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Romance, recovery & community re-entry for criminal justice involved women: Conceptualizing and measuring intimate relationship factors and power

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Abstract

Researchers have suggested that interpersonal relationships, particularly romantic relationships, may influence women's attempts at substance abuse recovery and community re-entry after criminal justice system involvement. The present paper evaluates relational and power theories to conceptualize the influence of romantic partner and romantic relationship qualities on pathways in and out of substance abuse and crime. The paper then combines these conceptualizations with a complementary empirical analysis to describe an ongoing research project that longitudinally investigates these relational and power driven factors on women's substance abuse recovery and community re-entry success among former substance abusing, recently criminally involved women. This paper is designed to encourage the integration of theory and empirical analysis by detailing how each of these concepts are operationalized and measured. Future research and clinical implications are also discussed.

Keywords

Substance Abuse Recovery; Interpersonal Relationships; Women; Power

Women have become increasingly represented in the criminal justice system over the past thirty years (Bloom, 1996; Covington, 2007); and recent reports have indicated up to an eightfold increase in women's incarceration rates (Covington, 2007). Furthermore, both women's incarceration and recidivism rates have increased at higher rates than those of men (Bloom, 1996; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004); and an estimated 60% of women released from prison or jail will be rearrested within three years (Deschenes, Owen & Crow, 2007). As the numbers of criminal justice-involved women have risen, scholars have emphasized understanding prisoner reentry processes as integral components of successful community re-integration (Petersilia, 2001; Travis, 2005).

Recent emphasis on gender-specific and gender-responsive programs has identified several important characteristics specific to justice involved women that continue to challenge women's attempts at community re-entry. Women-specific challenges include the

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motherhood of minor children, untreated mental disorders, substance abuse problems, minority status, poverty or economic disadvantage, and lack of post-release social supports (Bloom, 1996; Bloom, Owen & Covington, 2004; Holfreter, Reising&Morash, 2004; Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008; Steffensmeier & Allen, 1996). Because of these multiple challenges, women, when compared with men, report a greater need for tangible community resources, such as safe housing, education and employment opportunities, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, as well as basic food and clothing needs (Alegmano, 2001; O'Brien & Lee, 2007; Salina, Lesondak, Razzano & Parenti, 2011).

Recently, social scientists and criminologists have suggested that social relationships, in particular familial and romantic relationships, may also influence pathways to substance abuse and crime. For example, researchers have found strong empirical support that links the presence of familial supports to successful community re-entry after substance abuse treatment and criminal justice involvement (Jason, Olson, & Foli, 2004; Cheng, 2006; Cloud & Granfield, 2008). We are most interested in women's experiences in intimate or romantic relationships, and how these relationships influence pathways to substance abuse and crime; as well as the pathways leading away from substance abuse and crime. The idea for this project sprang from the authors' recognition of a common theme in many of their interactions with women exiting the criminal justice system. Countless anecdotal accounts mirrored the same personal struggles with romantic relationships: women's desires to have them, their own internal assessment about whether they believed that the relationship was "good" for them, their substance abuse recovery, and their chances for "starting over." Time after time, we would hear stories about how women's involvements with romantic partners either resulted in relapse or new criminal charges. Thus, the authors, and many of them women themselves, noted that women's romantic relationships often presented a risk for substance abuse recovery and successful community re-entry.

Even though research has indicated clear gender differences in the influence of romantic relationships on pathways to substance abuse and crime, researchers have suggested that previous research investigating these links may be too narrow to capture the complex and dynamic nature of intimate relationships (Leverentz, 2006; Covington, 2007). Furthermore, mixed method approaches may successfully combine the sound theoretical background as well as needed methodological rigor to social and psychological research (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2001; Griffin & Phoenix, 1994). The combination of these two methods may be especially important in cases where the goal is to create policy or political change as evidence based or quantitative research may better persuade constituents and policy makers (Akman, Toner, Suckless, Ali, Emmott & Downie, 2001).

