even my neighbors act funny when I come outside because I guess I'm some hard-core criminal now. I did rob people but I'm trying to change. I feel like I've changed but no one believes me. It pisses me off though because my own family has turned against me.

Jose's criminal experiences created shame within his family as well as in his neighborhood. A Hispanic youth, his family experiences are consistent with the literature

outlining strong family values and expectations among Hispanic families (Becker et al., 2014; Bersani & DiPietro, 2014). He later explains how his family experiences affected his decision to desist from crime:

In my family, it's a disgrace to not work and support your family. I didn't realize my family would look at me like this but in a way, I understand. I let them down and now they are trying to punish me. I stopped robbing people but I guess I have to prove it to them. Once I get a job, maybe things will change. For now, I get money from friends because I don't want to keep making my family ashamed.

With a variety of different family experiences, this study found that high levels of positive social capital within family relationships significantly affected participants' pathways towards desistance and the decision to seek legitimate employment.

Participants with high levels of negative social capital within family relationships were less likely to desist from crime and more likely to engage in illegitimate forms of employment. While family relationships were a dominant factor in the relationship between positive and negative social capital, participants' employment options were also affected by the perceptions and experiences within their peer groups.

#### *Peer relationships*

This study found that peer relationships affected the relationship between positive and negative social capital prior to and following the release from jail. Taking into account the high-risks of criminal activity associated with young offenders, peer perceptions and interactions were significant factors in participants' employment decisions. In both pre-release and post-release interviews, participants explained how peer relationships affected their employment experiences.

### Pre-release expectations

During pre-release interviews, participants were asked to describe their peer groups and explain how experiences with peers would affect their employment decisions. For some participants, peer groups shaped the pathway towards persistence in criminal activity. Greg explained his relationships with peers prior to his release:

I know a lot of people who have been locked up so it's not a big deal to me or my boys. They don't make me do anything I don't want to do but I do get in a lot of shit when I'm with them. I just have to keep my distance a little when I get out so I don't get in more trouble.

When asked how likely it was to keep his distance from his peers, Greg expanded on his response:

Probably not that likely. I see them boys every day. I can't avoid them when I get out. They sell dope and stuff so I'm sure I will be around it. I just don't plan on getting in trouble anymore.

Ian explained how his peers would most likely not be affected by his time in jail.

My friends are used to people coming in and out of jail. Most of them have been in and out themselves. I don't plan to stop hanging out with them. I know that's who I will spend my time with when I'm out but it doesn't mean I'm coming back here.

Larry explained how his peer group had affected his expectations as he neared release.

Even before I got locked up, I noticed some of my boys acting funny. Now that I'm in here, no one even checks in or visits me. From what I heard, my boys don't even appreciate what I did for them. They could be the ones in here, not me. I definitely ain't rockin' with them when I get out.

Most participants did not expect incarceration to affect their peer relationships nor did they expect their peer relationships to increase their risks of recidivism. These beliefs were often due to the normalization of criminal activity among participants and their

peers. However, the study's findings show that peers, along with other life circumstances such as family relationships and neighborhoods resulted in significant effects on post-release employment experiences.

### Post-release experiences

While family relationships were a dominant factor in the motivation to desist from crime, peer relationships also affected the levels of positive and negative social capital among participants. Some participants found high levels of positive social capital within their peer groups, particularly when seeking legitimate employment.

Earl explained how he utilized his personal connections to obtain employment:

I was a little worried about getting a job but my friend told me about this restaurant that was hiring. They took a chance on me. It's hard work because I mostly clean tables but it's fast money so it's cool. It keeps me out of trouble so I'm not stealing cars anymore.

Walter also explained how he obtained employment through the help of a friend:

My friend, who helped me get the job, really held me down. Looking back, I don't think I would be working now if it wasn't for him. Some of my friends don't have people who can help them get work because they out there committing crimes too. I'm happy my friend looked out for me.

James, who did not end up securing employment at the time of the post-release interview, explained how he was still able to utilize positive social capital within his social circle:

I had a friend whose mom worked in an auto repair office. She got me an interview there so I went in to fill out the application. When I filling it out, someone came out and asked me how often I used the computer. I told them I used it when I could but I don't have one at home. She started asking me all these things about programs and stuff which I didn't know. Then she said I should learn those things and then apply because I wouldn't be qualified without them. It discouraged me because when would I learn those things? I don't have a computer and I don't even know what those programs are. I went back to hustling after that.

Similar to James, Larry had not secured permanent employment at the time of the post-release interview but he was also able to utilize positive social capital in his employment search:

Most of my boys turned on me but I got one friend who has a job doing construction so I kept asking him to get me in. He said he would talk to his boss when I got out and he did. It took some time but I work off and on there and it's cool. The money isn't always steady but when they call me in, I get a ride from my boy and make some money. He's a good dude, my boy.

Peer relationships played an important role in the employment process as some participants were able to utilize peers as a form of positive social capital when seeking legitimate employment. For other participants, peer relationships increased negative social capital by presenting participants with illegitimate employment opportunities and reducing the motivation to desist from crime. Ed explained how his peers affected his employment search:

It's hard out there to get a legit job. Seriously, no one wants to hire no kid with a record when these rich ass kids walk up in there and apply for the same jobs. They always get them anyway. My friends were like, why you wanna work at the mall 5 days a week when you can work during the weekends making twice as much? It makes more sense.

Positive and negative social capital was significantly affected by peer relationships. While this was expected among this age group, other life circumstances, such as the type of neighborhood participants returned to, also affected post-release employment experiences. This study found that most participants returned to the same neighborhoods they resided in prior to incarceration which likely played a role in their initial involvement in criminal activity.

### *Neighborhoods*

The majority of participants in this study returned to neighborhoods with high levels of disadvantage. Many of these participants already had high levels of negative social capital within their neighborhoods prior to release. Returning to these disadvantaged neighborhoods affected participants' pathways towards or away from desistance. Most participants reported their neighborhoods presented significant challenges to obtaining legitimate employment.

#### Pre-release expectations

During pre-release interviews, participants were asked to describe the neighborhoods they lived in and explain how those neighborhoods may have affected their involvement in criminal activity. Several participants reported that limited resources, high crime rates, and unemployment were common characteristics in their communities. Thomas explained the disadvantages in his neighborhood:

Crime is so normal in my hood, it's not funny. I knew so many people who got in trouble since I was like, 5 years old. But when I look around, what else would they do? People I know are struggling. One week they're working, the next week, they're begging. We definitely do not have money in our hood unless it's from robbing someone or drugs.

Adam explained how some of the main characteristics in his neighborhood:

Let's just say this: I know a lot of broke folks! Growing up, we always say people hustlin' because that's how you make a buck. My mom doesn't read well and can't drive so we lived off of checks. My neighborhood is full of people waiting in line on Fridays to cash a check so they can pay some bills and smoke some weed. It's sad because we live in the richest county and people wouldn't even know how poor we are.

Tarone explained how his neighborhood was the cause of his criminal involvement:

I know I can't blame my actions on anything else but I know if I had more opportunities, I would not be sitting in jail right now. Crime occurs on my doorstep every day! I can't escape it. Most of my neighbors are criminals or disabled and living off a check. I think the government needs poor people and that's my neighborhood. Most of us never had a chance to begin with. I don't blame people for taking matters into their own hands.

While disadvantages within neighborhoods were prevalent among participants, most agreed that the combination of life circumstances with high levels of negative social capital increased their risk of criminal involvement compared to those with high levels of positive social capital within family relationships, peer relationships, and neighborhoods.

Steve explained how cumulative disadvantages affected his choices in life:

In a perfect world, I would have been born into a safe neighborhood with both parents working and living the American dream. Instead, my dad ain't in the picture, my neighborhood is filled with criminals, and my friends aren't doing anything different from me. I think we are screwed on all levels, not just because we're young or black or poor. It's everything so most of us aren't motivated because who can overcome that?

Pre-release interviews show how aware participants were of the effects of life circumstances on their criminal involvement. They identified factors within their neighborhoods with high levels of negative social capital which remained consistent after their release from incarceration. Many returned to the same neighborhoods with similar experiences prior to release. In a few cases, participants were able to overcome some of the disadvantages in their neighborhoods by obtaining legitimate employment. However, for the majority of participants, this does not occur.

#### Post-release experiences

Post-release interviews showed neighborhoods playing a strong role in initial involvement in crime, and most likely a continuing significant factor in the persistence of criminal activity. Most participants returned to the same neighborhoods they resided in

prior to incarceration. While a small number of participants secured legitimate employment, the disadvantages prevalent in their neighborhoods created additional challenges to securing this type of employment. Joseph explained his post-release experiences in his neighborhood:

Returning home has been tough. I managed to get a job at this shoe store but I see people still hustlin' right in front of me. It seems like my neighborhood only knows how to make money that way. Yeah, I think about going back to that, especially with my mom in my ear, but I can't go back to jail. I got lucky getting this job when most people around me are selling drugs. I got bigger plans so I can't go back to what I see around me.

Some participants explained why they returned to prior criminal behavior due to the disadvantages in their neighborhoods. Brad explained how he returned to selling drugs:

It's what I know. Jail didn't suddenly present new opportunities once I returned home. I do what I need to do to make money and take of me and my family. I got a baby but I don't see her much because my baby mama love drama! But when she need money, I gotta produce!

Randy explained similar reasons for returning to the drug market. He explained:

I have a kid to support so being unemployed is not an option for me. My baby moms don't like it but she needs the money so she supports me with what I need to do. I dabble with some harder stuff to make more money. It's all over my neighborhood anyway. Might as well make money.

Tarone expanded further on the limited opportunities in his neighborhood and the effects incarceration had on his social circles which influenced his return to criminal activity. Although enhanced street capital after incarceration did not occur for most participants, Tarone's case was an exception. He stated:

I tried looking for a job but all around me, people are making money on the streets. It's what I know and I do it well. I'm not saying I'm going to do this forever but people started reaching out to me when I got home

because they got mad respect for me now. Being locked up makes people around here look up to you. I'm not planning on going back but I like the respect it gave me. I'm probably not leaving my neighborhood anytime soon.

The effects of neighborhoods were a significant factor in seeking legitimate versus illegitimate employment. Participants expressed concern over the disadvantages prevalent in their neighborhoods and were able to explain how those disadvantages continued to affect their employment prospects after incarceration. Most participants were aware of their neighborhood deficiencies but many did not feel they had the tools or resources to overcome these disadvantages. Combined with other life circumstances, neighborhoods were often viewed as a major factor in the pathways towards or away from desistance.

### *Conclusion*

While most participants in this study did not experience significant enhancements in negative social capital, many of their post-release employment experiences were affected by life circumstances. These life circumstances, family relationships, peer relationships, and neighborhoods, significantly affected the process of obtaining legitimate employment. Most of the participants in this study were unable to secure legitimate employment and often returned to the type of criminal activity they were involved in prior to incarceration. These participants who had not desisted from criminal behavior also showed delayed progress in overall psychosocial maturity levels. These levels are explored further in the final research question of this study.

**Research Question #3: How are reentry experiences shaped by the developmental processes characteristic of this particular age group?**

*Introduction*

The transition into adulthood is a significant period in an individual's life. For most individuals, this transition occurs during the late teenage years and early twenties. It is often the beginning of the pathway towards self-sufficiency, self-definition and self-governance. However, incarceration often delays this transition due to the removal of individuals from families, the labor market, and the community. While we understand incarceration affects an individual's transition into adulthood, there is a significant lack of knowledge about what those effects are and why incarceration may affect different people in different ways. With this final research question, I expected to find significant levels of immaturity among young adult offenders due to deficiencies in maturity levels. It was my expectation that several factors such as stigma, life circumstances, and age, would greatly delay the transition into an independent and self-sufficient lifestyle, therefore affecting participants' success of reintegration. While I did not find significant changes in maturity levels among participants who had not desisted from crime, I did find a small group of participants who experienced changes in maturity levels and had reported desistance from crime after incarceration.

*Pre-release expectations*

During the pre-release interviews, participants were asked several questions pertaining to their perceptions of their criminal involvement and recent incarceration. These questions focused on how they viewed themselves and how they believed others would view them after their release. The purpose of these questions was to compare

participants' pre-release perceptions with participants' post-release perceptions, specifically looking for changes in maturity levels. During pre-release interviews, the majority of participants reported a change in their perceptions due to the incarceration experience. While incarcerated, Ken explained how his perceptions had changed since he entered jail:

I really did some dumb stuff in the past. Being locked up made me look at myself and see what I was doing to my mom and sister. They are the ones who suffer because they are always sad and crying when they visit me. Seeing how this affects people I care about is really hitting me. I can't do this no more.

Brad explained how jail made him change his views on criminal activity:

This is the second time I've been locked up. The first time was so short that I was like, okay, it's a not a big deal. But this time, I'm in here for almost a year and I know I've changed since I got here. I've learned my lesson because I definitely don't want to come back. I can't wait to get out and do things differently.

Greg also explained how his perceptions had changed since being incarcerated:

There is no way I am coming back to jail! This is my third time! I get it now. No more playing around because I'm older now and can see what I need to do. I've learned a lot here so it's time to make those changes. Some of the programs I was in helped me see that.

Ian expanded on the changes he planned to make after incarceration:

I don't think it will be that hard. Even though I can't get away from the people I know, no one makes me do anything I don't want to do. Just because I hang out with some people doesn't mean I'll go back to how it was. I don't have any plans to do that.

During the pre-release interviews, most participants reported some form of change in their perceptions. Participants often reported that jail allowed them to reflect on their lifestyles and understand the consequences of their actions. For most participants, they were willing to share their plans for desistance after incarceration. While a few

participants indicated that they would still engage in criminal activity after release, these participants still reported a change in their maturity levels due to the incarceration experience. This study found that post-release experiences significantly differed from pre-release expectations.

### *Post-release experiences*

Results from the post-release interviews show much heterogeneity in the effects of incarceration on maturity levels. While it was my expectation that most participants would not experience a significant change in maturity levels, this study found that some participants' maturity levels were affected by the incarceration experience while others were not affected.

Randy explained how his maturity levels were affected by incarceration:

Look, I know people look at me some type of way. I've been locked up and everyone thinks I'm a murderer or something. I'm not but I have had a violent past. I just realized that I don't have to be that guy anymore. I still have a temper but I'm staying away from people who bring that out in me. I'm growing up but it's gonna take some time. Way more time than I thought when I was in jail.

Ed also explained how incarceration affected his maturity level:

I think I'm mature but I got a ways to go. Since I've been back, I do kick it with the same friends but I'm not gonna repeat my mistakes. I'm not gonna get caught this time. Looking for a job ain't easy. No one wants to hire someone like me. So, what am I supposed to do? My boys held me down and gave me money when I got back. I owe it to them to stick in the game a little longer and do my thing.

Brad, who indicated his maturity levels had changed since incarceration, shared his post-release experiences:

I think I did learn a thing or two from jail but to be honest, coming back out was not what I expected. I tried getting a job at Target but once that

fell through, I went back to selling. I doubt I'm going back to jail though, but this is what works right now. I have time to make changes so I'm not worried.

Greg explained how his outlook had changed between his period of incarceration and release from jail:

Yeah, I had a lot of plans when I was in jail. You have all the time in the world to make plans there. But once you come out, the real world is nothing like you thought it was when you were locked up. I don't have a job so I have to make money somewhere. My friends don't control me but I'm not gonna stop hanging with them because they sell drugs and rob people. I don't have to do any of those things. If I do, it's because I want to. This is just my life. Probably not gonna change.

This study found that while participants reported changes in their maturity levels while incarcerated, returning home proved to be quite challenging for most participants seeking a self-sufficient lifestyle. While most participants had not experienced significant changes in maturity levels, a small group participants reported changes in maturity levels and were more likely to secure legitimate employment after their release.

### *Conclusion*

Most participants returned home to the same households they resided in prior to incarceration. Some participants experienced high levels of positive social capital from family relationships while others experienced high levels of negative social capital from family relationships. Participants were also affected by peers and the availability of post-release resources. The varying effects of positive and negative social capital explain why some participants experienced changes in their maturity levels while other participants did not experience these changes. The formation of an adult identity and obtaining psychosocial maturity are essential to the process of transitioning into adulthood. While this population had already experienced significant delays in achieving an adult identity

and obtaining psychosocial maturity, this study showed that the transition into adulthood was further marked by the incarceration experience causing more significant delays in maturation and the ability to desist from crime.

## **Conclusion**

The findings in this study enlarge our understanding of actual reentry experiences for young adult offenders and explain why incarceration has different effects on different individuals. The three research questions identified the gaps in criminological literature and enabled me to thoroughly address the effects of a criminal record in neighborhoods and labor markets, the effects of positive and negative social capital, the effects of life circumstances on employment opportunities, and the effects of transitioning into adulthood on reentry experiences.

The first research question enlarged our understanding of the effects of stigma, as well as positive and negative social capital in neighborhoods and in the labor market. As expected, stigma created a loss of positive social capital in the labor market. However, there was no increase in additional negative social capital in neighborhoods, as initially expected. The second research question examined various life circumstances such as family relationships, peer relationships, and neighborhoods as significant factors in participants' pathways towards or away from legitimate employment. The third and final research question examined the effects of transitioning into adulthood on young adult offenders' reentry experiences.

It was my expectation that participants would experience a loss of positive social capital and gain additional negative social capital due to the incarceration experience. Contrary to my initial expectation, this study did not find increases in negative social

capital through enhancements in criminal enterprise. Rather, most participants reported little to no change in criminal enterprise once released from jail. I also expected participants to display high levels of immaturity based on their age and delays into adulthood. However, there were several cases where participants' maturity levels were positively affected by the incarceration experience. The unanticipated results of negative social capital and the heterogeneity of maturation experiences are further analyzed in Chapter 5 as an attempt to identify the mechanisms involved in the reentry process for young adult offenders and understand why incarceration has different effects on different individuals.

## **CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 4 presented the results for each research question based on pre-release expectations and post-release experiences. These findings enlarge our understanding of the effects of incarceration and the reentry experiences for young adult offenders. These findings addressed the impact a criminal record had on neighborhood and labor market experiences, the roles of positive and negative social capital, the effects of life circumstances on the process of obtaining legitimate versus illegitimate employment, and the effects of developmental processes on post-release experiences. While these findings addressed the foundational questions in the study, there were some unanticipated findings related to positive and negative social capital in the first research question. These findings were contrary to the initial expectation that the incarceration experience would increase negative social capital among participants. This study found that while most participants experienced the loss of positive social capital due to the incarceration experience, very few participants experienced an increase in additional negative social capital. This chapter presents further analysis and interpretation on the unanticipated findings in this study, as well as the underlying mechanisms involved in the reentry process which help us understand why incarceration has different effects on different individuals.

### **Effects of Incarceration**

According to Sampson and Laub (2003a), the incarceration experience yields vastly different effects on different people throughout the life cycle. For these young men, their age group reflects a period in the life cycle where the decline in crime is most prevalent. As men transition into adulthood and increase in age, desistance literature has

shown the relationship of age to criminal activity thus having an inverse effect in which crime decreases over time. According to Moffitt (1993; 1994), most offenders' trajectories will result in "adolescent-limited" offending; they will eventually age out of crime as they mature into adulthood. However, for other offenders, they will persist in offending throughout the life course, therefore falling into the category of "life-course-persistent" offending.

While these categories aid in our distinction between different types of offenders, it is often difficult to predict in advance who will be deterred and by what mechanisms in terms of actual desistance from crime (Sampson & Laub, 2003). This study found that there were significant experiences following the release from jail that shaped the paths of young men towards or away from desistance. These experiences differed for different groups of participants and played a critical role in shaping how incarceration has one type of effect for some, the opposite effect for others, and in some cases, no effect at all.

Participants in this study experienced a variety of effects from jail once they returned home. These effects included the following possibilities: incarceration resulting in specific deterrence, incarceration resulting in a decrease in positive social capital, or incarceration resulting in little to no effect on participants. This study found that all three effects occurred in this sample, but for different kinds of individuals. In the upcoming analysis, the type of effect will be explained as it relates to the type of individual experiencing the effect. Notably, the majority of study participants indicated little to no specific deterrent effects from incarceration. For those who did indicate a motivation to desist from crime due to the jail experience, there was also an identification of significant

mechanisms in combination with the jail experience that shaped their desire to move away from criminal activity.

These results present a richer understanding of the experiences following young adult offenders after they return home from jail. While recent literature supports the theory that incarceration does not, in fact, prevent reoffending (National Research Council, 2014), it also notes the importance of understanding what other mechanisms are present in an offender's life once released from incarceration (Nagin et al., 2009). This study explored some of those mechanisms and utilized conjunctural analysis (Ragin, 1987) to identify how the interactions of significant factors led study participants towards desistance or persistence in criminal activity. In order to better understand these interactions, it is critical to reaffirm our understanding of the empirical and theoretical coverage of overall deterrent effects of incarceration.

In our most basic understanding of the goals of punishment, the purpose of incarceration is to deter criminal activity. Specific deterrence, most likely considered the goal in the sentencing of young offenders, is intended to subject individuals to a punishment so undesirable that they would further be deterred from committing future crimes. According to Becker (1968), imprisonment is the cost of criminal offending. The expectation behind harsh punishments is that individuals weigh the costs and benefits of criminal activity before making a conscious decision to commit a crime. Nagin et al., (2009) further explain that "if the custodial sanction is perceived to be more costly than a noncustodial sanction, then the imprisonment sanction will exert a greater deterrent effect" (p. 124). General deterrence would also be achieved as potential offenders would not want to experience a similar fate of punishment (Durham, 1994; Paternoster &

Piquero, 1995). In theory, this concept has been widely accepted despite significant findings which contradict these predicted outcomes. Several empirical studies have shown that incarceration does not yield the deterrent effects anticipated by the public (Nagin et al., 2009; Spohn & Holleran, 2002; National Research Council, 2014). Rather, incarceration may have little to no effect on an individual depending on relatively unknown underlying mechanisms present in the lives of young men returning home from incarceration. This study, however, was founded on a contrary and alternative hypothesis to this argument indicating that incarceration would lead to an increase in negative social capital among participants.

The expectation in this study was that incarceration would affect participants by stripping them of positive social capital and enhancing their criminal networks through the increase of negative social capital found within the jail environment. Based on empirical studies focusing on youth and the influence of peer networks (Anderson, 1999; Gifford-Smith et al., 2005; Kreager, 2007) the research questions in this study were developed to enhance our level of understanding of incarceration experiences and its effects on young offenders once released from jail. The expectation that young offenders would return home more criminally advanced than when they entered jail was based on the perspective of jail being a “school of crime” particularly for young men transitioning into adulthood in search of forming an adult identity. Several studies have identified correctional facilities as a criminal learning environment (Clemmer, 1940; Reynolds, 2013; Rose & Clear, 1998; Sykes, 1958; Wacquant, 2001). While the findings in this study support the research on the loss of social capital due to the incarceration

experience, this study found no increase in additional negative social capital as initially expected.

This study found that most participants experienced a loss of positive social capital as expected; however, the expectation that incarceration would increase negative social capital was not found among most participants in this study. For some participants, the loss of positive social capital due to the incarceration experience was profound. These participants were able to grasp the effects jail would have on their life-course outcomes early in their incarceration and appeared much more prepared for the challenges facing them once they returned home. These participants indicated a greater motivation to desist from crime and sought avenues, such as securing legitimate employment, to support this motivation. For other participants, the loss of positive social capital due to the jail experience had a significant impact on their reentry experiences, yet these individuals were unable to secure legitimate employment at the time of the post-release interview. These participants indicated a motivation or possible motivation to desist from criminal activity if legitimate employment was secured. The remaining participants in the study were the least affected by the jail experience. These participants persisted in criminal activity and were unable or unwilling to secure legitimate employment. While these men also experienced the loss of positive social capital due to incarceration, the exposure to advanced criminal networks through increased negative social capital was not found as initially expected.

In order to explain the unanticipated results, further exploration of this population was merited. While post-release experiences indicated a variety of reasons for not meeting the initial expectation in this study, such as prior criminal involvement,

normalization of criminal behavior, and peer perceptions, more comprehensive analysis of the data produced a detailed explanation as to why incarceration did not enhance criminal enterprise among participants. First, the developmental experiences occurring simultaneously within this population as they transitioned from jail to the community were particularly relevant to the understanding of the unanticipated results (Mears & Travis, 2004a; 2004b; Osgood et al., 2005). Changes in life circumstances affected participants in different ways and at different times in the life course. While these men were in the age group where the process of “aging out” was likely to occur, this process could not be predicted as to for whom and when this would occur for; this process was dependent on what other mechanisms were present in the participant’s life at the moment (Nagin et al., 2009; Sampson & Laub, 2003). In previous empirical studies, these mechanisms were rarely identified. This study was able to fill the gap in our understanding of the experiences affecting the motivation and ability to desist for these participants once released from jail by identifying underlying mechanisms present or absent in their lives.