We hope to investigate the link between romantic partner/relationship characteristics and women's community re-entry after periods of substance abuse and criminal justice involvement. In order to elucidate the link between romantic relationships and women's community re-entry, we investigate the complex link between women's community re-entry success, and women's dynamic intra-individual and romantic relationship factors. Specifically, we aim to investigate how women's individual motivations for intimacy, perceived relationship quality, romantic partner characteristics, and power-driven dynamics within the context of the romantic relationship, affect women's re-entry success in a sample

of formerly criminally involved women. In order to do so, we intend to first introduce a promising ongoing project, the DePaul Women's Participatory Action Research (PAR) study. This project is currently in progress and uses mixed methods to investigate these relationships. Next, we provide a critical analysis of relational and power theories, and explain how these two concepts provide a mechanism that may explain gender differences in substance abuse and crime pathways, particularly the differential influence of romantic relationships on community re-integration success. Finally, as we outline relational and power theories, we will provide a methodological description of how each of these power and relational variables is measured quantitatively, and what we propose may be potential relationships among the variables. Finally, we explain how these findings may contribute to the development of evidence based interventions for women re-entering the community with substance abuse.

The DePaul PAR project

DePaul's Participatory Action Research (PAR) Project is a longitudinal investigation funded by the National Institutes of Health, Center for Minority Health and Minority Health Disparities. The study seeks to investigate what factors affect justice involved women's success in community re-entry (e.g., housing environment, social supports, interpersonal interactions, romantic relationships, employment status) related to former substance abusing, criminally involved, women's community re-entry success. For the purposes of this inquiry, we have defined successful community re-entry by an individual's attainment of key resources commonly linked with successful functioning and independence after periods of substance abuse and criminal justice involvement (e.g., housing, employment, availability of social supports, drug abstinence, desistance from criminal behavior). This paper outlines a portion of this larger study that investigates the specific effects of romantic relationships on women's trajectories in and out of substance abuse and crime.

The PAR project uses mixed methods and Participatory Action Research principles (PAR; Jason, Keys, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor & Davis, 2004); and is a method of investigation that allows for community members to participate in all steps of the research process. Eligible participants are recently criminal justice system involved, former substance abusers, reporting a commitment to substance abuse abstinence. Participants were enrolled into the project, provided informed consent and detailed contact information for follow-up interviewing. Participants then completed baseline interviews that assessed several factors related to participant's previous criminal justice, sexual risk taking, substance abuse, social support, mental health, employment, and family and romantic relationships histories. Women are then contacted every six months for follow-up interviews to re-evaluate these factors, as well as to evaluate substance use, criminal behavior and sexual risk outcomes since the last interview. The power and relational data are collected at three different time points across a two year period. Our sample reflects the population one typically sees in an urban criminal justice system; as our participants were primarily poor (~ 45% of sample reported household incomes at or below federal poverty line), of minority status (~ 74% African American), unemployed (~ 66%), single mother status (~ 84%) and had limited educational attainment (~ 56% high school diploma or less). Furthermore, participants reported previous trauma histories, with approximately 85% of the sample reporting

(physical, sexual and/or emotional) abuse in their lifetime. Given these risk factors and challenges, this sample is at a high risk for relapse, recidivism and other negative physical and mental health outcomes.

Relational Theory & pathways into substance abuse & crime

Relational theory suggests that a large proportion of many women's identity development is achieved through "connections" with others (Covington, 2007; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver & Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1976). These connections exhibit mutuality and empathy, and are defined as "interactions with others that bring about a sense of being in time with others, and a sense of being understood and valued" (Covington, 2007, pg 4). Furthermore, mutuality is defined as "occur[ing] when each person in a relationship can represent her feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, and can both move with and be moved by feelings, thoughts and perceptions of the other person. Empathy is defined as a complex, highly developed ability to join with another at a cognitive and affective level without losing connection to one's own experience" (Covington, 2007, pg 4).

Relational Theory suggests that women who are able to foster mutual and empathetic connections are more likely to experience increased self-worth, increased knowledge of self and others, and increased empowerment to act (Covington, 2007). Conversely, multiple disconnections have been linked to negative psychological consequences such as depression, lack of self-knowledge, negative well-being and substance abuse (Covington, 2007; Henderson, 1997). Furthermore, Relational theorists suggest that disconnections may lead to substance abuse because women may either use substances to numb the negative effects of painful non-mutual, non-empathetic, or violent relationships, or may use substances as an attempt to foster or maintain current connections that lack mutuality (Covington, 2007).

Studies have illustrated this attempt to foster connections through substance abuse with intimate partners. For example, research has found that women willingly engaged in higher risk behaviors such as secondary drug injection because they reasoned that this behavior built intimacy and emotional relationship ties, and stated that their partners were "taking care of them" by first injecting themselves, and then injecting them (Sheard & Tompkins, 2008; McCollum, Nelson, Lewis & Trepper, 2005; Simmons & Singer, 2006).