Another explanation for the unanticipated results in this study was the period of incarceration time served among participants. This study explored the effects of jail rather than prison on young males. The purpose of this selected type of correctional facility was to enlarge our understanding of short-term effects from shorter periods of incarceration (Barbee, 2010; Freudenberg, Moseley, Labriola, Daniels, & Murrill, 2005; 2007; White et al., 2008). Given the young age of these men, the majority of the crimes committed were crimes that would likely place them in jail, rather than prison. It was critical to assess these experiences simultaneously during the transition into adulthood.

While some participants had been convicted for violent crimes, their age and maturity levels most likely played a role in the sentencing process which placed them in jail rather than prison. It was evident that most participants were surrounded by less serious offenders in jail compared to the offenders they would have been exposed to had they been sentenced to prison. The environment itself may have had a significant impact on the lack of gaining criminal enterprise in jail.

Lastly, to better understand the unanticipated results in this study, the criminal background and behavior of participants were examined. While this study included a variety of offenders such as violent, property, and drug offenders, the youthful age of participants precluded most from having extensive criminal background records. According to Nagin et al. (2009), “involvement in crime is highly age dependent.” Although most participants had had prior involvement in the juvenile justice or criminal justice system, their prior criminal background did not meet the profile of a serious felony offender; some of their crimes were violent in nature but their backgrounds were mostly lower-level crimes that would have most likely resulted in jail time over prison time. Although some of the current crimes committed yielded the possibility of prison, their age and maturity level most likely influenced the sentencing options in favor of jail.

These possible explanations present a clearer understanding of the unanticipated findings in this study. Although the expectation of gaining additional negative social capital from the incarceration experience was not found, this study did uncover underlying mechanisms which explained how jail affected participants returning home from jail. The purpose of this study, to concentrate on young offenders between the ages of 18 and 24 and take on the gaps in the literature to enlarge our understanding of how

this population is affected by incarceration, was achieved as emergent categories were identified through inductive analyses which explored the interaction of significant factors leading participants towards or away from desistance.

While the majority of study participants did not indicate a motivation to desist from crime following the release from jail, there were a small number of participants who did indicate a motivation to desist. For those acquiring this motivation, an even smaller number of participants were able to achieve actual desistance at the time of the post-release interview. The participants were identified as falling into one of the three groups: 1) motivated to desist with work, 2) motivated to desist without work, and 3) persistence without motivation to desist. It is important to note that since this study explored short-term effects following the release from jail, the long-term effects of desistance or persistence could not be determined. These outcomes were used to capture the early reentry experiences of participants rather than the long-term effects. This is particularly significant as experiences and decisions made shortly after release likely affected the risk of reoffending for these men. As these groups were further explored, several factors were identified as playing a strong role in the reentry process. The three groups of participants were differentiated by the following factors present or absent in their experiences following release:

- 1) Strong family bonds within immediate family structure
- 2) Commitment to fatherhood role in new family structures
- 3) Prior work experience
- 4) Personal and professional connections to work
- 5) Specific deterrent effects of the jail experience

- 6) Changes in peer relationships
- 7) Maturity levels focusing on self-sufficiency, self-definition, and self-governance.

In the table below, these factors are illustrated as they pertain to the three groups of study participants: those who achieved desistance and were employed at the time of the post-release interview; those who were motivated to desist but were unable to secure employment at the time of the post-release interview; and those who had not secured employment and were not motivated to desist from crime at the time of the post-release interview.

**Table 2: Groups of Study Participants Post-Release**

	<b>Group 1 Desistance w/work</b>	<b>Group 2 Desistance w/o work</b>	<b>Group 3 Persistence w/o work</b>
<b>Factors</b>			
Family bonds	YES	YES	YES & NO
Commitment to fatherhood	YES	YES	NO
Prior work experience	YES	YES	YES
Connections to work	YES	NO	NO
Specific deterrent effects of the jail experience	YES	YES & NO	NO
Changes in peer relationships	YES	YES	NO
Maturity levels	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
	N = 6	N = 3	N = 10

Narrative accounts of experiences prior to, during, and after incarceration led to the categorization of various reentry experiences for each group of participants. The abovementioned factors were carefully assessed through qualitative data analysis of transcribed interviews. First, participants were questioned on the strength of family bonds and how much support they received from family members once released. The majority of participants reported that family members provided a wealth of support; however, some participants also experienced tension within their family structures due to a variety of causes including their period of incarceration. Based on the interview responses, strong family bonds and support was assessed as either being present (YES) or absent (NO) in the participant's life. In Group 3, some participants received strong family support while others experienced significant tensions; this resulted in both the presence and absence of family bonds.

Second, if a participant reported he was a father, the assessment of being committed to the role of fatherhood was based on whether the participant reported involvement in the life of his child(ren). The commitment to the role of fatherhood was assessed as either being present (YES) or absent (NO). Third, participants were questioned on prior legitimate work experience. If a participant reported he had been employed at some point prior to incarceration, the assessment was made as being present (YES); likewise, if he had not been employed prior to incarceration, the assessment was made as being absent (NO). Fourth, participants were questioned about the personal and professional contacts they had in the labor market. If a participant had these contacts and utilized them in order to obtain legitimate employment after release, the assessment of this factor was made as being present (YES). If participants did not have or utilize these

contacts, this factor was assessed as being absent (NO). Fifth, participants were questioned on whether or not they considered jail to have had a specific deterrent effect on their behavior after release. The responses received were assessed as the deterrent effect either being present (YES) or absent (NO). In Group 2, both the presence and absence of specific deterrent effects of the jail experience were found among participants. Sixth, participants were questioned on whether or not they made changes to their peer relationships and social circles following the release from jail. If a participant reported that they did make these changes, this was assessed as a present factor (YES); similarly, if they had not made these changes, this was assessed as an absent factor (NO).

The last factor assessed in the analysis process was maturity levels. This factor involved the most analysis in terms of assessment. Participants were questioned about a variety of experiences that were simultaneously capturing the level of maturity behind their responses. Maturity was assessed as either being advanced (high), moderate (medium), or delayed (low). The level of legitimately seeking self-sufficiency, self-definition, and self-governance which are all “capacities foundational to achieving psychosocial maturity and developed in part via youths’ normative experiences and interactions in the free world” (Arditti & Parkman, 2011, p. 206) were used to determine whether a participant’s maturity level was categorized as either high, medium, or low.

Participants who were categorized as having advanced maturity levels acknowledged their behaviors as deviant, displayed a motivation to desist, and were able to achieve desistance at the time of the post-release interview. Participants who were categorized as having moderate maturity levels acknowledged their behaviors as deviant, displayed a motivation to desist or possible motivation to desist, and were either currently

desisting or indicated a possibility of future desistance. Lastly, participants who were categorized as having delayed maturity levels typically considered their age group to be a period of transition where previous and current behaviors would be overlooked with time. These participants did not display an awareness of the consequences following incarceration. The acknowledgement of deviant behavior was not as evident among this group; most were not motivated to desist nor had they desisted from criminal activity.

The analysis identifies how various factors do or do not occur together in the data and, beyond that, how these factors interact with one another in mechanisms leading to desistance from or persistence in criminal activity. Utilizing a methodological approach focusing on the conjuncture of factors (Ragin 1987), this study was able to show how certain factors fit together in order to identify those specific mechanisms and present a thorough account of three distinct groups of effects of incarceration. The first group, identified as the *combination effect* group, included the presence of all of the illustrated factors interacting with one another after the participant returned home from jail. The second group, identified as the *surprise effect* group, included the interaction of most of the illustrated factors with the exception of connections to work, specific deterrent effects of the jail experience, and advanced levels of maturity. The third group, identified as the *no effect* group, included the least amount of illustrated factors interacting together. Some of the participants in this group returned home to supportive family members and most had had prior work experience; however, the interaction of these limited factors did little to create a motivation to desist from criminal behavior. As the analysis shows, the conjuncture of factors was critical in categorizing the effects of incarceration on the study participants.

## **Combination Effect**

### *Introduction*

This study identified one group of participants who were motivated to desist from criminal activity and actually achieved desistance following the release from jail. This group consisted of participants who had obtained employment post-release and reported they were actively refraining from criminal activity at the time of the post-release interview. The factors listed in Table 2 were all present for this group of participants. Therefore, reentry experiences for this group were identified as the combination effect group based on all the factors occurring together after the release from jail.

### *Factors*

A significant finding in this study indicated that most of the sample participants employed after release identified jail as a motivation to desist from criminal activity. The experience of being removed from society for a set period of time appeared to be effective in terms of deterring these young men from engaging in future criminal activity. However, the jail experience alone did not result in actual desistance among this population. Rather, a combination of factors played a role in the motivation to desist from crime. The factors affecting the motivation to desist included the following: strong family bonds, commitment to the role of fatherhood, prior work experience, personal connections to work and employers, specific deterrent effects of the jail experience, changes in peer relationships, and advanced levels of maturity during this period of developmental transition into adulthood.

Strong family bonds were present in this group, regardless of some family members' involvement in criminal behavior. Existing research already shows that family

criminality is not as significant in the reentry process as the actual support received from family members following the release from jail (Alltucker, Bullis, Close, & Yovanoff, 2006; Anderson, 1999; Patillo et al., 2004; Sampson & Laub, 1993a; Smith & Thornberry, 1995; Wilson, 1987). The strength of family bonds within this study sample was significant in terms of encouraging desistance from crime. The relationships with family members, for participants in the combination effect group, were often strengthened and validated while the participant was incarcerated; this often occurred through the use of jail visits, phone calls, and letters. For these participants, the level of appreciation for family members appeared to be heightened at the time of post-release. Earl, who obtained employment at a restaurant shortly after his release reflected on the support he had received from his family:

My family would visit and we would talk all the time when I was locked up. I didn't feel as alone in there. Even though I know they were disappointed in me, they still supported me. I saw guys in there that had no one. I know I'm lucky to have my family. That's why I want to make them proud of me. I'm doing my best to stay on the right path now.

As mentioned in chapter 4, this study found this factor particularly present in Hispanic participants' family structures. When compared to African-American participants, Hispanic participants reported higher levels of family support and stronger family bonds due to a cultural expectation of family unity (Becker et al., 2014; Bersani & DiPietro, 2014). Almost all Hispanic participants explained how cultural expectations provided them with a more unified family structure than those of their African-American peers. While high levels of support and strong family bonds were found within African-American participants' families, the cultural expectation of providing this support was

much more evident among Hispanic families. Earl explained how his family treated him after he was incarcerated:

In our community, we always work together. Someone is always helping someone else get a job. Unlike other people, Hispanics will work anywhere! We are good with construction, building things, cleaning, landscaping, anything! I know it's not like that for everyone but our culture is a strong one. My family always stood by me, even when I was doing wrong.

While strong family bonds and support played a significant role in the motivation to desist, the role of fatherhood had an especially significant effect on these young men. This additional responsibility of caring for a child was considered a serious and important role among these participants. For most of these men, their own relationships with their fathers had either been turbulent or non-existent. Many were in search of an experience that enabled them to provide support to their children that they had not personally received themselves. Although some were no longer in intimate relationships with the mother of their child, the turning point of having a child was a critical component in their motivation to desist from crime. Thomas, who obtained employment in a grocery store, shared his motivation to desist from crime.

Once I got my GED, I knew my outlook would change. Having a daughter means I have to be responsible. I can't be one of the 'bum ass' dads who doesn't do anything for their kid. I see that all around me. That won't be me. I'm gonna work and move on up for my family. That's what a man does.

In addition to the strong roles of family and fatherhood, prior work experience and the connections to finding work were significant factors affecting the motivation to desist or persist for participants. Obtaining employment with a criminal record presented several challenges for participants in this study. Reentry literature considers employment

a critical component in the reentry process. Once an individual is able to secure employment following incarceration, the risk of recidivism significantly decreases (Pager, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993b; Western et al., 2001). For these young men, the motivation to secure legitimate employment was driven by their desire to desist from criminal activity. The participants who were able to secure legitimate employment following incarceration had distinct experiences from other participants in the study such that they were able to market their skills to employers by utilizing prior work experience and personal connections to jobs or employers. These personal connections spoke on behalf of the participants' qualifications and credibility. Employers were more likely to overlook the incarceration experience and extend employment if they received a referral from a trusted individual. Walter, who is a mechanic, obtained employment from the help of a friend.

I have a friend who is a mechanic. He wrote me letters when I was in jail and told me I could come work for him when I got out. I wasn't sure if he was telling the truth but I checked him out when I got out and he hired me. I work on cars so I feel like my job actually matters. I think I want to open my own shop one day.

Despite a criminal record, prior work experience and personal connections to work played a strong role in securing legitimate employment for these participants. Empirical literature suggests that the incarceration experience does not consistently deter offenders from crime (Nagin et al., 2009; Spohn & Holleran, 2002; National Research Council, 2014). As the results from this study show, the removal from family, work, and communities played a role in the reentry process when combined with other significant factors present in the participant's life. While the jail experience alone did not deter or motivate participants to desist from crime, the experience seemed to have an effect on

certain participants when combined with other significant factors. Participants affected by the jail experience typically left jail with a different outlook on their lives than when they entered jail. For this group of participants, the jail experience prompted them to make changes within their peer relationships which often enabled them to obtain a higher level of maturity once released.

As illustrated in Table 2, the group of participants who were motivated to desist from criminal activity and obtained legitimate work after release also made changes in their peer relationships following incarceration. For many, their peer relationships did not provide the positive social capital needed to increase the likelihood of desistance from crime. Their peers were either engaged in illegitimate methods of making money or provided little support to reduce the chances of reoffending for the offender. Bobby, who obtained employment at Chipotle while at the pre-release center, shared the changes he had to make within his social circle:

When I came out, all my friends were like, you gonna come hang with us? I played it cool and all but I wasn't trying to live that life anymore. I didn't want to act whack around them or anything but I told them I had to stay out of trouble. Those fools ain't up to no good! I gotta get away from all these people if I wanna make it. I'm working and saving my money but it ain't easy. My friends are always trying to get me to hang. I just gotta be cool and do my thing.

The recognition of making changes within one's social circle was a reflection of advanced maturity levels among these participants. As these young men transitioned into adulthood seeking an adult identity, self-sufficiency, and self-governance, many were able to make the determination of which peers would increase the likelihood of their adult identity formation and reduce their chances of reoffending. The participants in the combination effect group were affected by the jail experience, took advantage of the

support provided by family and employers, and made decisions following release that would impact their path in shaping their social identity into adulthood. This particular group of participants stood to lose more by not desisting from crime. The interaction of these factors significantly increased their motivation to desist from criminal activity more than any other group of participants in the study.

### *Summary*

This study identified a small group of participants who were motivated to desist from crime and reported having achieved actual desistance at the time of the post-release interview. This group of participants had also secured legitimate employment following the release from jail. While the jail experience alone was not found to be a significant factor in the determination of desistance from or persistence in crime when looking at the whole sample, the combination of the following factors – strong family bonds, commitment to the role of fatherhood, prior work experience, personal connections to work and employers, specific deterrent effects of the jail experience, changes in peer relationships, and changes in maturity levels during this period of developmental transition – increased the motivation to desist from crime and categorized a group of participants who were able to secure employment and desist from criminal activity following the release from jail. The next group of participants indicated a motivation to desist from crime but was unable to secure legitimate employment at the time of the post-release interview.

## **Surprise Effect**

### *Introduction*

The next group of participants indicated a motivation or a possible motivation to desist from criminal activity yet was unable to obtain legitimate employment at the time of the post-release interview. These participants had either reported desistance from criminal activity while seeking employment or had not desisted from criminal activity but indicated they would desist if legitimate employment was obtained. The factors present in this group of participants' reentry experiences included the following: strong family bonds, commitment to the role of fatherhood, prior work experience, specific deterrent effects of the jail experience, changes in peer relationships, and moderate changes in maturity levels during this period of developmental transition into adulthood. The absent factors in this group of participants' reentry experiences included personal connections to work and employers, specific deterrent effects of the jail experience for all participants, and advanced levels of maturity during the developmental transition into adulthood.

This group experienced a unique transition from jail to the community causing a "surprise effect" for many participants returning home. Participants reported that they were often surprised at the stigma they had acquired due to incarceration as they sought employment following the release from jail. Many were ill-prepared for the responses they received from the labor market and found the acceptance of the stigma they had acquired from incarceration to be a more gradual process over time rather than an immediate recognition of the effects of incarceration. While this delay in recognition affected employment prospects for these participants, the delayed response is consistent with literature showing how stigma is acquired over time (Becker, 1968; Goffman, 1963).

For participants in this group, the gradual process of acquiring stigma greatly affected their reentry experiences in the labor market, as well as their developmental transitions into adulthood.

### *Factors*

As illustrated in the combination effect group, strong family bonds and the role of fatherhood played a strong role in the motivation to desist from crime. Participants in the surprise effect group who were motivated to desist from crime also had either supportive family members or family obligations, such as a child, that increased their motivation to desist from crime. While these participants reported desistance at the time of the post-release interview, the nature of how they were financially supporting themselves was further explored considering their unemployment status. These participants indicated that their main source of income came from family members, peers, or romantic partners. The financial and emotional support they received from these individuals appeared to increase their motivation to desist from crime. Aaron, who was receiving financial support from his girlfriend, explained his reasons for desisting from crime:

My girl gives me money and keeps telling me how much better it is to have me out of jail. My family does too. I don't like taking money from people but I appreciate their help as long as I don't go back to robbing people. I'm trying to change my life for my girl and my baby so I'll take the help. Plus, I know I will give the money back once I get a job. I keep looking because I know someone will take a chance on me. I just don't know when!

Similar to the combination effect group, the surprise effect group included participants who had strong family support systems and bonds. While family members' criminal involvement may have had various effects in their initial delinquent or criminal behavior, the strength of family support and family bonds played a significant role in

participants' motivation to desist from criminal activity following the release from jail.

While not all participants in the surprise effect group came from criminally involved families, those who did identified family support and bonds as stronger factors, compared to family criminality, which led them towards desistance from rather than persistence in crime.

Although family bonds are considered a significant factor in the motivation to desist from crime, some of these participants returned home to family situations with heightened levels of tension. Family members had various responses to the incarceration experience including feelings of frustration, disappointment, and anger. However, it is important to note that family support was still evident among many households despite high levels of tension. Additionally, those who experienced tension within their families had other family obligations that they considered significant in their motivation to desist. For example, if a participant had tension within his family, he may have also been faced with the newfound role of becoming a father which provided a strong sense of responsibility. While tension within immediate family structures affected participants negatively, the support from family members and the role of fatherhood often outweighed the effects of tension among most participants. Jose, who received financial assistance from his friends, explained his family situation:

My family doesn't really trust me since I got locked up. I understand why but it still makes me mad because family is supposed to stick together. They act like they don't know me. Once I get a job, I'm out of there. I got a baby so I remind myself of that every time I think of doing something dumb. Plus, my girl and friends give me money so at least I got some support. Without my baby, I'd probably still be acting dumb!

In addition to the presence of significant factors such as family bonds and the role of fatherhood, the members of this group also reported prior work experience, changes in peer relationships, and moderate changes in maturity levels as playing a significant role in their path towards desistance. Most of the participants in this group had prior work experience which provided them with basic employment skills. They indicated significant optimism during the pre-release interviews in terms of obtaining employment shortly after their release. However, the challenges of securing legitimate employment after incarceration affected their levels of optimism as they experienced the reluctance of employers to consider an applicant with a criminal record. Participants in this group were surprised at the responses received from the labor market as they had not fully considered the effects their criminal record would have on potential employment prospects.

Additionally, some participants made changes within their peer groups upon returning home. This was often due to their desire to desist from crime and enhance the presence of positive social capital in their lives. Being in jail had facilitated the realization that some peers were not as supportive or reliable as initially expected. One participant, Larry, was surprised at the response he received from his peers upon his release. While he did not “snitch” on his peers during his conviction, he was surprised at the fact that he did not feel a sense of gratitude for his actions. This resulted in his self-removal from his social circle upon his release.

I noticed that my boys were not really my boys once I got locked up. Some of them were involved in my crime but I didn't snitch. You'd think they would be grateful or something but they act like they don't know me now. I don't really care because I'm trying to get a job and move out of state but I see how it is. They act like I hurt them or something. I'm the one who did time and got a record now. They get to go on with their lives while I'm picking up the pieces.

The sense of betrayal experienced from peer groups increased the possible motivation to desist from crime as the weight of peers shifted to other forms of social capital weighing more heavily during the developmental transitions into adulthood. These realizations indicated a moderate change in maturity levels as participants came to terms with the effects of their actions and the impact their social circles had on the amount of positive social capital needed to desist from crime. While the changes in maturity levels were not as prevalent in this group as among those in the combination effect group, these changes did indicate a potential turning point for some participants who had already acquired the motivation to desist from crime. Larry further explained how his outlook had changed after incarceration:

I learned a lot from jail. I learned who to trust and who not to trust. When I was locked up, no one came to visit. None of my boys came, even though I didn't rat out two of them when I was in court. Now that I'm out, they wanna hang out again and act like we're cool. I told them I don't roll with them no more since they weren't down for me when I was locked up. I don't really hang with anyone now. I just look for work and stay in the house.

Whereas all factors explored in this study were present in the combination effect group, the factors absent in the surprise effect group included connections to work and limited effects from the jail experience. For many in this group, the release from jail presented significant challenges to obtaining employment. Although participants in this group had prior work experience, this experience was often limited and inconsistent. Considering their young age, many of them had not had the employment experiences that made them marketable to employers following a jail sentence. While almost all participants in this study faced this challenge, the surprise effect group lacked the personal and professional connections to work found in the combination effect group.

The lack of connections placed this group on their own in terms of marketing themselves to employers. Consistent with reentry and employment literature (Petersilia, 2003; Western, 2006; Wilson, 1996), a criminal record often dissuades employers from considering these individuals for employment. It was apparent that these participants were ill-prepared for the responses they received from the labor market following their release.

Contrary to the limited concerns participants had in jail regarding the impact their criminal record would have in the labor market, the members of this group were surprised once released at the stigma they had acquired from incarceration. The effects of having an adult criminal record proved to have a more profound impact in the labor market than participants had anticipated. Employers were reluctant to consider these men without an incentive or referral from a trustworthy individual. Without this factor present in the reentry process, it was difficult for participants to obtain legitimate work and fully comprehend the rationale behind employers not extending an offer of employment. Aaron explained his surprise at not being able to secure employment immediately after release:

Once I returned home, I thought I'd get a job quickly. I had experience before in retail stores and grocery stores. But I went to all of those stores and no one would even consider me once they found out I was in jail. My experience didn't matter to them and I was surprised. I really didn't think it would be this hard.

The surprising revelation of the effects of a criminal record in the labor market can be attributed to the jail experience itself. While incarcerated, participants were often placed in work programs that sought to prepare them for release. For some participants, the consequences of incarceration were not thoroughly comprehended while incarcerated. Programs and services that promoted their participation with the promise of employment

after release impeded their ability to apply the consequences of incarceration to their personal experiences in jail. Many left jail with the notion that their prior work experience, young age, and newly acquired employment skills in jail made them marketable to employers. Once released, these participants faced a surprisingly reluctant response from employers who were unwilling to consider employing an individual with a criminal record. Similarly to the combination effect group, there were other factors that were present in the surprise effect group which affected the motivation to desist for participants. The effects from the jail experience likely played a role in either delaying or advancing maturation which was another significant factor in the reentry process.

As with many young adults transitioning into adulthood, life experiences affect the levels of maturity in which young people make decisions. Consistent with life course literature, the experience of incarceration affects and delays maturity levels for the incarcerated population. While the effects and delays were evident in this study, the interactions among the different factors played a significant role in the transition into adulthood for participants. It was particularly interesting to observe the varying expectations of labor market responses in pre-release and post-release interviews. During the pre-release interviews, most participants showed little to no concern of how a criminal record would affect their employment prospects following the release from jail. However, the experiences following release in the labor market proved to be especially challenging to those who had acquired the motivation to desist but had not been able to secure legitimate employment to sustain this motivation. Unlike the first group, the surprise effect was much more prevalent as these individuals were expected to maneuver the labor market with a criminal record, limited employment skills, limited personal

connections to work, while simultaneously transitioning into adulthood. Without legitimate employment, their chances of reoffending increased significantly.