Research illustrates that women's pathways into criminal activity are complex and dynamic, and are often tied to young girls' experiences with poverty, broken homes, abuse and victimization (Covington, 2007; Oderekek & Puccinni, 2010). Many adolescent girls enter into the juvenile justice system as a result of status offenses such as running away and truancy (Oidekerk & Reppucci, 2010). Some researchers suggest that the key to understanding women's pathways into crime lies in the investigation of the transition of young women from the juvenile justice system into adult criminal behavior (Oidekerk & Reppucci, 2010), and caution that romantic partner characteristics can be powerful influences on this transition. For example, the Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health found that girls who partnered with "bad boys" were more likely to engage in illegal behaviors. These findings were robust even after controlling for peer delinquency, length of romantic relationship, and socio-demographic characteristics (Oidekerk & Reppucci, 2010).

The link between desire for romantic relationships and substance abuse is also well established (Bloom et al, 2004; Covington, 2007). Thus, research in this field necessitates a focus on the collective effects of these three factors on women's community reintegration success.

Pathways out of substance abuse and crime

Several research studies have investigated gender differences for substance abuse recovery success in the context of romantic relationships, and have indicated that recovering men benefit more from romantic relationships than recovering women (Leverentz, 2006). Most often, these results are explained by the differential access to pro-social partners (Laudet, Magura, Furst & Kumar, 1999; Leverentz, 2006). This differential access stems from the fact that men are more likely to find pro-social partners, or partners who do not have criminal or drug abuse histories, and who adhere to law abiding norms and values. Consequently, these "prosocial" women may serve as powerful modulators of the male romantic partner's behavior, and often stipulate that pro-social, abstinent behaviors are necessary for the relationship to remain intact. Alternatively, after release, many women return to high crime neighborhoods with large proportions of male ex-offenders and substance users (Leverentz, 2006); thus, the pool of recovery-conducive romantic partners may be much smaller. With reduced access to recovery-minded partners, women may enter into relationships with partners who may influence their return to criminal behaviors and unhealthy lifestyles. This reduced access to male pro-social partners may place women at a disadvantage for successful community re-entry which is further complicated by the fact that historically, substance abusing men are often not very supportive of women's attempts at recovery (McRae & Aalto, 2000; Tuten & Jones, 2003). Thus, we are interested in parsing apart the complicated interactional relationship between partner pro-social characteristics and other relational and power driven variables.

Partner's pro-social characteristics - measurement

In order to measure the dynamic changes in the level of pro-social characteristics participants' romantic partners' exhibit, we collect data on partner attributes at each time point. We use portions of the Relationship Survey Form from John Hopkins' School of Medicine Center for Addiction and Pregnancy (Tuten & Jones, 2003) to first investigate basic sociodemographic information for the participant and the romantic partner (partner's age, educational attainment, ethnicity, employment status, past and current drug and criminal history, HIV risk behaviors, length of time in relationship).

Historically, studies that have investigated romantic relationships have most often operationalized romantic partners in relationships as married partners; however, researchers have recently acknowledged the importance of including non-married couples in analyses (Owens, Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2011; Rhoades, Scott, Stanley, Markman, 2011). This expansion of the operational definition of "romantic partner" is especially important for our sample because many women may not "fit" the Americanized definition of "romantic partner" since they may be in romantic relationships with same sex partners, or may have deliberately chosen to postpone or eschew marriage. For example, some American

researchers have found support that minority women may purposely delay marriage until after motherhood (Edin & Keflas, 2005). Our sample reflects this tendency as an overwhelming majority report being mothers (84%) single marital status (~ 91%), or same sex partners (~ 19%). Thus, we have added questions that attempt to parse apart the classification of relationship partner (committed relationship partner, casual partner, sex work partner), partner's gender (an indicator of sexual orientation), as well as the marital status and length of relationship. We do not make any specific hypotheses about the influence of non-heterosexual relationship status, as we suggest that power and relational factors play a role in all types of romantic partnerships. Our sample contains a large enough proportion of participant's reporting non-heterosexual relationships that we will be able to investigate this topic further.

We also assess qualities of the relationship that may indicate increased enmeshment history between the romantic partners (whether or not the romantic partner and participant ever used together, whether or not the partners have a child together, whether or not the partners have ever relapsed together, whether or not the partners have ever engaged in criminal activity together), as these factors may influence the stability of the relationship, and women's likelihood to relapse and recidivate with her partner. Finally, we directly ask the participant two questions about their romantic relationship partner's support for their substance abuse recovery and community re-entry efforts (e.g. How supportive is your partner in your attempt to stop using drugs? (1 – Not at all to 5 – Extremely supportive); Do you think your partner would be willing to help you with your problems (for example, go to counseling/ attend groups? (Yes/No).

Previous research has illustrated that romantic partners who display more pro-social behaviors (non-engagement in criminal or drug using activities), and are more socially supportive of community re-entry efforts better influence women's chances at successful community re-entry. However, we suggest that these relationships may be complicated by other power driven and relational factors within each romantic dyad.

Relational Theory & women's specific re-entry needs

Research has noted that, oftentimes, the simplest step to criminal desistance is substance abuse recovery (Mallik-Kane & Visser, 2008). However, women who use substances do not always have the resources or supports for successful community reentry, thus perpetuating the cycle of substance use and crime (Salina, Lesondak, Razzano & Parenti, 2011; Covington & Surrey, 1997). Furthermore, women's substance use often results in continued legal consequences related to obtaining drugs, prostitution, and probation/parole violations.

Some studies suggest that women exiting the criminal justice system lack tangible and emotional supports usually provided by family members and close friends (Salina et al., 2011). Furthermore, previously incarcerated women often re-enter the community severely depleted of necessary resources. There may be several reasons for this lack of social support: 1) women may purposefully avoid re-connecting with family members and close friends because of the group's involvement in criminal or drug activities, 2) women may not be able to obtain tangible and emotional social support from their family or friendships because

these resources have already been severely strained by other obligations or economic pressures, and/or 3) women may not have the support of their family and friends because these potential supports have chosen to terminate (either temporarily or permanently) the relationship as a result of previous problems that occurred during these women's active substance use. Thus, given that women newly exiting the criminal justice system often lack the necessary social support needed to gain access to valuable resources, and that women are motivated to create relationship bonds with others, women may be especially motivated to begin (or rekindle) romantic relationships. This desire to create intimate relationships may be especially powerful since newer romantic relationships may be relatively easily created, in comparison to attempting to repair previously broken relationship bonds with family (Covington & Surrey, 1997; Zelvin, 1999).

Motivation for Romantic Relationships (Relational Theory) - Measurement

We aim to investigate the motivation for relationship development in our sample; however, this project does not explicitly ask women to report their own desires for romantic relationships. Instead, we attempt to investigate relationship building motivation by proxy, using the interpersonal relationship subscale of Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources (COR; 1989) measure. The original COR scale contains 45 items, and assesses personal assessments of loss and gain across several types of resource domains. For the purposes of this analysis, we use the 18 item intimacy loss subscale that assessed participant's perceptions of loss in the past 3 months for romantic intimacy loss items (e.g. good relationship with my partner). We expect that women who report high levels of perceived intimacy loss at baseline will be more likely to enter into romantic relationships during study duration. Furthermore, we also expect that women who report higher intimacy gains at successive interviews (compared to the losses at baseline) will be less likely to leave relationships with non-pro-social partners, and will be more likely to relapse and recidivate if they are with non-prosocial partners.

Researchers have suggested that future investigations link relationship quality (e.g., perceived relationship quality, perceptions of relationship commitment) to women's substance abuse and crime trajectories. Thus, we have also added two measures that delve into dynamic perceived relationship quality factors across the study. The first, Arriaga and Agnew's (2001) Commitment scale, is a 12-item, 5-point Likert scale (1-Not at all true, to 5-Extremely true; e.g., "I feel very strongly linked to my partner - very attached to our relationship") that assesses individuals' long term attitudes and goals for their relationship. We expect that women in relationships with less pro-social partners who report higher levels of relationship commitment will be more likely to remain in these relationships, and more likely to relapse or recidivate over the study course. We also use Fletcher, Simpson and Thomas' (2000) Perceived Relationship Quality Components scale. This scale is an 18 item, 7-point Likert scale (1-Not at all to 7-Extremely; e.g., "How devoted are you to this relationship?") that investigates romantic relationship satisfaction and assesses the commonly cited components of relationship satisfaction: trust, commitment, intimacy, passion, and love as a whole. We expect, similar to commitment, women in romantic relationships with non-pro-social partners who report higher levels of romantic relationship

satisfaction will be more likely to relapse and recidivate, and less likely to leave relationships with non pro-social partners.