While the surprise effect group included participants who had acquired the motivation to desist from crime, not all participants had achieved actual desistance at the time of the post-release interview. Participants who were still engaged in criminal activity after their release from jail indicated that they would be more likely to desist from crime if they were able to obtain legitimate employment. Adam, who makes money selling drugs and working side jobs in landscaping, explained:

I do want a job. I tried applied everywhere but then I got frustrated because I need money and this is how I know how to make money. I'm trying to stay away from breaking into homes but if I had a job, I would not need to do that anymore. I would stop selling drugs. I just do that because it's fast money. I work from time to time but it's not enough. I know it's wrong and I could go back to jail but what else am I supposed to do if no one hires me? It's not like I'm not looking.

Consistent with the characteristics of this group, these participants were ill-prepared for the responses they received from the labor market. While the desire to desist and enter the legitimate labor market was prevalent, the need to financially sustain themselves often drove participants back to criminal activity. Many of these participants who indicated a possible motivation to desist were still engaging in “side bets” (Becker, 1968) or criminal activity in replacement of legitimate employment which increased their chances of returning to jail. Although there was no unequivocal commitment among these participants to desist from or persist in offending, the criminal opportunities in their communities appeared to present more accessible income than the legitimate labor market (Becker, 1960; Sampson & Laub, 2003b). This created a balancing act among these participants between their motivation to desist and their ability to achieve

desistance. It was unclear if and when this group would desist from criminal activity; the gradual process of acquiring stigma and reduced, yet present participation in criminal activity increased the chances of reoffending for participants in the surprise effect group.

### *Summary*

While participants in the surprise effect group indicated a motivation or at least a possible motivation to desist from criminal activity, the difficulties in securing legitimate employment significantly affected participants' ability to actually desist from crime altogether. For those participants who had desisted from crime at the time of the post-release interview, the effects their criminal record had had on their employment prospects were an especially surprising consequence of incarceration. For those participants who had not desisted from crime but indicated a possible motivation to desist if legitimate employment was obtained also reported a similar level of surprise in terms of making the connection between a criminal record and limited employment prospects. Although the factors present in the surprise effect group's post-release experiences, such as strong family bonds, commitment to the role of fatherhood, prior work experience, specific deterrent effects of the jail experience, changes in peer relationships, and moderate changes in maturity levels played a strong role in the reentry process, the limited connections to employment opportunities and the varying effects of the jail experience appeared to have a more significant effect on the increased risk of reoffending compared to those participants in the combination effect group.

The third group of participants indicated little to no motivation to desist from criminal activity. At the time of the post-release interview, these participants had not

secured legitimate employment nor did they indicate specific deterrent effects of the jail experience.

## **No Effect**

### *Introduction*

The third group of participants indicated little to no “turning point” in the motivation to desist from criminal activity following incarceration. Upon returning home, these participants had not secured legitimate employment and had not desisted from criminal activity. The factors present in this group were limited. Some participants returned home to strong, supportive families and most had had prior legitimate work experience. However, the majority of factors were absent in this group of participants. The absent factors included the following: consistently strong family bonds, commitment to the role of fatherhood, personal connections to work and employers, specific deterrent effects of the jail experience, changes in peer relationships, and advanced levels of maturity during this period of developmental transition into adulthood. Considering most of these participants displayed little to no significant effects from the jail experience, this group of participants is defined as experiencing the “no effect.”

### *Factors*

The majority of participants in this study fell into the no effect group. While the combination and surprise effect groups included significant factors which affected the motivation to desist from criminal activity, many of those factors were missing in this final group of participants. Family bonds, as illustrated in all three groups of participants, were considered a significant factor in the motivation to desist from crime. Participants in all three groups reported the importance of strong family bonds. However, family bonds

were not consistently strong within this group of participants. While some had very supportive family members, others experienced heightened levels of tension and weakened bonds within their family structures. Participants in the no effect group, who had become fathers, also did not indicate a strong desire to desist from crime due to their newfound role of fatherhood. The combination of these weakened family bonds did little to increase motivation among this group of participants. Additionally, these participants returned home with limited personal connections to work and employers in the labor market.

The no effect group had the most limited connections to work and employers following their release compared to the combination and surprise effect groups. While the majority of participants in this group had had previous work experience, most did not indicate a strong desire to obtain legitimate employment. One participant, James, explained why he had no desire to secure legitimate employment:

I'm not ready to make \$7.00 an hour, sorry. It's insulting to have people telling you what to do for that type of money. When I was locked up, I had plans but coming out and seeing how employers even look at you when you walk into their store, I'm not going to put myself through that. They look at you like dirt. I get it that I did things I shouldn't have but I don't deserve people looking at me like I'm nothing. Screw that.

Although several participants indicated an initial plan for desistance while incarcerated, most of these individuals returned home and continued to engage in criminal activity including selling drugs and breaking into homes as a major source of income. When probed about seeking legitimate employment, some participants in this group reported that they considered their age group a period of transition which would allow for time to alter the course of their lives in the future. During the post-release interviews, these participants indicated that their initial plans for desistance had changed

and their immediate plans included persisting in criminal activities and delaying the search for legitimate employment. It was evident from post-release responses that the jail experience had had little to no effect on the motivation to desist from crime for participants in the no effect group.

The specific deterrent effects of the jail experience were the primary focus of this study. In the pursuit of understanding deterrence among the young adult offender population, this study found that the jail experience had the least effect on this group of participants. Participants in this group did not attribute persistence in crime to the jail experience. Instead, they regarded jail as a brief removal from society which did not affect them in a largely negative or positive way. Consistent with deterrence literature (Nagin et al., 2009; Spohn & Holleran, 2002), the jail experience did not appear to have a profound effect on these participants. When probed about the jail experience itself, many participants felt incarceration was a part of life that was prevalent in their communities and families; the effects were reported as insignificant. Those participants who did indicate being affected by the jail experience reported only a minor effect on their social reputation.

While the jail experience had little to no deterrent effect on this group of participants, it did have a minor effect in their social circles. This study found that being in jail did not necessarily increase criminal enterprise among this population; it did, however, increase social reputation within peer groups for some participants. The enhancement of social reputation helped ease the return for some participants by allowing them to pick up where they left off prior to incarceration. Some of their peers saw them as more credible in the “streets” but this did not enhance criminal activity; instead, it just

allowed some participants to return to similar activities with a more respectable social reputation. In particular, Greg experienced an enhancement of social reputation among his peers. He explained:

Man, people threw me a party! I'm not kidding. I was like, what's this for? These youngin's were like, this is for you man! You made it! I was the coolest guy on the block it seemed. That's died down a bit now but I see how youngin's be acting over here. They don't know what you went through in jail so they think it's cool. Some want to go themselves! It's the older cats out here that keep telling me to learn a lesson and stay out of trouble. But they're still out here doing their thing too, ya know?! But I feel them...they don't want me to end up worse.

The majority of participants in this group did not make significant changes within their social circles following their release from jail. Rather, their social interactions remained relatively unchanged. These decisions indicated a possible delay in maturation as many of these individuals were unable to connect the relationship between peer interactions with the heightened risk of reoffending. While participants in the combination and surprise effect groups acknowledged the need to make changes within their social circles in order to desist from crime, this group of participants had not yet reached the point in their emerging development into adulthood where the motivation to desist outweighed the thrill and simplicity of criminal activity and peer interactions.

In regards to the labor market, participants in the no effect group believed employers would be forgiving of their actions due to their young age. In their own words, participants believed they had time to “grow up” and “make changes in life.” There was no sense of urgency in this group of participants which indicated a possibility of desistance in the near future. Norman explained his views on securing employment following his release:

I thought I had changed when I was locked up. I had all these plans but I thought I would get a job easily. Now that I'm out, I'm like, I'm still young. I have my whole life to work. Why not have fun for now? Jail isn't fun but I don't want a serious job yet. I will mature one of these days, I'm sure. For now, I'm good.

Participants in the no effect group lacked the positive social capital found in the first two groups which included strong family bonds, connections to work and employers, drastic modifications in interpersonal relationships and a growing sense of self-sufficiency and self-governance. This group of participants displayed the highest amount of cumulative disadvantage, placing them at the highest risk for future offending among all of the study participants. According to Sampson & Laub (1997b), "crime itself – whether directly or indirectly – causally modifies the future probability of engaging in crime" (p. 12). In addition to their criminal background, participants in the no effect group already faced various forms of disadvantages prior to, during, and after incarceration. This group of participants, with little to no motivation to desist from crime, displayed the least amount of options for a conventional lifestyle after incarceration.

### *Summary*

Consequently, the no effect group included participants who were the least affected by the jail experience. The factors affecting their motivation to desist from crime were unmistakably absent prior to and upon their return home. This group of participants experienced the least amount of change in their life course, despite being removed from society for a brief period of incarceration. This study found that it was unclear how aware these participants were about the stigma they had acquired due to incarceration. The realization of the consequences of incarceration was likely more prolonged for participants in the no effect group than participants in the combination or surprise effect

group. Of the three groups of participations, the no effect group was the least likely to desist from criminal activity while transitioning into adulthood.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to better understand what mechanisms shaped the pathways towards or away from desistance for young adult offenders released from jail. Empirical literature identifies conflicting outcomes on the deterrent effects of incarceration. While previous studies have suggested that incarceration deters offenders from committing future crimes, more recent studies have shown incarceration having little impact on the desistance process. This study found that there were significant factors that were either present or absent in participants' lives which greatly affected their motivation to desist or persist in criminal activity. The jail experience alone, however, had little impact on the motivation to desist from crime. Instead, the interactions among different factors affected these individuals in different ways, leading to either desistance for some or persistence for others. Utilizing a variety of qualitative approaches to explore the interactions among these factors enabled a greater understanding of reentry experiences by providing insight into how these young men made decisions and into the mechanisms through which patterns of behavior emerged after their return home from jail.

The original hypothesis in this study predicted that the jail experience would affect participants by removing positive social capital and increasing negative social capital in their lives. However, this study found that while the removal of positive social capital did occur for some participants, the increase of negative social capital was not prevalent among the study sample. Instead, the study found significant factors present or

absent in the lives of participants which greatly affected reentry experiences. The interactions among these factors were categorized into three groups of participants: the combination effect group, the surprise effect group, and the no effect group.

The first group, the combination effect group, included participants who had obtained legitimate employment and reported desistance from criminal activity following the release from jail. This group of participants included the following factors: strong family bonds, commitment to the role of fatherhood, prior work experience, personal connections to work and employers, specific deterrent effects of the jail experience, changes in peer relationships, and advanced maturity levels during the period of developmental transition. The combination effect group appeared the most motivated to desist from criminal activity when these factors were present and occurring together in the reentry process.

The second group, the surprise effect group, included participants who indicated a motivation to desist or would have indicated a motivation to desist if legitimate employment had been obtained. These participants had not secured employment at the time of the post-release interview. However, the factors present in the combination effect group were all present in the surprise effect group except for personal connections to work and employers and advanced maturity levels. Instead, this group had moderate levels of maturity and found themselves ill-prepared for the responses they received by employers who were unwilling to hire an individual with a criminal record. While participants in the surprise effect group indicated a motivation to desist from criminal activity, many had not achieved actual desistance due to the impact their criminal record had had in the labor market.

The third and final group, the no effect group, included participants who had not secured legitimate employment and had not desisted from criminal activity at the time of the post-release interview. This group had the least amount of factors present and appeared the least deterred by the jail experience. While the presence of family bonds and prior work experience existed for some participants, the no effect group were notably missing the following factors: consistently strong family bonds, the commitment to the role of fatherhood, personal connections to work and employers, specific deterrent effects of the jail experience, changes in peer relationships, and advanced levels of maturity during the period of developmental transition into adulthood. Participants in the no effect group were the least motivated to desist from criminal activity compared to the combination and surprise effect groups.

In this study, three groups of participants were differentiated by their levels of motivation to desist from criminal activity. The interactions among the following factors – strong family bonds, commitment to the role of fatherhood, prior work experience, personal connections to work and employers, deterrent effects of the jail experience, changes in peer relationships, and changes in maturity levels during this period of developmental transition – were identified through qualitative data analysis as emergent categories which explain why incarceration has one type of effect for some offenders, the opposite effect for others, and in some cases, no effect at all. These findings suggest that analyzing reentry experiences is much more complex than simply identifying significant factors in an individual's life; instead, it is critical to understand *how* these factors connect and interact with one another once an offender is released from jail. This study identified a significant gap in the reentry literature and has enlarged our understanding of

how the population of young offenders experiences jail and the effects the incarceration experience has on both the reentry and developmental processes.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

In this study, I set out to identify the gaps in our understanding of reentry experiences for young adult offenders. Specifically, this study explored why incarceration has different effects on different offenders. While significant attention has been given to prisoner reentry, this study uncovered the experiences of reentry from jail for this population of offenders. The findings in this study enlarge our understanding of the reentry process for young adult offenders by identifying the heterogeneity of incarceration experiences and exploring how these experiences significantly affect the likelihood of deterrence.

Capturing the reentry experiences for young adult offenders was explored through the following research questions:

1. What is the mark of a criminal record in the “streets” and how do offenders balance this with the mark of a criminal record in the labor market? What roles do positive and negative social capital play in this process, and how do offenders maneuver between the two types of opportunities?
2. How do life circumstances following the release from jail mediate the effects of incarceration as offenders pursue legitimate versus illegitimate forms of employment?
3. How are reentry experiences shaped by the developmental processes that are characteristic of this particular age group?

In this study, I uncovered several important findings. First, the mark of a criminal record resulted in a loss of positive social capital in the labor market. However, acquiring a criminal record did not have the same effect in neighborhoods. I expected to find an increase in negative social capital but, for most participants, the mark of a criminal record did not result in an enhancement of criminal enterprise within neighborhoods. Although there were a few exceptions among participants, the mark of a criminal record had significantly different effects in the labor market compared to the neighborhoods participants returned to after incarceration. Second, I found that life circumstances, in addition to the mark of a criminal record, mediated the effects of incarceration for participants seeking employment after incarceration. These life circumstances significantly affected the process of pursuing legitimate versus illegitimate forms of employment. Lastly, I found that most participants' reentry experiences were significantly affected by their simultaneous transition into adulthood.

### **The Mark of a Criminal Record**

Consistent with reentry literature (Becker, 1960; Goffman, 1963; Pager, 2003; Petersilia, 2003; Weiman, 2007; Western, 2006; Western et al., 2001), it was my expectation that the stigma acquired from obtaining a criminal record would result in a loss of positive social capital in the labor market. The findings in this study show that participants did experience a loss of positive social capital in the labor market due to a criminal record. Most participants reported that employers were more likely to stigmatize them for their criminal histories and less likely to consider them for employment. Participants who were able to obtain employment after incarceration reported that the utilization of resources, such as personal or professional contacts to employers, was

essential to securing legitimate employment. These participants also reported a strong awareness of the stigma attached to being incarcerated. In order to secure post-release employment, these participants relied on trustworthy leads to recommend them for employment despite their criminal record and the stigma attached to this label.

Participants who were unable to obtain employment after incarceration experienced a more profound effect in the labor market from acquiring a criminal record than participants who had obtained employment. For many of these unemployed participants, comprehending the consequences of a criminal label was not an immediate realization; instead, this was often a gradual process for these participants who found themselves ill-prepared for the responses they received from the labor market. Additionally, most of these participants were unable to utilize reliable personal or professional contacts to secure employment after incarceration. Overall, participants in this study found that the mark of a criminal record had a much larger impact in the labor market than it did in their neighborhoods.

Most participants in this study returned home to the same neighborhoods in which they resided in prior to incarceration. Consistent with the perception of jail being a “school of crime” (Clemmer, 1940; Reynolds, 2013; Rose & Clear, 1998; Sykes, 1958; Wacquant, 2001), it was my expectation that the incarceration experience would increase additional negative social capital within neighborhoods. However, the findings show that most participants did not experience an enhancement in criminal enterprise. For the majority of participants, the incarceration experience had minimal effects on their pathways towards or away from desistance.

Most participants reported that acquiring a criminal record in their neighborhood did not result in the same stigmatization found in the labor market. For many participants, incarceration experiences had become normalized among peers and family members. Consistent with Wacquant's (2001) discussion on the symbiotic relationship between incarceration and disadvantaged neighborhoods, the effects of incarceration were not as significant in neighborhoods as they were to employers. Additionally, several participants reported that prior experiences with the juvenile justice or criminal justice system and early exposure to criminal activity through family members or peers affected neighborhood responses towards incarceration. Overall, most participants did not experience an increase of additional negative social capital as I had originally expected.

While the mark of a criminal record did not enhance criminal enterprise among most participants, there were a few cases where incarceration enhanced the social reputation among peers. In these cases, peers attached a positive response to incarceration where they associated incarceration with strength, popularity, and masculinity. However, enhancements in social reputation had minimal effects on enhanced criminal enterprise among most participants. Although the loss of positive social capital occurred in the labor market, the increase of additional negative social capital did not occur in neighborhoods to the degree I originally expected. For most participants, the incarceration experience itself did not affect pathways towards or away from desistance. Instead, this study found that the effects of incarceration were also mediated by significant life circumstances following the release from jail.

## **Life Circumstances**

In addition to the stigma acquired from a criminal record, it was my expectation that life circumstances would play a significant role in young adult offenders' pathways towards or away from desistence. I found that both positive and negative social capital was mediated by the following life circumstances: family relationships, peer relationships, and neighborhood characteristics. These life circumstances affected whether participants pursued legitimate or illegitimate forms of employment.

Family relationships and behavior are critical components of the reentry process (Anderson, 1999; Guterman & Lee, 2005; Harper & McLanahan, 2004; McCord, 1983; Nurse, 2002; Sampson & Laub, 1993a; Simons et al., 2007). Some participants reported that positive social capital among their family structures increased their motivation to desist from criminal activity and seek legitimate employment. However, in other cases, strong family support was reported yet the stigma associated with a criminal record, along with other life circumstances, significantly affected the likelihood of obtaining legitimate employment.

For other participants, negative social capital within families affected the process of seeking legitimate employment. Most of these participants reported persistence in criminal activity through forms of illegitimate employment. Family tension and discord were reported as major factors in the decision to persist in crime. In a few cases, however, participants were able to desist from crime and secure legitimate employment despite negative social capital within their family structure. Overall, participants' family relationships played a significant role in the process of seeking legitimate or illegitimate forms of employment.

Peer relationships are another critical component in the reentry process, particularly due to the importance and influence of social circles (Anderson, 1999; Gifford-Smith et al., 2005; Kreager, 2007; Mears & Travis, 2004a; 2004b; Ploeger, 1997; Rios, 2009; Sampson & Laub, 1993a; 1993b; Sampson & Laub, 1997). The majority of participants reported that they returned to their social circles after incarceration as it was often difficult to avoid peers due to certain characteristics of their neighborhoods. For some participants, positive social capital among peers increased the likelihood of securing legitimate employment. This often occurred in the form of personal contacts referring participants to places of employment. For other participants, negative social capital among peers decreased the likelihood of desistance and encouraged involvement in illegitimate forms of employment. Although negative social capital among peers did not directly increase criminal behavior for most participants, it also did not promote desistance from crime.

The third life circumstance explored in this study focused on the effects of neighborhood characteristics on young adult offenders' pursuit of legitimate or illegitimate forms of employment. The majority of participants returned to disadvantaged neighborhoods with high levels of negative social capital (Anderson, 1999; Carr et al., 2007; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Mears et al., 2012; Pager, 2003; Western, 2006; Wilson, 1987; Wilson, 1996). Most of the participants reported limited resources, high crime rates, and unemployment as typical characteristics of their neighborhoods. For many participants, engaging in illegitimate forms of unemployment was more common in their neighborhoods than securing legitimate employment. For a small group of participants, high levels of positive social capital within other life circumstances enabled them to

maneuver the deficiencies in their neighborhoods and secure legitimate employment.

However, for the majority of participants, the combined levels of negative social capital found within other life circumstances, such as family and peer relationships, had a significant effect on persistence in crime through illegitimate forms of employment.

### **The Transition into Adulthood**

It was my expectation that participants' transition from jail to their neighborhoods would be affected by their simultaneous transition into adulthood. Participants were in an age group where the desire to achieve self-sufficiency, self-definition, and self-governance were the next likely stages in their life course. However, with the interruption of incarceration, it was my expectation that there would be significant delays in their transition into adulthood which would significantly affect reentry experiences (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Arditti & Parkman, 2011; Mears & Travis, 2004a; Osgood et al., 2005; Sampson & Laub, 2003a; Sullivan, 2004).

During pre-release interviews, most participants reported that incarceration had positively changed their perceptions of criminal behavior. They reported that incarceration allowed them time to reflect on their actions and consequences which they expected would lead to their desistance in criminal activity. However, post-release experiences resulted in much heterogeneity in the effects of incarceration on maturity levels. After their release, most unemployed participants reported little to no change in their maturity levels. The most significant improvements in maturity levels were found among participants who had secured legitimate employment after incarceration.

The study found that incarceration alone did not achieve a deterrent effect on participants. Various levels of positive and negative social capital found within specific

life circumstances mediated the effects of incarceration which encouraged desistance from crime for some participants and persistence in crime for other participants. While participants were faced with a multitude of challenges within the labor market, neighborhoods, family structures, and peer circles, the transition into adulthood was further marked by the incarceration experience creating delays in maturation and the ability to desist from crime for the majority of participants.

### **Varying Effects of Incarceration**

A significant theme in this study was social capital. Research shows how essential social capital is to individuals, as well as communities, by providing indispensable resources in a productive and valuable way (Bourdieu, 1984; Coleman, 1998; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006). However, not all forms of social capital provide legitimate resources. Positive social capital provides access to legitimate resources while negative social capital provides access to illegitimate resources (Clemmer, 1940; Reynolds, 2013; Rose & Clear, 1998; Sykes, 1958; Wacquant, 2001). In this study, both forms of social capital were explored to understand how reentry experience are affected by various levels of positive and negative social capital.

While I expected that most participants would experience a loss of positive social capital due to the incarceration experience, I also expected that participants would increase levels of negative social capital. It was my assumption that these individuals had already experienced forms of negative social capital through family, peers, and neighborhoods. However, I expected an enhancement of criminal enterprise to occur due to the incarceration experience which did not occur. I also expected that participants' maturity levels and transition into adulthood would be negatively affected by

incarceration but this also did not occur for all participants. The findings in this study produced several unanticipated results which enlarge our understanding of why incarceration has different effects on different individuals.

Consistent with the literature, incarceration has varying effects on different individuals (Sampson & Laub, 2003a; 2003b; National Research Council, 2014). This study found that compounded factors affect reentry experiences for different offenders in different ways. There is no one factor that determines desistance; rather, it is a conjuncture of factors that affect the motivation to desist from crime. The most significant factors found among participants were strong family bonds, commitment to the role of fatherhood, prior work experience, personal connections to work and employers, specific deterrent effects of the jail experience, changes in peer relationships, and advanced levels of maturity during this period of developmental transition into adulthood. These factors were further categorized into three groups of incarceration effects: the *combination effect*, *surprise effect*, and *no effect*.

The combination effect group included all of the abovementioned factors; these factors occurred together for participants who were able to achieve legitimate employment and desist from criminal activity after the release from jail. The surprise effect group included all of the abovementioned factors except personal connections to work and employers and advanced levels of maturity; instead, their maturity levels fell towards the middle of the maturity scale. This group included participants who had to gradually accept the inheritance of the stigma that follows a criminal record. These participants found themselves unprepared for the responses they received in the labor market. However, once they were able to grasp the acceptance of their newly acquired

stigma, they were able to achieve desistance or showed promise of achieving desistance if legitimate employment was found. The last group, the no effect group, included the least amount of factors occurring together. While the presence of family bonds and prior work experience existed within this group, the limited factors in this group were unable to fit together to achieve desistance. These participants had not secured legitimate employment, achieved desistance, or indicated the motivation to desist from criminal activity.

The three effects of incarceration identified in this study demonstrated which factors occurred together for participants and how the factors interacted in mechanisms leading to desistance from or persistence in criminal activity. This study found that incarceration, alone, did not achieve a deterrent effect among participants. However, the conjuncture of factors with varying levels of positive and negative social capital was much more significant in the reentry process for young adult offenders.

### **Policy Implications**

Understanding the reentry experiences of young adult offenders is critical to achieving deterrence and lowering risks of recidivism. There are several policies which should be considered in order to achieve these goals. First, the transition into adulthood must be considered during sentencing and correctional practices. This is a unique population of offenders who are experiencing significant interruptions to their life course due to incarceration. Removing them from society without considering the implications incarceration has on this transition will further delay their entrance into adulthood. This will have long-term effects on this population, their families, and the communities in which they return.