Power within romantic relationships & community re-entry success

The concept of power has been surrounded by controversy since theorists argue about how power should be defined and used to promote social equality (Hooks, 2000). Literature acknowledges three different conceptualizations of power: power as an inherently negative and corrupting concept, power as a useful and necessary concept, and power as an elusive, intangible concept (at least for women). One definition of power asserts that power is a form of social dominance, and that any illustration of this power is a misuse that opens the door to oppression (Hooks, 2000). Proponents of this conceptualization argue that since all humans have the same value system, women, once they have absorbed the same access to power as men, would use the power in the same oppressive manner. If true, one would expect that women with power would engage in activities focused on their own needs, regardless of legal consequences or the perceived need to use violence against others. This conceptualization of power then asserts that social activists must totally redefine the social structure in such ways that reduce social power for all humans.

A second conceptualization of power asserts that power is a “necessary evil” and argues that women must take social power back to finally equalize power with males. Thus, supporters argue that women should learn to use power the same way that men do. Proponents of this conceptualization of power argue that women are fundamentally different than men, and these differences would prevent them from abusing power. In fact, proponents of this power conceptualization assert that women’s natural nurturing instincts cause them to fear and eschew power, thus, women must be first taught that power is a necessary part of life that can better women’s living circumstances (Hooks, 2000).

The final conceptualization of power asserts that there is no true way to empower women enough to establish social equality between the sexes. This conceptualization of power stemmed directly from criticisms of Empowerment Theory. Supporters reason that women are so disenfranchised that unless structural changes occur to redistribute resources, any psychological attempts at reconceptualizing power on the individual level are simply a mirage of power and are not fruitful (Riger, 1993). The authors, in an attempt to apply knowledge taken from research on Relational Theory and Power, suggest that the second definition of power is the most useful for our purposes.

We suggest that power differentials within romantic relationships may interact with romantic relationship partner effects to explain why some women are less successful at community re-integration as compared to their male counterparts. Using Relational Theory as a springboard, we suggest that former substance abusing, criminally involved women may be especially at-risk for creating new or resurrecting old relationships that are misconnected and non-mutual. Since mutuality implies equal power with others, and that each member in the romantic dyad is free to share their own thoughts and feelings with one another; non-mutual relationships are thought of as inherently less powerful. Thus, women who are in non-mutual relationships may not feel as if they can share their own thoughts or

feelings, and may also feel as if they must acquiesce to their partners' wishes. Women in disempowering romantic relationships may be less likely to leave relationships with non pro-social partners, or may be more likely to relapse or re-offend with these non pro-social partners. Furthermore, women in these disconnected, non-mutual relationships may also be so disempowered that they may not be able to assert themselves when a romantic partner suggests that they either re-enter the drug culture (by asking her to take part in using drugs, or engage in sex work for drugs or money) or by making other unsafe choices.

The most obvious and common form of power measurement within dyads rests in the structural examination of differential access to resources; with the assumption that those with the most access to valued resources will yield the most power. Historically, since women tend to be younger, less educated, and less financially stable than their romantic partners, many women are disempowered to some degree within this type of romantic relationship. However, given that our sample often has tremendous difficulty securing educational and financial resources, due to their previous drug and criminal involvement, these women may be subjected to romantic relationships with extremely high power differentials. We evaluate comparative access to key resources by asking participants to answer questions about their own, and their romantic partner's educational attainment, job status, and income. This information allows us to calculate resource access comparisons. In addition, we also ascertain if participants receive financial support from their partners for both their living and entertainment expenses.

Although comparative access to resources is a highly effective measurement of power, it is important to understand that this one concept cannot provide an exhaustive explanation of the complicated power dynamics in romantic relationships. Attraction researchers have suggested that men and women may have different mate values based on several characteristics, and that the relative "worth" (and resulting power) of a romantic partner may be much more difficult to calculate (Regan, 1998). In order to capture the complexities of power dynamics beyond the most obvious comparison of differential access to resources, we have added three other proxies of power within romantic relationships in which we compare romantic partners' decision making power, emotional investment, and benefit taking within the relationship. Researchers have found that the more powerful romantic partner usually: 1) makes most of the important decisions in the relationship, 2) is less emotionally involved in the relationship and 3) perceives that their partner is receiving the most benefits from the relationship when they conduct a cost-benefit comparison.