Second, consistent and objective evaluations should be utilized to ensure correctional programs are meeting the needs of the offender. In this study, many participants either did not join any programs or joined simply to earn “good time” in hopes of an earlier release. These programs should be high in participation among the young adult offender population with effective and beneficial strategies applicable to the environments they return to after incarceration. Programs should also be multi-faceted where they address specific areas of need and prepare offenders with the tools needed to desist from crime, mitigate family tension, and engage in prosocial relationships.

Third, allocating resources to both the offender and family members after incarceration is fundamental to increasing positive social capital among families. Offenders and family members should be provided with the necessary tools to prepare these men for the transition from jail while working towards reaching the critical steps needed to form their adult identity. Lastly, reducing joblessness by implementing more post-release employment programs should be a priority for policymakers. Offenders who have stronger ties to work are more likely to desist from crime. Providing these opportunities prior to or shortly after release would encourage more involvement in legitimate employment rather than illegitimate employment.

### **Research Limitations**

There were several research limitations in this study. First, the ability to generalize the results from this study was a considerable limitation. The small sample size of 19 participants was an appropriate amount for this dissertation. However, in order to adequately generalize overall reentry experiences for young adult offenders returning from jail, a larger sample size would be needed. Another issue was self-selection as the

primary means of participating in this study. Inmates who met the criteria for the study, male, between the ages of 18 and 24, had been convicted and sentenced to jail, and were nearing release within three months, were selected from monthly reports and asked to participate. Although all of the selected participants inside of the jail volunteered for the study, several potential participants refused participation in the pre-release center. Self-selection created the limitation of not knowing why some inmates agreed to participate and why other inmates did not agree to participate.

Second, the sampling strategy utilized in this study was another research limitation. Non-probability, purposive sampling was used to create a sample size during the data collection phase. While this strategy was appropriate for this dissertation, it limited the content of the data to the goals and research questions of this particular study. Participants were selected based on the accessibility of individuals who met the needs of the study. Although no exclusions were made on race, female inmates, pre-trial status inmates, and mentally ill inmates were excluded from the study. This limited our understanding of reentry experiences for all young adult offenders.

Third, there was a limitation of geographic representation. This study took place in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. While standard city amenities were available to many of the participants, such as steady public transportation and a large employment pool, the county in which this study occurred in is considered a wealthier county than most counties in the United States. However, the experiences narrated from participants are considered generalizable due to the majority of participants coming from disadvantaged communities and low socio-economic backgrounds, similar to experiences found in other metropolitan areas in the U.S.

Lastly, this study examined desistance from and persistence in criminal activity on a short-term basis. Post-release interviews were conducted within four to eight months following participants' release from incarceration. While the goal of this study was to capture early reentry experiences of young adult offenders, it is unknown whether or not participants continued on their path of desistance from or persistence in criminal activity after the post-release interviews.

### **Future Research**

My hope is that this dissertation generates new research on young adult offender reentry. One suggestion would be to formally identify this population of offenders, in research, as a distinct group with significantly different needs and experiences than those of juvenile or adult offenders. An increase in our understanding of this particular group of offenders, from a research standpoint, would be valuable to criminological theory. Another suggestion for future research would be to replicate this study in nearby counties and metropolitan areas to observe similarities and differences in reentry experiences. Since geographic representation was a limitation in this study, there is a need for similar research in other areas of the country. I would also suggest increasing the sample size of the study and including individuals who are currently being held in jail at a pre-trial status. Although pre-trial individuals are not guaranteed a jail sentence, their initial involvement in the criminal justice system is important to consider when observing differences in reentry experiences.

There is a significant gap in the literature of the reentry process for young adult female offenders. Future research should include females to enlarge our understanding of the different needs and challenges experienced by this group of offenders. It is likely that

gender differences significantly affect reentry experiences for female offenders. Lastly, research capturing long-term effects of incarceration would generate a more accurate account of the experiences of young adult offenders returning home from jail. Although understanding early reentry experiences was the primary goal of this study, obtaining a greater understanding of the factors affecting recidivism and desistance on a long-term scale would be especially beneficial for future research.

### **Conclusion**

This study identified the gaps in our understanding of the reentry process for young adult offenders. The findings show that the heterogeneity of incarceration experiences has significantly different effects on different offenders. The varying levels of positive and negative social capital within participants' reentry experiences contributed to the motivation and ability to desist from crime. This study concludes that incarceration alone does not deter offenders. Rather, a conjuncture of critical factors either present or absent in an individual's life will be influential in pathways leading towards or away from desistance.

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May 11, 2012

**P.I. Name:** McDavid  
**Protocol #:** 12-647Mp

Justine H. McDavid  
 10103 Baltimore Ave, #2304  
 College Park MD 20740

Dear Justine McDavid:

✓  
**( Initial / Amendment / Continuation / Continuation w/ Amendment )**

**Protocol Title:** "Labor Market and Neighborhood Experiences of Young Adult Offenders: The Effects of Jail on the Reentry Process"

This is to advise you that the above-referenced study has been presented to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, and the following action was taken subject to the conditions and explanations provided below:

<b>Approval Date:</b>	4/27/2012	<b>Expiration Date:</b>	4/26/2013
<b>Expedited Category(s):</b>	6,7	<b>Approved # of Subject(s):</b>	25

This approval is based on the assumption that the materials you submitted to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) contain a complete and accurate description of the ways in which human subjects are involved in your research. The following conditions apply:

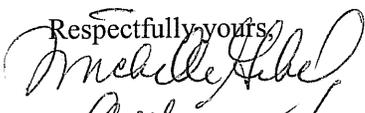
- **This Approval-**The research will be conducted according to the most recent version of the protocol that was submitted. **This approval is valid ONLY for the dates listed above;**
- **Reporting-**ORSP must be immediately informed of any injuries to subjects that occur and/or problems that arise, in the course of your research;
- **Modifications-**Any proposed changes **MUST** be submitted to the IRB as an amendment for review and approval prior to implementation;
- **Consent Form(s)-**Each person who signs a consent document will be given a copy of that document, if you are using such documents in your research. The Principal Investigator must retain all signed documents for at least three years after the conclusion of the research;
- **Continuing Review-**You should receive a courtesy e-mail renewal notice for a Request for Continuing Review before the expiration of this project's approval. However, it is your responsibility to ensure that an application for continuing review has been submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to the expiration date to extend the approval period;

**Additional Notes:**            **Expedited Approval per 45 CFR 46.110**

**Failure to comply with these conditions will result in withdrawal of this approval.**

Please note that the IRB has the authority to observe, or have a third party observe, the consent process or the research itself. The Federal-wide Assurance (FWA) number for the Rutgers University IRB is FWA00003913; this number may be requested on funding applications or by collaborators.

Respectfully yours,


Sheryl Goldberg  
 Director of Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
 gibel@grants.rutgers.edu

cc: Mercer L. Sullivan

Consent ID # \_\_\_\_\_

**Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study**

Title of Study: *Labor Market and Neighborhood Experiences of Young Adult Offenders: The Effects of Jail on the Reentry Process*

Principal Investigator: Justine H. McDavid

Form #1: Consent form for confidential interviews of offenders in local correctional facility prior to release

**Introduction**

Hello, my name is Justine McDavid and I am a graduate student at Rutgers University. You are invited to participate in a research study of approximately 20-25 subjects. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions, you can ask me at any time. You should be satisfied with the answers before you agree to be in this study.

**Background**

I am currently working on my dissertation, which is a research project that I have designed to study the issues facing young adults who are returning to their communities from local correctional facilities in Montgomery County, MD. The purpose of this study is to learn about your life and your experiences before, during, and after incarceration. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences, including the various circumstances in your life up until now that you feel played a role in your criminal justice system involvement. I am also interested in learning about your feelings about being incarcerated, being away from home, and your feelings about your upcoming release from jail.

**Information**

If you agree to let me interview you, I will be asking you a series of questions that may or may not have simple answers. There are no correct or wrong answers. I want to find out what you feel and think about what has been happening to you. You can share with me as much or as little information as you would like. If you are comfortable with me using a digital recorder in the interview, and the correctional facility approves this method of data collection, I would like to record the interview so that I am not writing notes down while speaking with you. I want to give you all of my attention and have a conversation with you regarding your experiences. However, if you prefer that I not use the recorder, I will make notes during the interview instead. If I do make a recording of the interview, it will be burned onto a CD and will remain my confidential property. No

**EXPIRES**

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

APR 26 2013

Approved by the  
Rutgers IRB**APPROVED**Date: 4/27/12

## ATTACHMENT 4

one other than me will be allowed to hear it, and I will destroy the CD after my dissertation is finished.

Each interview should last between 1-2 hours each. This will depend on how much information you are willing to share with me. Since I am interested in learning about your experiences in jail, as well as after your release, I will be asking that you spend 2 days speaking with me – 1 day in jail and 1 day after you have been released. I anticipate the maximum amount of your time interviewing with me would be a total of 4 hours spread over 2 days.

### Confidentiality

If you agree to be interviewed, all of the information shared will remain confidential. I will not reveal what I discuss with you to anyone including correctional staff, parole, probation, your family, friends, community members, any other criminal justice or social service agencies, or anyone else in any way that would connect your name or identity to the things you tell me. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you, such as your name, phone numbers, age, gender, etc., However, I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated, unless you have agreed otherwise.

There are a limited number of situations in which I might have to report what you say. These are:

- 1) If you tell me specific details about future intentions to commit a crime or that you know someone else is going to commit a crime, I may have to report that information to the authorities, including the police.
- 2) If you tell me that you are going to harm yourself or others, I may have to report that information to the authorities, including the police or call someone to get you medical help.

### Benefits

It is my hope this study will help other people learn some things about young adults like you who are transitioning back into the community after incarceration. Some of the benefits associated with participating in the study include having your voice be heard by people in authority who might be able to change some things that may make it better for people like you when they get out of facilities. Although I cannot promise that this research study will have that effect, I do hope it will have a positive impact. I hope the knowledge obtained from your participation, and the participation of other volunteers, may help us to better understand your experiences.

EXPIRES Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

**APPROVED**

Date: 4/27/12

APR 26 2013

Approved by the  
Rutgers IRB

**Risks**

I do not expect any harm to come to anyone who participates in this study. This interview is confidential, and I will not publish your name or any other information that might identify you as a particular individual. However, I realize that talking about your life and personal experiences might cause you to become emotional or anxious at times. Because of that, I want you to understand that, if you begin an interview, you can stop at any time you like and you can refuse to answer any particular question. If you should need counseling as a result of getting upset by this interview, I would help you find a counselor that will be beneficial to you. Currently, there are professionally trained counselors at the correctional facility that are prepared to address any issues that may arise during or following this interview. If you need these services, please let me know and I will notify the staff at this facility immediately. However, I will not be able to pay for these services.

**Compensation**

I expect that each interview would last no more than two hours, depending mostly on what you are interested in discussing. You will not be paid for participating in this interview while incarcerated. This interview is entirely voluntary on your end. However, if you agree to participate in a follow-up interview, you will be compensated \$25 for your time. I do hope I am able to get back in touch with you after you are released, for a second interview, to follow up with you. I am very much interested in learning about your experiences while incarcerated, as well as after your release. Any further participation would be entirely up to you. However, any participation from you will be greatly appreciated for the purposes of this research study.

Again, your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you do not want to participate at all or in some specific part of what I am doing, I will respect your wishes. Your decision to participate, or not, will not have any effect at all on your parole or probation status. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you may choose to withdraw from the study or choose not to answer specific questions. You may do so without forfeiting your \$25 stipend. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be removed from the data set and destroyed.

**Contact**

If you have any questions about possible benefits, risks, or discomforts that might go along with doing an interview, or about anything else that I am doing, please ask me and I will do my best to answer your questions.