We assess these three additional proxies of power (decision-making power, emotional investment, comparative benefit taking) by using Felmlee's (1994) Brief Power Measure, a 4 item, 7-point Likert scale. Questions ask participants to rate which partner has 1) more absolute power, 2) makes more decisions in the relationship, 3) is less emotionally involved and 4) is getting a "better deal" (e.g., Compared to what you put into the relationship, and what you get out of the relationship, and what your partner puts into the relationship, and what they get out of it – who would you say is getting a better deal?"; – "I am getting a better deal – 7, "My partner is getting a better deal"). We expect those women who perceive themselves as having less decision making power, being more emotionally involved, and receiving more benefits than their partner will be more likely to stay with romantic partners.

Furthermore, we predict that women in non pro-social relationships who report power deficits in these domains will be the less likely to leave their romantic relationships, and more at-risk for relapse and negative community reintegration outcomes.

Our third measure of power attempts to use a more observational style of power measurement, by asking participants to detail their typical interaction patterns during a relationship problem. This measure, entitled the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) aims to capture the manifestation of power that stems from the three proxies of power (decision making, emotional investment, comparative benefit taking); in particular, emotional involvement. This manifestation of power can be evidenced in differences in stereotypical communications (style and content), particularly in communications where one partner is requesting change, and another member is attempting to maintain status quo. During this type of communication, a stereotypical Demand/Withdraw pattern emerges (Heaven, Smith, Prabhakar, Abraham & Mete, 2006). In these exchanges, the more powerful member of the dyad most often shuts the communication down (effectively withdraws) and the lesser powered member will attempt to keep the lines of communication open, while using verbal cues and language that might become excited, agitated or plaintive in attempts to get the greater powered individual to stay engaged in the conversation. Stereotypically, research has indicated that in patriarchally defined romantic relationships; women have less power in the relationship and often assume the role of “demander” and men often assume the role of “withdrawer.” We expect that high demander women in relationships with non pro-social partners will be the most likely to recidivate and relapse. However, we expect that women in greater demander roles in these relationships may be more likely to terminate relationships with non pro-social partners in favor of relationships with more pro-social partners.

We include one final assessment of power dynamics by asking participants to report their lifetime and past 30 day prevalence of emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Abuse represents an extreme form of powerlessness that may influence women’s mental health, substance abuse and community re-entry.

Empowerment

While it is important to measure women’s perceived power in the multiple contexts described above, it is also critical to evaluate women’s perceived empowerment. Empowerment has been widely discussed in the literature, and this emphasis on empowerment has been linked to the historical oppression of women. The concept of empowerment is often rooted in a woman’s ability to obtain power, and this ability is often related to women’s capacity to make choices (Kabeer, 1999). For example, Kabeer (1999) asserted that choice is a construct directly related to power, and subsequently highlighted three dimensions of empowerment that outline the process of empowerment for women: 1) resources (all available resources that promote choice—a pre-condition of empowerment); 2) agency (the ability to use the available resources to develop and act on goals); and 3) achievements (the outcome of using resources to contribute to the process of pursuing and acting on goals).

An overarching goal of research and practice has been to empower women (Worrell & Remer, 2003). Johnson, Worell, and Chandler (2005) proposed a model of empowerment which led to the development of a measure of empowerment (Personal Progress Scale-Revised [PPS-R]) for women in feminist therapy. In this framework, women's empowerment consisted of four broad principles. These included: 1) recognizing women's identity within a social context (Principle 1: Personal and social identity are interdependent); 2) looking at the basis of mental illness within a social and political context, including accounting for both gendered and cultural stereotypes of women (Principle 2: Personal is political); 3) addressing the unequal status between women and men (Principle 3: Relationships are egalitarian); and 4) valuing traditional feminine characteristics, such as caring and demonstrating concern for others (Principle 4: Women's perspectives are valued).

Empowerment – Measurement

Our project uses the Women in Recovery Empowerment Scale (WIRES; Hunter, Jason & Keys, 2011) to measure empowerment in our sample. This scale is a 20-item, 7-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree) that assesses women's self-perceived empowerment (e.g. I am aware of my strengths as a woman), knowledge of community resources (e.g. I am aware of places in my community that will help me find jobs.) and participation in behavioral activities (e.g. I participate in activities in my neighborhood) based on community psychology frameworks of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995). The WIRES was created from the original PPS-R by including items designed to assess aspects of empowerment that were not included in the original measure, such as resource knowledge and participation in community and/or organizational activities. In addition, the WIRES was developed specifically for the population of women who had substance use histories. Thus, the WIRES may allow for a more comprehensive assessment of empowerment, specifically for women in substance abuse recovery who have past criminal justice system involvement. We expect that women who score higher on the WIRES will be more likely to leave non pro-social partners, will be less likely to relapse, and will be more likely to successfully re-enter the community. These findings will be particularly evident for women who report having a higher knowledge of where to access important resources in their community (childcare, food, housing, substance abuse treatment).

Conclusion

We have provided an analysis of interpersonal variables that may impact women's likelihood of substance use and community re-entry within the frameworks of both relational and power theories. Importantly, we have provided a conceptual overview of women's pathways into and out of criminal behavior and substance use. Central to our discussion is the overlap between substance use, criminal justice involvement, and relational theory; with specific attention to the underlying mechanisms of power dynamics in romantic relationships. Within this context, interpersonal relationships, specifically characteristics of romantic relationships, such as partner choice, partner behaviors, and power within the dyad, may greatly contribute to women's challenges for both continued abstinence and community re-entry. There is a dearth of evidence that investigates how romantic relationships

contribute to the needs of this population and their recovery trajectories. It is essential that future research continue to examine how dynamic features of romantic relationships influence women's substance use recovery and community reintegration success.

Power is integral to our understanding of women's lived experiences, in that the theoretical components of equality and mutuality are reflective of power distributions. For women who face multiple oppressions, power may manifest itself in an inability to make choices, be self-sufficient, choose pro-social partners and effectively negotiate within these romantic dyads to best support community re-entry efforts. It is our hope that researchers can continue to evaluate these concepts using both quantitative and qualitative methods, so that the dynamic nature of romantic relationships can be better understood. We assume that other researchers are currently creating or evaluating evidence based programs in the criminal justice system. Thus, we have gone into detail and described at length the quantitative measurement of these power driven and relational concepts. We look forward to reporting the outcomes of our study in the future, and hope that this initial report will aid those in the field of women's criminal justice and substance abuse by providing a strong theoretical conceptualization of how romantic relationships can influence women's substance abuse and community re-entry trajectories. Furthermore, we hope that this initial report will encourage those in the field to continue to create therapies aimed at creating the skills necessary to allow former criminally involved, substance abusing women to identify their own motivations for romantic relationships, successfully navigate non community re-integrative conducive relationships with non pro-social partners, and balance unequal power distributions to ensure successful community re-integration.

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Biographies

Lisa C. Walt, Ph.D., is an Experimental Health and Social Psychologist, and is currently employed as the Project Director of a large NIH (Center for Minority Health & Minority Health Disparities) funded grant. This project investigates the difficulties women with criminal backgrounds and substance abuse histories face when re-entering the community. Her expertise and interests lie in the investigation and assessment of the interaction of social cognitive, self-regulatory and interpersonal factors related to the development and progression of chronic illness (substance abuse, heart disease, HIV, diabetes), as well as the creation of interventions aimed at addressing these issues to promote positive health outcomes.

Bronwyn A. Hunter, MA, is a doctoral candidate in the clinical community psychology PhD program at DePaul University. Currently, Bronwyn works as a graduate assistant with Dr. Leonard Jason on a project evaluating the Oxford House model as an effective aftercare program for women exiting the criminal justice system in Chicago. In the future, she hopes to work in the community developing, implementing, and evaluating programs that facilitate reentry for women offenders.

Doreen Salina, Ph.D., is a clinical and forensic psychologist and an Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Northwestern University, Feinberg School of Medicine, since 1993. She has had extensive experience working with incarcerated and post release individuals. Dr. Salina has a long history of conducting research and consultation with incarcerated populations and other groups disproportionately affected by health disparities.

Leonard Jason, Ph.D. is a professor of Psychology at DePaul University and the Director of the Center for Community Research. He is a former president of the Division of Community Psychology of the American Psychological Association. He received the 1997 Distinguished Contributions to Theory and Research Award and the 2007 Special Contribution to Public Policy award by the Society for Community Research and Action. Dr. Jason was also awarded the 2011 Perpich Award for distinguished service to the IACFS/ME and the CFS/ME community. Dr. Jason has edited or written 23 books, and he has published over 540 articles and 77 book chapters on ME/CFS; recovery homes; the prevention of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse; media interventions; and program evaluation.

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