If you would like to contact me at any time about this process, you can reach me at:

**APPROVED**  
Date: 4/27/12

**EXPIRES**

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

APR 26 2013

Approved by the  
Rutgers IRB

## ATTACHMENT 4

Justine H. McDavid, Principal Investigator  
 School of Criminal Justice  
 Rutgers-Newark  
 123 Washington Street  
 Newark, New Jersey 07102  
 Telephone: (301) 704-3974 e-mail: [mcdavid@pegasus.rutgers.edu](mailto:mcdavid@pegasus.rutgers.edu)

If you would like to contact the faculty advisor on this research project, you can reach him at:

Mercer L. Sullivan, Faculty Advisor  
 School of Criminal Justice  
 Rutgers-Newark  
 123 Washington Street  
 Newark, New Jersey 07102  
 Telephone: (973) 353-5931 e-mail: [mercerc@andromeda.rutgers.edu](mailto:mercerc@andromeda.rutgers.edu)

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of  
 Human Subjects  
 Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
 3 Rutgers Plaza  
 New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559  
 Tel: 848-932-0150  
 Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

**By signing below you agree to participate in an interview. Participation is voluntary. If you decide after you sign this form that you do not want to participate, you can stop participating at any time or refuse to answer questions. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.**

Subject's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 (PLEASE PRINT)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator's  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 (PLEASE PRINT)

EXPIRES Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED  
 Date: 4/27/12

APR 26 2013

Approved by the  
 Rutgers IRB

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**I also agree to let part of this interview be digitally recorded, with the understanding that the recording will be used for research purposes, that I can request the recording on CD to be turned off at any point, and that the CD will be destroyed when the research report is completed. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.**

Subject's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

EXPIRES

APR 26 2013 Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

**APPROVED**  
Date: 4/27/12

Approved by the  
Rutgers IRR

Consent ID # \_\_\_\_\_

**Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study**

Title of Study: *Labor Market and Neighborhood Experiences of Young Adult Offenders: The Effects of Jail on the Reentry Process*

Principal Investigator: Justine H. McDavid

Form #2: Consent form for confidential interviews of offenders who have been released from a local correctional facility

**Introduction**

Hello, my name is Justine McDavid and I am a graduate student at Rutgers University. You are invited to participate in a research study of approximately 20-25 subjects. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions, you can ask me at any time. You should be satisfied with the answers before you agree to be in this study.

**Background**

I am currently working on my dissertation, which is a research project that I have designed to study the issues facing young adults who are returning to their communities from local correctional facilities in Montgomery County, MD. The purpose of this study is to learn about your life and your experiences before, during, and after incarceration. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences, including the various circumstances in your life up until now that you feel played a role in your criminal justice system involvement. I am also interested in learning about your feelings about being incarcerated, being away from home, and your thoughts and experiences after release from jail.

**Information**

If you agree to let me interview you, I will be asking you a series of questions that may or may not have simple answers. There are no correct or wrong answers. I want to find out what you feel and think about what has been happening to you. You can share with me as much or as little information as you would like. If you are comfortable with me using a digital recorder in the interview, I would like to do that so I am not writing notes down while speaking with you. I want to give you all of my attention and have a conversation with you regarding your experiences. However, if you prefer that I not use the recorder, I will make notes during the interview instead. If I do make a recording of the interview, it will be burned onto a CD and will remain my confidential property. No one other than me will be allowed to hear it, and I will destroy the CD after my dissertation is finished.

**APPROVED**Date: 4/27/12**EXPIRES** Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

APR 26 2013

Approved by the  
Rutgers IRR

Each interview should last between 1-2 hours each. This will depend on how much information you are willing to share with me. Since I am interested in learning about your experiences in jail, as well as after your release, I will be asking that you spend 2 days speaking with me – 1 day in jail and 1 day after you have been released. I anticipate the maximum amount of your time interviewing with me would be a total of 4 hours spread over 2 days.

### **Confidentiality**

If you agree to be interviewed, all of the information shared will remain confidential. I will not reveal what I discuss with you to anyone including correctional staff, parole, probation, your family, friends, community members, any other criminal justice or social service agencies, or anyone else in any way that would connect your name or identity to the things you tell me. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you, such as your name, phone numbers, age, gender, etc., However, I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated, unless you have agreed otherwise.

There are a limited number of situations in which I might have to report what you say. These are:

- 3) If you tell me specific details about future intentions to commit a crime or that you know someone else is going to commit a crime, I may have to report that information to the authorities, including the police.
- 4) If you tell me that you are going to harm yourself or others, I may have to report that information to the authorities, including the police or call someone to get you medical help.

### **Benefits**

It is my hope this study will help other people learn some things about young adults like you who are transitioning back into the community after incarceration. Some of the benefits associated with participating in the study include having your voice be heard by people in authority who might be able to change some things that may make it better for people like you when they get out of facilities. Although I cannot promise that this research study will have that effect, I do hope it will have a positive impact. I hope the knowledge obtained from your participation, and the participation of other volunteers, may help us to better understand your experiences.

**EXPIRES**

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

APR 26 2013

**APPROVED**

Date: 4/27/12

Approved by the  
Rutgers IRR

**Risks**

I do not expect any harm to come to anyone who participates in this study. This interview is confidential, and I will not publish your name or any other information that might identify you as a particular individual. However, I realize that talking about your life and personal experiences might cause you to become emotional or anxious at times. Because of that, I want you to understand that, if you begin an interview, you can stop at any time you like and you can refuse to answer any particular question. If you should need counseling as a result of getting upset by this interview, I would help you find a counselor that will be beneficial to you. I will obtain a list from the correctional facility of professionally trained counselors who are prepared to address the needs of individuals who have served time in a correctional facility and have now been released back into the community. I will refer you to the appropriate resource; however, I will not be able to pay for these services.

**Compensation**

I expect that each interview would last no more than two hours, depending mostly on what you are interested in discussing. This interview is entirely voluntary on your end. However, if you agree to participate in a follow-up interview, you will be compensated \$25 for your time. I am very much interested in learning about your experiences while incarcerated, as well as after your release. All participation would be entirely up to you. However, any participation from you will be greatly appreciated for the purposes of this research study.

Again, your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you do not want to participate at all or in some specific part of what I am doing, I will respect your wishes. Your decision to participate, or not, will not have any effect at all on your parole or probation status. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you may choose to withdraw from the study or choose not to answer specific questions. You may do so without forfeiting your \$25 stipend. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be removed from the data set and destroyed.

**Contact**

If you have any questions about possible benefits, risks, or discomforts that might go along with doing an interview, or about anything else that I am doing, please ask me and I will do my best to answer your questions.

If you would like to contact me at any time about this process, you can reach me at:

Justine H. McDavid, Principal Investigator  
School of Criminal Justice  
Rutgers-Newark

**EXPIRES**

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

APR 26 2013

**APPROVED**Date: 4/27/12Approved by the  
Rutgers IIR

123 Washington Street  
Newark, New Jersey 07102  
Telephone: (301) 704-3974

e-mail: [mcdavid@pegasus.rutgers.edu](mailto:mcdavid@pegasus.rutgers.edu)

If you would like to contact the faculty advisor on this research project, you can reach him at:

Mercer L. Sullivan, Faculty Advisor  
School of Criminal Justice  
Rutgers-Newark  
123 Washington Street  
Newark, New Jersey 07102  
Telephone: (973) 353-5931

e-mail: [mercers@andromeda.rutgers.edu](mailto:mercers@andromeda.rutgers.edu)

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of  
Human Subjects  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
3 Rutgers Plaza  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559  
Tel: 848-932-0150  
Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

**By signing below you agree to participate in an interview. Participation is voluntary. If you decide after you sign this form that you do not want to participate, you can stop participating at any time or refuse to answer questions. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.**

Subject's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator's  
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

EXPIRES

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

APR 26 2013

APPROVED

Date: 4/27/12

Approved by the  
Rutgers IRB

**I also agree to let part of this interview be digitally recorded, with the understanding that the recording will be used only for research purposes, that I can request the recording on CD to be turned off at any point, and that the CD will be destroyed when the research report is completed. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.**

Subject's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**EXPIRES** Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

**APPROVED**  
Date: 4/27/12

APR 26 2013

Approved by the  
Rutgers IRB

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### *Initial Interview*

#### *Sample Questions (demographics)*

1. How old are you?
2. Which ethnic or racial group(s) do you identify with?
3. What is the highest level of education you completed? GED? High school? College?
4. What is your marital status? Married, divorced, or single?

#### *Sample Questions (initial interview while inside facility or pre-release center)*

5. What are you currently locked up for? How long have you been locked up?
6. How many times have you been locked up? Are there other offenses you have been convicted of?
7. Do you know other people who have been locked up from your community? What about from your family? If so, what types of offenses have they been convicted of?
8. What is it like being incarcerated? What do you do on a typical day in jail?
9. How do you cope with being locked up, away from family, friends, etc.?
10. Does anyone visit you in jail? If so, how often do people visit you? What do you talk about on your visits? Do you think these visits help you cope with being locked up?
11. Have you had any positive experiences while being locked up? For example, have you been able to obtain educational or employment services? How about any additional programs or services?
12. Have you had any negative experiences while being locked? How do you get along with the staff and other inmates? Have you had any problems in jail?
13. What was your life like before you got locked up? Tell me about your family, friends, school, work, and neighborhood. Do you think life has changed much since you got locked up?
14. What types of jobs did you hold before you got locked up? How did you make money? How did you find these jobs? How did your friends make money?
15. What are your plans for employment after you are released? Do you have any leads or contacts that may be able to get you a job?

16. How long do you think it will take to get a job? Do you think being locked up will affect your chances of getting a job? How will you make money if you do not find a job immediately after release?
17. What types of jobs are you interested in? What do you want to be doing in 5 years? 10 years?
18. What are your concerns about leaving jail and returning to your community? Are you planning on hanging out with the same friends you had before you got locked up? How do you think this will affect your success in the community?
19. What do your friends and family think about you being incarcerated? Are they supportive of you as you near release? Who else is supportive of you?
20. Do you think being locked up will affect how your friends, family, community treat you? Why or why not?
21. What are you looking forward to as you near your release? What changes do you hope to make in your life?

### ***Follow-up Interview***

#### *Sample Questions (follow-up interview once released into community)*

1. How long have you been out of jail?
2. What was it like the day you got out? What did you do? Who were you with? Walk me through the day.
3. What is your current living situation? Do you have a regular place to live or are you in search of a regular place to live? Do you live with anyone? How does everyone get along?
4. Can you describe the neighborhood you live in? What types of jobs do people have there? How do they make money? Do you know anyone who hustles to make money? How do they do it? What are your thoughts on this option to make money?
5. Do you know anyone who has been released from jail or prison who met people inside of the facility that helped them find work? What kind of work do they do? How do they view the world? What is possible for them? What is not possible for them? What choices do they make that you agree or disagree with?
6. What are the positive things that have occurred since your release? What are the negative things that have occurred since your release?

7. Have you been able to obtain a job? What are the challenges you have faced while trying to secure work? How do you make money? How much do you make?
8. What types of jobs are you looking for? Have you received any services that have been helpful in your job search? Does anyone help you look for work?
9. How has being in jail affected your job opportunities? Is it easy or difficult to obtain legitimate work? How do employers react when they find out you have been locked up? How does this make you feel? How do you think they should react?
10. How do you feel about your future job opportunities? Are you satisfied with your options? Do you believe you will be able to secure and maintain long term employment? What changes would you like to see occur in your life, in terms of work?
11. Since you got out of jail, who do you spend the most time with? What do you do with them? How do they feel about you being locked up? This includes friends, family, romantic partners, etc.
12. Compared to what we spoke about while you were locked up, how has your experience been since being released? Is it what you thought it would be or is it different?
13. How do you feel about being locked up? How do you feel about knowing other people who have been locked up? How do you think being locked up has affected your life? How about your family's life? How about your friends' life?
14. What do you think you need to be successful after being locked up? What would be the most helpful things to prevent you from returning to jail?
15. If you could change anything in terms of programs and policies that directly affect people who have been locked up, what would you change? What would be the most important service, program, support to receive to help people make positive transitions back into the community?

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Justine McDavid Madoo

- 1982            Born April 25 in Georgetown, Guyana
- 2004            Bachelor of Arts in Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland
- 2006-2008      President, former Secretary, of Graduate Student Government Association, School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey
- 2007            Master of Arts in Criminal Justice, School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey
- 2007-2009      Research Assistant, School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey
- 2007            Sullivan, M.L., Christian, J. with E. Panuccio, J. Jensen, and J. McDavid. (2007). Interim Process Evaluation of Family-Oriented Juvenile Reentry Programs: A Report to the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission.
- 2008-2009      Adjunct Lecturer, School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey
- 2009            Sullivan, M.L., Christian, J. with E. Panuccio, J. Jensen, and J. McDavid. (2009). Evaluation of Family-Oriented Juvenile Reentry Programs: A Report to the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission.
- 2009-2010      Research Assistant, Economic Development Research Group. Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey
- 2011-2014      Adjunct Instructor, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice, Montgomery College, Rockville, Maryland
- 2011-            Adjunct Associate Professor, Criminal Justice and Legal Studies, University of Maryland, University College, Adelphi, Maryland
- 2013            Recipient, Dean's Research Grant, School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey
- 2014-            Lecturer, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland
- 2015            Doctor of Philosophy in Criminal Justice, School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey