

A CASE STUDY EXAMINATION OF MALE FORMER YOUTH OFFENDERS'
SCHOOL REENTRY CHALLENGES AND FACTORS ENABLING THEIR
ACADEMIC SUCCESS

by

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTOPHER MARK GLOVER. A multiple case study examination of former youth offenders' school reentry challenges and factors enabling their success. (Under the direction of DR. CHANCE W. LEWIS)

Youth offenders often struggle to successfully return to their communities and schools after release from confinement. The reasons for this struggle are well documented, as is the fact that school engagement and success (before and after confinement) are closely associated with delinquency and recidivism. Despite this, little attention has been given to examining the specific school reentry challenges that reentering youth offenders face, as well as the supports and motivating factors that enabled some to succeed. In response, this dissertation analyzed the success stories of former youth offenders who returned to their schools from confinement, graduated, and remained out of the justice system. To do this, a single case study was conducted with four "successful" former youth offenders. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, with this analysis yielding four central themes: (1) Managing and Balancing: Dealing with School Reentry Challenges; (2) I Did It, With Help: The Types and Role of Social Support; (3) No Other Choice: Motivating Factors for Reentry Success; and (4) It's a Process: Sustaining Motivation for Reentry Success.

The findings illustrated the school reentry challenges for former youth offenders and how social supports and motivation are both critical, and complement each other, for those achieving success. Furthermore, it was revealed that because reentry is a process with many challenges, failures, and setbacks, motivation must be sustained and persistent. This is done, in part, through embracing weakness and a lack of confidence in

the ability to be successful in isolation. The participants in this study did not necessarily expect success, which led them to be more diligent in setting boundaries, sticking to strategies, and leaning upon others for help. In the end, the findings and recommendations provided in this study allow for schools to imagine how to improve their services for youth offenders and ensure that they become the protective factor that is so desperately needed. Doing so could significantly reduce the recidivism rates for youth offenders and provide significant cost savings to broader society.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	19
School-to-prison Pipeline	20
Community Isolation and Violence	23
School Policies, Interactions, and Climate	26
Staff/Student Interactions	27
School Climate	32
Academic Achievement	33
Justice System	35
Personal Factors	38
Differential Involvement Versus Differential Selection	42
Confinement	46
Personal Experience/Identity Development	46
Educational Challenges	49
Reentry	53
Challenges	54
Motivational and Support Factors for Successful Reentry	56
Community Reintegration	57
Reentry Interventions and Supports	59
Motivation and Reentry	63
School Connection	68
Summary	71

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	75
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	93
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	147
REFERENCES	171
APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL	187
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT	188
APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT TALKING POINTS	191
APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE	192
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	193

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For incarcerated youth, reentry represents the world outside of confinement and the day when they will once again return to their communities and face the struggles and possibilities of being reunited with family and friends. For most of the 100,000 youth present in juvenile detention centers each day, this moment will certainly come (Sickmund, 2008). Indeed, despite the wide variety of reasons youth are incarcerated, most have at least one common trait—they will eventually transition back into society. This reintegration process is fraught with difficulty, as evidenced by the fact that approximately 55% will again be arrested, 33% will be reconvicted, and 25% will be reincarcerated, all within one year of release (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).

Wilka (2011) noted that the process into juvenile confinement can be described as a pipeline that begins at birth and is characterized by disparate access to certain opportunities, resources, and labels (e.g. quality schools, stable families, quality nutrition and healthcare, etc.). After youth enter this pipeline, they are often caught in a cycle that funnels them into the adult criminal justice system. Many youth enter the system with previously identified learning disabilities and/or low academic scores to go along with multiple other struggles (Foley, 2001; Meltzer, Levine, Karniski, Palfrey, & Clarke, 1984). They often possess mental health disorders, substance abuse problems, anxiety disorders, and disruptive disorders (Gupta, Kelleher, Pajer, Stevens, & Cuellar, 2005). While in confinement, youth offenders often receive inconsistent and inadequate

educational services, causing them to fall even further behind in their schooling (Morrison & Epps, 2002; Painter, 2008). Additionally, despite the more rehabilitative focus of the juvenile justice system (in comparison to the adult criminal justice system), youth often do not receive adequate supports or reentry planning, and they experience inmate culture and delinquent peers that can further entrench a delinquent identity (Inderbitzin, 2009).

When released, former youth offenders often return to the same underserved and marginalized neighborhoods where they struggle to find housing and jobs, reconnect with family and friends, and avoid delinquent temptations (Fields & Abrams, 2010; Vaughn, Wallace, Davis, Fernandes, & Howard, 2008). Compounding their struggles is the fact that many face dual transitions as they simultaneously try to transition back into society while transitioning into adulthood (Zimmerman, 2005). Finally, as Maruna (2001) notes, “The socially excluded street offenders...face far more obstacles to reintegration, because in most cases they were never integrated in the mainstream in the first place” (p. 14). Their struggles often mirror those they previously faced before detention, with the added dimension that upon release they also possess further educational deficits, broken social bonds, and negative criminogenic labels.

Numerous reentry challenges—forming new friendships with prosocial peers, catching up on schoolwork, and redeeming newly acquired criminal identities—take place within the youth’s own school. For many, the school itself represents a return to chaos from the structure of confinement—the only place where they felt they could predict cause and effect (Rios, 2011). With so many overlapping challenges, it is no surprise that many youth offenders get entangled in a complex system that pushes them

towards the adult prison system rather than away from it. Still, there are those that manage to return to school, graduate, and “stay clean.” But how did they do it?

Research indicates that successful reentry to school is a key factor in remaining out of incarceration, but it reveals little about how these successes have occurred (Novotny & Burnstein, 1974; Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, & D’Ambrosio, 2001). Indeed, it reveals little at all about the specific school reentry experiences and challenges of former youth offenders. This perspective—the stories of successful former youth offenders’ school reentry and how they managed success—is increasingly needed in a context of exceedingly high failure rates. Uncovering this perspective was the purpose of this study.

The remainder of this chapter first provides a more detailed explanation of the problem—namely, that research exists on numerous facets of youth offender reentry but neglects to focus on success stories within school reentry (Todis et al., 2001). Following this, the chapter develops the purpose of the study and specific research questions that will be addressed before discussing the study’s undergirding theoretical frameworks. Two frameworks, Social Support Theory and Motivational Capital, form the foundation for this study. After discussing the frameworks, the context of the study is described, an overview of the methods is given, and the overarching significance of this research is noted. Additionally, this chapter includes a section on my background as a researcher in an effort to position myself within the study and acknowledge my own experiences and biases. Finally, the chapter concludes by defining important terms to be used, discussing the limitations and delimitations of the study, and summarizing the chapter.

Statement of the Problem

While most researchers, practitioners, and policymakers agree that high youth recidivism rates are problematic, these rates continue to be the norm (Bernard & Kurlychek, 2010). In an effort to address this issue, numerous studies on youth offender reentry have documented risk and protective factors, specific interventions aimed at reducing recidivism, and personal experiences of youth offenders (Abrams, 2012; Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008; Calley, 2012; Evans-Chase & Zhou, 2014; Fields & Abrams, 2010; Inderbitzin, 2009; Watson, 2004). Still, despite a wealth of research, inadequate and ineffective reentry services are often the only available options, and inconsistency remains common (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008). While part of the problem is arguably funding and a lack of political will, another issue is the lack of focus on the schooling engagement of reentering youth offenders. Numerous studies have shown the importance of education in reentry and the high correlation between education and incarceration (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Katsiyannis, Ryan, Zhang, & Spann, 2008; N. Silberberg & M. Silberberg, 1971). Research has also been conducted on the education of offenders and their experiences *within detention* (Wexler, Pyle, Flower, Williams, & Cole, 2014). In comparison, however, little has been done to understand: (1) the challenges of youth offenders *within school* after reentry and (2) the support systems and motivating factors of those students who transitioned successfully back into school, graduated, and remained out of the carceral system. This is particularly troubling since education is inextricably linked to incarceration and future life prospects and school is where many youth offenders return and spend a significant portion of their time after release from detention (Hirschfield, 2014).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

In response to the lack of research on school reentry, the purpose of this study was to focus on *school* experiences of *successfully* reintegrated former youth offenders. For this study, success includes both graduation from high school (no GEDs) and desistance from crime. It was the goal of this study to examine successful former youth offenders and their challenges with school reentry. Additional purposes included uncovering the support systems that enabled success, as well as examining the role of motivation in success—its development and its relationship to support.

Research Questions

In order to fulfill the purposes of this study, four research questions remained central:

- 1) How do successful former youth offenders describe their high school reentry challenges?
- 2) What social supports do these former youth offenders describe as helpful to their success?
- 3) What motivated these former youth offenders to desist from crime?
- 4) What motivated these former youth offenders to graduate from high school?

Theoretical Framework

Though this study focuses on the educational experiences of former youth offenders, it utilizes a blended theoretical framework that consists of a theory and concept/construct that are not educational in nature but have been shown to be influential in criminal desistance: Social Support Theory and Motivational Capital. One stems from the psychological field and the other from criminology. In including both, I am

acknowledging that both internal and external factors play a role in desistance and that they can influence each other.

Social Support Theory

Social Support Theory, as an explicit criminological paradigm, was advanced by Cullen (1994) in his Presidential Address to the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. In this address, Cullen noted that numerous criminology writings stemming from The Chicago School and diverse others had either implicitly or explicitly referenced the importance of social support in preventing crime (Cullen, 1994). In his words, “The writings of The Chicago School suggest that lack of social support- not simply exposure to criminal cultures or a lack of control- is implicated in crime” (Cullen, 1994, p. 528). Rather than being opposed to most criminological theory already in use, Cullen proposed that social support be integrated and formally examined. It could be seen as reducing the stress of individuals that is common in Strain Theory, and it could be seen as a balancing force along with the social control evident in Control Theories. It was also already a common theme in feminist and peacemaking studies. Instead of keeping social support secondary, implicit, and segregated across various theories, Cullen advocated bringing it to the forefront and using it as an organizing principal for future research.

Within Cullen’s (1994) Social Support framework, several propositions lay out his argument that “both across nations and across communities, crime rates vary inversely with the level of social support” (p. 537). Embedded within these propositions, and critical to this particular study, is the definition of social support. As defined by Lin (1986), social support is “the perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners” (p. 18).

In his theory, Cullen synthesized and built on the components of social support that were previously described by Lin et al. (1986), House (1981), and Vaux (1988). These components include:

- 1) Social support includes a distinction between objective support and perception of support. People do not always receive support in the same way, but rather interpret it based on context.
- 2) Social support consists of instrumental and expressive dimensions. The instrumental dimension involves a relationship that is used as a means to an end, and it can include material goods. The expressive dimension involves a relationship that is both an end and a means. It can include affirmation, encouragement, love, and companionship.
- 3) Social support can vary based on social level. Micro-level support occurs on an individual level, while macro-level support involves social networks and larger ecological units, including community and government systems.
- 4) Social support can be delivered by formal agency or informal relations. Informal support involves a relationship that has no official status, while formal support involves relationships that do, including the government and criminal justice system.

Though not a part of the overall scope of social support as defined above, it is also imperative to make a distinction between positive and negative support systems. Indeed, social support may actually increase delinquency if the support is criminogenic in nature. Therefore, positive social support systems must outweigh negative social support systems.

Since Cullen's delineation of social support, several studies have examined its relationship to crime and delinquency (Colvin, Cullen, & Vander Ven, 2002; Hochstetler & DeLisi, 2010). Most notable for this study, however, are the studies that focus on youth offender reentry and the importance of social support (Panuccio, Christian, Martinez, & Sullivan, 2012). These studies have illustrated the importance of social support in helping reentering youth offenders establish themselves successfully in the community and desist from crime. Continuing in that vein, Social Support Theory is suited well for the purposes of this study because of its focus on surrounding youth offenders with systems and relationships within the school setting that promote prosocial behavior and encourage success. In examining these areas, this study hopes to add to the knowledge base on how schools can be "protective factors that both insulate persons from criminal/deviant behavior and assist in the process of correctional rehabilitation" (Hochstetler, DeLisi, & Pratt, 2010, p. 590).

Motivational Capital

Motivational capital is derived from the social psychological field and closely resembles the sociological concept of social capital. Clinkinbeard and Zohra (2012) define it as "a collection of social and cognitive resources which work together to provide momentum for behavior" (p. 237). This concept builds on the literature surrounding "possible selves," which notes that each individual has a possible future self that he or she would like to become. These possible selves include each individual's goals, motives, fears, and anxieties (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). As such, they serve as incentives for organizing and encouraging individuals toward an end-goal.

Descriptions of motivational capital posit that, in order to have the highest success rate in achieving a possible self, there must be a balance between fears and expectations.

Oyserman and Markus (1990) explain this balance:

Thus a *feared* possible self will be most effective as a motivational resource when it is balanced with a self-relevant positive, *expected* possible self that provides the outlines of what one might do to avoid the feared state. Likewise, a positive expected self will be a stronger motivational resource, and maximally effective, when it is linked with a representation of what could happen if the desired state is not realized. (p. 113)

Others have also added that motivation is greatest when an individual has not just a goal in mind, but specific plans for achieving that goal (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009).

Therefore, in order to “reduce the psychological distance between present and future,” individuals must implement concrete, achievable strategies for achieving goals (Clinkbeard & Zohra, 2012, p. 239).

In the context of youth offenders and juvenile delinquency, motivational capital is relevant in many ways. While motivation is not the only characteristic necessary for desistance from crime, it is essential. Delinquent youth, however, often struggle with constructing and achieving realistic and positive future selves. As with most people, their future selves are often a reflection of their immediate surroundings (Markus & Nurius, 1986). For many, these surroundings are marked by dysfunction, hopelessness, and crime. And, as Rios (2011) noted, many of their adult role models are convicts.

When youth offenders are able to construct positive future selves and goals, and many of them do, they often lack the concrete strategies necessary for achieving these goals. Additionally, many fail to account for the barriers or roadblocks that exist for previously incarcerated individuals, especially those that also happen to minorities (Clinkbeard & Zohra, 2012). Spencer and Jones-Walker (2004) have indicated that

minorities are more likely to encounter barriers with regard to stereotyping, discrimination, and economic stratification. Failure to adequately prepare for these roadblocks and any potential changes in environment can lead to failure in the achievement of future selves. In any case, youth who are unable to construct or maintain their desired future selves are more likely to search for alternative methods for self-definition.

Finally, even youth who do not seek out delinquent activity are more likely to engage in this behavior if they have low motivational capital. These youth, known as “drifters,” may become involved in a delinquent act based upon the simple fact that they are presented with an opportunity and can find no adequate reason to dismiss it (Matza, 1964, 1969). Alternatively, they may have not yet developed the necessary fear of the consequences for delinquent actions (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). In both cases, instead of proactively working to achieve their goals, they allow themselves to negatively get caught up in the moment.

Context of the Study

This study will take place in Charlotte (Mecklenburg County), North Carolina, a city with 25.2% of its population under the age of 18 (U.S. Census, 2010). In Mecklenburg County in 2013, there were 3,729 total delinquent complaints (including violent, serious, and minor classes, as well as infractions) (NCDPS, 2013). Among the juveniles that were arrested, 243 were placed in detention, 17 were committed to a Youth Development Center, and 21 were sent to non-residential placements such as group homes (NCDPS, 2013).

Recent demographic information from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School system indicates that there are 145,363 children being served in its schools (CMS, 2014). Among these, 54.1% are classified as economically disadvantaged, while 42% identify as African-American, 32% as white, 18% as Hispanic, 5% as Asian, and 3% as American Indian/multiracial (CMS, 2014). The school district consists of 31 high schools and an economically disadvantaged rate of 51.8% for high school students (CMS, 2013). The high school graduation rate is 85.2% (Dunn, 2014).

Overview of Methods

A single case study qualitative design with four embedded units of analysis was used to examine the unique experiences and success stories of four participants. This design was selected because of its flexibility and its emphasis on depth and context. Additionally, all four participants represented a very similar context, with each having been incarcerated during high school and ultimately successful in their reentry and graduation. This allowed me to focus on the common themes that emerged without an emphasis on extremely divergent contexts. Each participant constituted an embedded unit of analysis to be analyzed with the other cases. These participants were selected through a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling. Since former youth offenders who are successful (criteria defined below) are difficult to find, numerous contacts in the local community were used to locate and gain participants. These contacts work in education, juvenile justice, and nonprofit sectors. Once initial participants were found, they were also used to recommend and secure other possible participants.

Data collection primarily took the form of multiple in-depth interviews. As participants were interviewed, field notes were also taken on their body language and

interactions. Participants reflected on their past experiences in school, so school observations were not possible. Additionally, participants filled out questionnaires with demographic, academic, and adjudication information.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is multifaceted and exists on both micro and macro levels. The research presented here fills a void in the literature by highlighting the voices of successfully reintegrated youth offenders. It also sheds light on the school reentry experiences of these former youth offenders and how these experiences contributed to desistance and future success. In doing these two things, it is my hope to provide research that offers a different viewpoint on school reentry and its inherent challenges and opportunities.

Highlighting the schooling experiences of youth offenders who were able to successfully reenter also adds to the body of knowledge on important characteristics, experiences, and support systems that are helpful for effective school reentry. In addition, it helps to complicate and reframe the overarching reentry narrative from one that is completely dismal to one that acknowledges successes and seeks to understand the processes by which those successes were accomplished. Conducting this research was also important in part because it helps inform future policy and practice for transitioning youth. Understanding their experiences and what supports and motivating factors helped them overcome their struggles is critical for implementing effective initiatives aimed at promoting future success. Unfortunately, success stories are often not examined because of their rarity. It is even more rare to find a study that focuses on success stories *within*

school, as opposed to having school experiences investigated as marginal to the overall reentry experience.

This study goes beyond filling a void in literature, however, and finds additional significance in its economic benefits. While some may argue that understanding and improving reentry services for youth offenders is a moral imperative (and I agree), it is also very pragmatic economically. As Peter Greenwood (2008) notes:

Preventing delinquency not only saves young lives from being wasted, but also prevents the onset of adult criminal careers and thus reduces the burden of crime on its victims and on society. It costs states billions of dollars a year to arrest, prosecute, incarcerate, and treat juvenile offenders. Investing in successful delinquency-prevention programs can save taxpayers seven to ten dollars for every dollar invested, primarily in the form of reduced spending on prisons. (p. 185)

Indeed, spending for *each* youth offender amounts to \$241 per day, an amount four times that of an incarcerated adult (Pew Center for the States, 2008). Additionally, as Lochner and Moretti (2004) note, improving the education of offenders and helping them graduate high school has reverberating effects (as cited in Fitch & Delvi, 2012). They estimate a reduction in murders by 400 and a reduction in assaults by 8,000 in the year 1990 if the graduation rate had risen just 1%. This also translates to a savings of \$1.4 billion in victim expenses, property losses, and court costs (as cited in Fitch & Delvi, 2012).

Far beyond the immediate direct savings as a result of reducing delinquency, there also exist broader savings of the more indirect kind. McMahon (2006) notes that the typically less educated individual (which is common amongst the incarcerated) usually represents lost wages (from working in lower-wage jobs), lost tax revenue, and increased health care costs. If there was more investment in helping youth succeed in school, however, there would be short term gains, including lower unemployment, better health,

less depression, more civic participation, more racial tolerance, less infant mortality, and more charitable giving. These benefits also combine to create long-term effects that are positive for all (McMahon, 2006). It is also important to note that learning how to reduce delinquency through more effective school reentry services is imperative for the former and future victims of crime. Understanding and effectively supporting youth offenders in their desistance has the potential to reduce the emotional distress that victims of crime often face.

Background and Role of the Researcher

The topic I selected for this study is one that became interesting to me only a few years ago. While I was a youth myself, I had friends and acquaintances (none who were very close to me) arrested as juveniles and/or sent to confinement facilities. It was not until I became a teacher at my former high school, however, that I began to experience juvenile delinquency a little more closely. There, in a school classified as “urban,” I had students that were taken to detention centers, students that had returned from confinement, and students who never gave up their delinquent or criminal identities. Around this same time, one of my friends, a teacher at another high school in the area, decided to start a program that focused on youth development. It became successful and expanded quickly. It even caught the attention of a local judge who wanted to send certain youth to the program as a condition of their probation. After this interest from the judge, I began to think about reentry more intently. I did not know if students in my school received reentry services. I did not know what services they really needed to help them transition successfully. Truthfully, I did not even know all of the challenges they faced. But I wanted to.

In 2012, I started a Ph.D. program that focused on urban education. It was in this program that I learned more about race, power, privilege, and the intersections of these things. It was also where I was able to explore topics that interested me. Since I wanted to better understand the challenges of reentry and how I could help former youth offenders transition to their schools and communities successfully, I began to examine this topic in-depth. I focused on understanding the entire context of the issue, including delinquency theories and the many social and personal facets that come into play, but I always returned to reentry and helping students come back to school. I believe in the ability to rehabilitate most youth offenders with the right interventions, services, and efforts to modify social contexts. It just so happens that school is where much of the fight for success takes place. I have never been a delinquent and I have never been a victim, but I care about helping former youth offenders find success in school and in life, for the benefit of everyone. In order to do this, I realized that a more thorough examination of reentry success within school was needed. My goal in focusing on success stories is not to downplay or diminish the barriers facing former youth offenders. These are very real. Rather, my goal is to provide more balance by highlighting the intricacies that make success possible.

Definition of Terms

Youth offender. Under-age people accused of crimes and processed through juvenile court (The Free Dictionary, n.d.). The youth offender group in this study was all high school age and could have also been processed through adult court.

Recidivism. Refers to a relapse into criminal behavior after negative consequences have been administered (National Institute of Justice, 2014).

Adjudicated youth. Youth under 18 that are convicted of wrongdoing in a juvenile or adult court.

Criminogenic. Something likely to cause criminal behavior (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Prosocial. Consistent with community laws and norms (Wiktionary, 2014).

Successful reentry. For this study, success is defined as having graduated from high school and remained out of the justice system.

School-to-prison pipeline. A phenomenon in which problems in school can lead to suspension and/or expulsion, which contributes to greater likelihood of justice involvement.

Disproportionate minority contact. Refers to the reality that minorities come into contact with the juvenile justice system in disproportionate numbers.

Criminalization. The process of making behaviors illegal.

Exclusionary discipline. School sanctions that remove students from school (e.g. suspension/expulsion).

Discretionary sanction. A disciplinary decision that was administered on the basis of subjective decision-making.

Differential Involvement. Refers to the argument that minorities are disproportionately involved in discipline incidents.

Differential Selection. Refers to the argument that minorities are disproportionately singled out for disciplinary sanctions as a result of systemic biases.

Hypermasculinity. Exaggerated stereotypical male behavior (e.g. aggression, violence, overly sexual, etc.)

Limitations and Delimitations

This study took place in Charlotte, North Carolina between October 2015 and June 2016. Only participants that met the selection criteria were used. These criteria included male former youth offenders who: (1) Were placed in either a juvenile confinement facility or the juvenile wing of an adult facility, (2) Transitioned back into a public high school and graduated (no GEDs), (3) Remained out of the criminal justice system after graduation and (4) Were no older than 28 years of age at the time of interview. These criteria were selected in order to capture the experiences of “successful” former youth offenders. For purposes of this study, success was defined as high school graduation and staying out of the criminal justice system. Rearrests did not eliminate someone from participation unless also accompanied by a conviction.

This study was limited in its lack of demographic diversity and incarceration experiences amongst participants. Additionally, all but one participant received reentry services from Communities in Schools. This is not common for many former youth offenders, but it significantly impacted the success of those in this study. This lack of variability was adequate for the single case study design but also limited exploration of how diverse experiences shape reentry success.

Summary

Youth offenders have diverse paths into the juvenile justice system, but once there, they must later reenter their communities and schools and avoid myriad obstacles in order to remain out of the justice system and have a successful life. The challenges are very real, as evidenced by the many that become incarcerated again either as juveniles or adults. There are those, however, who manage to reenter their schools, graduate, and

remain out of the justice system. Their stories are seldom heard, in part because they are so rare and hard to find. This study explored those stories and uncovered the motivating factors and support systems that contributed to success. In doing so, this research fills a void in the literature that often focuses on reentry interventions and programs but seldom examines successful youth offender experiences with school *during* reentry. It was also my hope to not diminish the struggles that youth offenders face, but rather present positive news to balance out the overwhelmingly negative reentry narratives. The story that reentry *can* be successful is important, as is the story of *how* it can be successful for more youth offenders in the future. Policymakers, practitioners, and students alike can learn from the words of former youth offenders themselves, and it is important that we give them voice.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“He who opens a school door, closes a prison.”- Victor Hugo

The above quote by Victor Hugo illustrates a common sentiment among educational professionals—namely, that education reduces incarceration. Indeed, investments in more accessible and quality educational endeavors do tend to result in lower crime rates (McMahon, 2006). Additionally, education has been closely linked to incarceration outcomes in many studies (Christle et al., 2005; Katsiyannis et al., 2008; N. Silberberg & M. Silberberg, 1971; Skiba et al., 2014). Upon closer examination, however, this statement can also be critiqued as overly simplistic. For many youth in urban settings, school does not represent a way to avoid incarceration, but rather a path directly into it. Then, upon release from incarceration, many youth struggle to reenter their schools and communities successfully (Snyder, 2004). This literature review intends to illustrate how schools often form this path to incarceration and why schools are so critical in successful reintegration after confinement. The goal is to also provide a foundation for understanding the reentry challenges for former youth offenders, as well as what contributes to reentry success. To do this, the review is grouped into three sections: (1) School-to-prison pipeline, (2) Confinement, and (3) Reentry. Each of these sections represents a distinct time period that ultimately shapes the reentry success of transitioning youth offenders.

In the first section, school-to-prison pipeline, literature is reviewed that discusses the numerous community and school challenges that contribute to incarceration. These include community isolation, violence, and policing; student/teacher interactions, school climate, school policies, and academic achievement; and justice system sentencing and policies. Additionally, personal factors that influence delinquency are discussed, as well as the debate between differential involvement and differential selection. The second section reviews literature addressing confinement, including personal experiences/identity development and educational challenges. Finally, the third section details the reentry process. This section provides an overview of challenges, motivational and support factors helpful for reentry success, and the importance of a school connection. These sections illustrate, collectively, how the school too often serves as the starting point for a vicious cycle of incarceration and release, even as its stated goal is to prepare all students for a productive life. Understanding experiences before and during incarceration are key to also understanding why reentry remains a challenge, and how successful youth offenders overcome these challenges. Additionally, it is important to understand what has contributed to successful reentry in the past. The focus, however, will remain on the reentry portion of the pipeline and the critical point that school reentry, engagement, and graduation are necessary but little understood components of reentry success.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

The phrase “school-to-prison pipeline” is not always defined in the same manner among researchers. Skiba, Arredondo, and Williams (2014) note that it has been a useful construct for research but that some deny its scientific validation, choosing instead to

emphasize it as a political movement. The phrase itself has indeed become politicized, with growing numbers of studies acknowledging its social construction and political dimensions; yet, it is also true that this construct has very real consequences for the thousands of youth trapped in its grasp (Skiba et al., 2014).

In its most basic form, the school-to-prison pipeline refers to the reality that problems in school can lead to removal from school, which often culminates in justice system involvement (Monahan, Vanderhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014). Once a student is suspended, he or she is at greater risk for dropping out and getting in trouble with the law (Christle et al., 2005). Monahan et al. (2014) revealed that suspended or expelled students are 2.1 times more likely to get arrested during the month of their school absence, and this effect is stronger for students with no discipline background or association with delinquent peers. It has also been demonstrated that there is a strong link between suspension and justice involvement (Fabelo et al., 2011; Sedlak & McPherson, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014), and that dropouts are in fact eight times more likely than their peers to be incarcerated (Christle et al., 2005). Some would argue, however, that these students are “pushed out,” referring to a series of policies and actions that all but force them to drop out of school (Fine, 1991; Tuck, 2012). Many students experience school not as safe, caring, and productive centers of learning, but as institutions that are discriminatory, calloused, and ineffective (Tuck, 2012). Furthermore, Fisher (2008) and Winn (2010) argue that youth are aware of what schools think of them, and when they disinvest in their education, they are targeted by practices and policies that push them out of school (as cited in Winn & Behizadeh, 2011).

It is also clear that suspensions are not distributed equitably, as underserved and minority students, particularly African-American males, are far more likely to be suspended and enter the pipeline (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Decades of research, beginning with the Children's Defense Fund in 1975, have documented these disparities in school suspension (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). While not all studies control for the overlapping of socio-economic (SES) status and other variables, some research has illustrated that racial disparities remain even after the effect of SES is removed (Skiba et al., 2002). Other demographic factors, including family structure, parental education, and urbanicity of residence, also do not explain racial differences (Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Wallace et al., 2008). Generally, black males receive the most disciplinary infractions and white females receive the least, though Hispanic and American Indian students are also more likely to experience school discipline than white students (Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). Furthermore, racial disparities increase as disciplinary sanctions become more punitive, as well as when gender is taken into account. Among females, the race gap is largest (Wallace et al., 2008), while sexual minorities (those that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) and students with disabilities are also at increased risk of exclusionary discipline and justice involvement (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015).

The reasons for initial justice involvement and disparate racial outcomes can be traced to personal/individual factors, community factors, school factors, and justice system factors. Individual factors such as behavioral and psychological struggles, health problems, and poor decision-making play a role in school suspension and justice

involvement, but a dominant theme in the literature is that of biased school and justice systems and the argument that many disparities can be traced to subjective decision-making on the part of those in power (Kirwan Institute, 2014). Complicating these arguments further is the common notion that harmful personal actions are often a response to oppressive institutions (Anderson, 1999; Majors & Billson, 1993).

Understanding the scope of these factors and the impact they have on youth experiences is essential to understanding their school reentry challenges upon release from confinement.

Community Isolation and Violence

For many youth, the pipeline to adjudication begins at the cradle rather than in the school (Wilka, 2011). They are born into neighborhood contexts and surrounded by family and peer groups that profoundly shape their life trajectory (Chung & Steinberg, 2006; Jocson & McLoyd, 2015). Communities ravaged by economic downturns and offering limited opportunities through school or viable job options often suffer from increased levels of violence and low levels of collective efficacy (Hoffman, 2011; Wilson, 2012). As Anderson (1999) notes, in these contexts a “code of the street emerges where the influence of the police ends,” and it is this code that governs interpersonal behavior and violence (p. 10).

Many male youth are also caught in what Rios (2009) refers to as a double bind. They desire to live up to traditional notions of masculinity (i.e. good job, support family, etc.), but find that this form of masculinity is either out of reach or does not enable survival on the streets. Furthermore, policing and surveillance systems often stigmatize and label minority males before they have even committed an offense. According to Rios

(2009), the youth have two options: comply with the police, which leaves them vulnerable on the street, or disregard the police and be arrested. Their experiences with police can include emasculation, and the result of these interactions is the often the development of hypermasculinity and toughness that promotes further violence.

Females growing up in underserved areas lacking investment and opportunity can also be caught between the worlds of “good and ghetto” (Jones, 2010). As Jones (2010) notes, girls growing up in impoverished urban contexts often receive pressure to be “good,” which includes looking pretty and acting appropriately feminine and “respectable.” It is this same pressure that puts them in a difficult place, however, because being “good” does not protect them from other “ghetto” girls (those who do not fit mainstream values and embrace fighting) who are more violent. The result is a fine balance between acting ladylike and embracing a tough stance to deter violence.

In addition to the effects of violence exposure, peer networks become more important to youth as they get older. Extant research has shown that many delinquent acts are committed in groups, and youth with deviant peers are more likely to engage in delinquency themselves (Chung & Steinberg, 2006; Haynie, Doogan, & Soller, 2014; Hoffman, 2011; O’Donnell, 2003). Additionally, youth in disadvantaged and disorganized neighborhoods are more prone to associate with deviant friends (Chung & Steinberg, 2006). The effect of peers, however, cannot be considered without a simultaneous examination of family influence.

Students coming from families with criminal histories are more likely to be involved in crime and recidivate themselves (Barrett, Ju, Katsiyannis, & Zhang, 2015). Not surprisingly, the opposite is also true. “Decent” families, described by Anderson

(1999) as hardworking, responsible, and possessing many mainstream values, are one of the biggest deterrents to criminal behavior (Anderson, 1999), and family support has been demonstrated as instrumental in coping with trauma and achieving societal success (Hall, Cassidy, & Stevenson, 2008; McMahon, Coker, & Parnes, 2013). Families that provide consistent supervision and control are more likely to have children that do not engage in delinquency, particularly in underserved neighborhoods (Chung & Steinberg, 2006; Deutsch, Crockett, Wolff, & Russell, 2012; Slattery & Meyers, 2014). In this case, parental control serves as a mediating factor between delinquency and disorganized neighborhoods. As youth receive less supervision and parental control, they are more likely to engage with delinquent peers in their neighborhood context. The type of support that youth need, however, varies across ethnicities (Deutsch et al., 2012).

Both males and females growing up amidst such violence and substance abuse often suffer trauma, which has been correlated with school behavior and school sanctions (Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Additionally, Gorman-Smith and Tolan (1998) illustrate that children exposed to violence often show signs of anxiety, irritability, stress, and hypervigilance (as cited in Skiba & Noguera, 2010). They are also more likely to have adolescent antisocial behavior (Slattery & Meyers, 2014). Chauhan, Reppucci, Burnette, and Reiner (2010) found that neighborhood disadvantage was an important factor in delinquency, even accounting for greater disparity in nonviolent rearrests than race. Urban youth often develop their identities amidst disorganized communities, discrimination, economic deprivation, myriad social influences, and competing notions of race and gender. Those that manage to avoid delinquent behavior often develop strong ideological identities on the basis of some central part of their lives (e.g. academics or

ethnicity) (De Haan & MacDermid, 1999). This identity serves as a protective factor that enables greater traditional success. Unfortunately, there are numerous competing identities for youth, and many find that prosocial identities do not get them accepted or protected. As youth navigate their incongruent community and school contexts, the behavior that serves to protect them on the streets can create disciplinary problems within the school environment.

School Policies, Interactions, and Climate

The school is a pivotal location where students can be developed for future societal success or funneled into the justice system where their chances of becoming productive members of society are significantly diminished. This designation of the school as pivotal in students' lives is not a new concept, but its relative importance in the expansion of juvenile justice has increased in recent years. As Hirschfield (2008) notes, in earlier decades, school discipline was primarily the responsibility of teachers and administrators. Today, however, many student actions, including nonviolent ones, are criminalized and addressed with either exclusionary discipline (suspension/expulsion) or, in some cases, arrest (Hirschfield, 2008; Irby, 2014). This change in American schools developed alongside a failing economy, mass unemployment, mass incarceration, and urban public education fiscal crises (Hirschfield, 2008). While Rimer (2004) argues that the criminalization of school discipline is the result of a "moral panic" due to an upsurge in youth violence, Fuentes (2003) says that it is a response to high-stakes testing and the need to exclude low-achievers and Arum (2003) contends that it developed as a legal response to arbitrary student discipline court cases in the 1960s and 1970s (as cited in Hirschfield, 2008). Still, Simon (2006) focuses on broader structural changes and

diminishing safety nets that resulted in reactionary “governing through crime” (as cited in Hirschfield, 2008). Hirschfield (2008) argues that none of these explanations is sufficient by themselves, as the changes in school criminalization developed amidst a complex combination of events and factors. What remains true is that school discipline and policing practices have resulted in the rapid expansion of students entering the justice system, even as research has indicated that schools are safer than in the past and that schools with more security measures have higher levels of disorder (Fuentes, 2012). The current climate of punishment has been labeled as counterproductive, yet it still persists (Irby, 2014). Some even contend that the educational and penal systems are doing what they were designed to do—maintain wealth and power in the hands of a certain group in society (Alexander, 2010; Fasching-Varner, Mitchell, Martin, & Bennett-Haron, 2014). Despite competing notions of the reasons for this development, the reality remains that today, more than ever, students are criminalized and excluded from school for a wide variety of offenses. This reality plays out every day for thousands of students across America.

Staff/student interactions. When a student from an underserved community low in resources and opportunities enters school for the first time, he or she is often restricted by the community context. Quality school options are limited, negative labels may have already been assigned, extracurricular options are limited, and the student has a psychology that has been shaped by his or her surroundings (Anderson, 1999). As the student progresses through school, he or she may notice a formal and “hidden” curriculum that caters more toward white, middle-class culture and norms (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). There also often exists a racial and cultural mismatch between

teachers and students (Landsman & Lewis, 2011). The combination of school practices, policies, and the application of such practices and policies can create an environment that isolates certain students and singles them out for exclusionary discipline.

Several studies have argued that the role of implicit bias in school discipline is significant and how, even when unintentional, policies and practices can lead to greater discipline rates for minority students (Dancy, 2014; Kirwan Institute, 2014; Morris, 2005; Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Snapp et al., 2005). One such study documented how students were treated differently based on race, class, and gender (Morris, 2005). Morris (2005) noted that black students were seen as more of a threat when not dressing according to school rules, and black males were seen as a greater threat than black females. Similarly, Latino males were seen as more of a threat than Latino females. White and Asian students, even when dressing outside the regulations created by the school, were treated differently and had fewer negative assumptions made about them (Morris, 2005). In addition, many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students are singled out for greater disciplinary sanctions as they are punished inequitably for public displays of affection and retaliating to bullying (even when they were not protected in the first place) (Snapp et al., 2015).

While these biased actions may be purposeful, it is also plausible that they result from unrecognized bias and cultural mismatches between students and teachers. Indeed, one of many factors influencing discipline disproportionality is the stark imbalance between students of color and white teachers in urban school settings (Landsman & Lewis, 2006). White teachers may view black students, particularly black males, as unsalvageable or threatening (Dancy, 2014). In general, society has rarely viewed young

black males as children (Dancy, 2014). History, interpersonal interactions, media, and other social avenues shape these views before influencing teacher interactions and perceptions in the classroom. This phenomenon has been displayed in other fields and a credible argument can be made for its presence in schools (Kirwan Institute, 2014; Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Unrecognized bias may lead to the issuing of disciplinary sanctions inequitably, which stems from focusing on minority students or treating certain actions as more severe when committed by students of color. Teachers may rely on stereotypes to interpret student behavior and speech (Ferguson, 2000), and this bias may also lead to negative expectations and beliefs about students.

Negative expectations have also been shown to affect student outcomes, and students often live up to the labels given them by others (Dancy, 2014; Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Interestingly, however, research indicates that bias and negative expectations do not influence administrator discretion as much as teacher discretion (Skiba et al., 2002). Skiba et al. (2002) note that racial disproportionality in school discipline occurs at the referral level. Once students come to the administrator's office, their disciplinary consequences are relatively equitable. Disparities occur as students of color are referred to administrators more frequently and for differing offenses than their white peers. Even if not singled out for discipline, negative teacher expectations can affect academic achievement, which is also related to greater chances of future discipline and justice involvement (Irvine, 1990; Katsiyannis et al., 2008).

Other explanations note that the cultural mismatch between white teachers and students of color can lead to communicative issues, as white teachers are often not accustomed to the animated and interpersonal interaction style of their black students (as

cited in Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Western-based classrooms also often focus on individualistic and competitive teaching styles, in contrast to the communal cultures of black, Latino, and Native American students (as cited in Skiba & Noguera, 2010). This, combined with a curriculum that often marginalizes the history and experiences of minority groups, can help create an environment in which students of color are misunderstood and misrepresented. Their efforts to engage may be seen as threatening, even as their level of engagement may be directly affected by the curriculum and teaching style present in the classroom. As students feel less connected to their teachers, they are more likely to use marijuana and amphetamines and practice risky sexual behaviors (Voisin et al., 2005).

Despite a focus on discipline experiences and disparate outcomes for black males in the literature, there exist other minority groups that likewise experience differential treatment and outcomes on the basis of race, gender, sexual minority status, and disability status (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Poteat, Scheer, & Chong, 2015; Mallett, 2014). These groups have experiences that both mirror and contrast those of black male students. Girls are the fastest growing group of offenders in the juvenile justice system, with similar racial disparities as males (Moore & Padavic, 2010; Blake et al., 2011). Some research even challenges the dominant notion of black males receiving the most discipline infractions by illustrating that female students are sometimes most likely to receive exclusionary discipline (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott, 2012). Similar to black males, black females are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline, and the reasons for their discipline differ from that of Hispanic and white females (Blake et al., 2011). Blake et al. (2011) examined the discipline records of girls

in a Midwest urban school district and found that black girls were most often disciplined for defiance, inappropriate dress, profane language, and physical aggression. Hispanic girls were cited for a wider range of infractions, while white girls were more likely to receive sanctions for truancy than black girls. The authors note that black girls seemed to be disciplined for not following traditional standards of femininity. Other researchers (Cofer, 1993; Collins, 2004) have also noted that black girls are often stereotyped as independent, aggressive, loud, assertive, sexual, and crime-prone, while Hispanic girls are seen as dependent, submissive, family-oriented, and domestic, and white girls are seen as passive, in need of protection, nonthreatening, and amenable to rehabilitation (as cited in Moore & Padavic, 2010). These stereotypes and cultural/gender differences may influence discipline by resulting in misunderstandings or biased decision-making on the part of teachers and administrators.

Additionally, recent research has begun to illuminate the reality that many sexual minority students are also represented by disproportionate discipline outcomes (Poteat et al., 2015; Snapp et al., 2015). This is possibly the result of a combination of factors: (1) LGBTQ youth are victimized at higher rates than other students and may respond with increased substance abuse, truancy, and self-protective strategies like weapon carrying (all discipline-worthy offenses) and (2) LGBTQ youth are victims of biased policies and biased enforcement of policies in school (Poteat et al., 2015). While research has indicated increased coping skills (e.g. substance abuse, truancy, etc.) in LGBTQ youth, Poteat et al. (2015) find little evidence of those behaviors as reasons for disparate discipline outcomes. Rather, they find that LGBTQ youth are punished more strongly for infractions than heterosexual youth. Disproportionality could also stem from biases in

the treatment of LGTBQ youth (e.g. differences in treatment for public displays of affection between heterosexual youth and LGBTQ youth, prohibition or punishment for taking a same-sex partner to prom, etc.) (Poteat et al., 2015; Snapp et al., 2015).

School climate. The potential issues that arise from implicit bias, negative expectations, and cultural mismatch influence the overall school climate. Delgado (2014) defines school climate as the way members perceive various school factors (including important components like safety and emotional well being) and how these factors influence learning (as cited in Skiba et al., 2014). Positive school climate has been linked to greater achievement, less risk-taking, and less violent behaviors (Skiba et al., 2014). In contrast, schools with an overly punitive focus are often characterized by a negative school climate with lower achievement and greater behavioral issues (Skiba et al., 2011). Furthermore, exclusionary school discipline reduces school bonding/attachment and places students at greater risk for delinquency (Christle et al., 2005).

In recent decades, many schools also adopted the use of school resource officers (SRO) in an effort to provide additional safety measures in the wake of school shootings and violence. The use of these officers has, however, proven to be of little use for actual school safety, while increasing arrest rates for issues that would have been previously handled within school (Fedders, Langberg, & Story, 2013). While the use of SROs also occurs in middle-class, suburban schools, security measures there often take a different tone that reflects a lower concern with crime threats. In these settings, criminalization of student behavior is less intense and security measures are more likely to complement school discipline measures rather than override them (Hirschfield, 2008). In this sense,

the metaphor of a gated community for affluent schools can be compared to the prison metaphor that often accompanies urban schools (Hirschfield, 2008).

Research has also given much attention to the proliferation of zero tolerance policies and their impact on student discipline (Fuentes, 2012; Wilson, 2014). Despite evidence of safer schools, policing expanded throughout the 2000s and zero tolerance policies that were once used for extreme measures began to include minor and more subjective infractions (Fedders et al., 2013; Hirschfield, 2008). The expansion of these policies did not ultimately lead to safer schools, but rather to increasing numbers of suspensions and expulsions for behaviors that were previously addressed in such a way as to keep students in school. Zero tolerance policies also coincided with the expansion of high-stakes testing, which resulted in a narrowed and less engaging curriculum, particularly for students in struggling schools (Lipman, 2004). As teachers and students focused more on test-taking, and as underserved schools received additional sanctions for poor performance, students became more disengaged and school policies became more punitive (Lipman, 2004). This resulted, for some, in the heightened use of exclusionary discipline as a control measure for students and as a means to exclude underachieving students to boost school test scores (Butler, 2011; Hirschfield, 2008).

Academic achievement. The cumulative effect of the above-mentioned factors influences student discipline directly, but it also influences student discipline more indirectly by affecting academic achievement. Research is clear that there is a strong connection between academics and delinquency, and it seems to indicate that this relationship goes both ways (Katsiyannis et al., 2008). Students that are prone to delinquency achieve at lower rates, while low achievement contributes in some way to

delinquency (Katsiyannis et al., 2008). What is also clear is that students with lower achievement are considerably more likely to engage in delinquent acts (Katsiyannis et al., 2008). This fact becomes more critical when combined with research documenting that students of color are currently achieving at lower rates than white students (Landsman & Lewis, 2011). Skiba and Noguera (2010) have even made the proposition that the “achievement gap” and the “discipline gap” are two sides of the same coin. Additionally, one particular study examined the discipline patterns of 3,500 African-American males in an urban school district and found that these students missed 3,714 days of school in one academic year (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010). Such a high level of school absence must logically impact the low achievement scores of those African-American males in some way. It is plausible that underserved students or those who have been discriminated against disengage from school, often for very rational reasons, and then decide to either engage in delinquent acts and/or drop out from school. For many, school does not represent a beacon of hope with a legitimate promise to social mobility. Certain forms of delinquency, on the other hand, may present better economic prospects than their failing and culturally irrelevant schools.

In theory, exclusionary discipline is used to remove troublesome students from class so as not to affect the academic achievement of others. In reality, it is associated with lower state exam scores, reading achievement, school grades, and writing achievement (Skiba et al., 2014). Instead of fixing the discipline problem, exclusionary discipline has been accused of putting excluded students further behind while not treating the cause of any misbehavior. Furthermore, students who have at least one suspension on their record are three times more likely to drop out by tenth grade than their peers, and

students who drop out are three times more likely to enter the justice system (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). In a longitudinal study examining students in the state of Texas, Fabelo et al. (2011) found that exclusionary discipline for a discretionary violation resulted in a student being almost three times as likely to have juvenile justice contact in the following year. Exclusionary discipline is not inherently wrong; rather, as Yang (2009) requests: “I ask educators to prove that their discipline system is inclusionary. Crudely speaking, more discipline should result in more achievement” (p. 51). Once students have been excluded from school and have contact with the juvenile justice system, they often find another set of challenges that contribute to racial disparities and the likelihood that they will be placed in confinement in the future.

Justice System

Historically, the juvenile justice system was created to treat juveniles differently than adult criminals. The focus was more on rehabilitation and support than punishment, with the belief that juveniles were still impressionable and developing (Bernard & Kurlychek, 2010). Since then, patterns have emerged in juvenile justice with time periods of harsh treatment and alternating periods of greater leniency. While still more rehabilitative than the adult criminal system, the current iteration of this cycle rests in the “harsh treatment” area, where “get tough” legislative policies have promised to crack down on juvenile crime and reduce delinquency through punishment and deterrence. The image of a delinquent in one’s mind helps to frame what he or she believes society’s response should be. As Bernard and Kurlychek (2010) note:

The ideas of delinquency and of the delinquent are of paramount importance because people have an idea of juvenile justice that is associated with their ideas

of juvenile delinquency and the juvenile delinquent...the person viewing the juvenile as a hardened criminal would probably favor policies that punish that juvenile in proportion to the offense committed, similar to the philosophy of the adult criminal system. The person viewing the juvenile as a victim probably would favor policies that respond to that juvenile's cry for help, either by aiding the juvenile directly or by addressing the neglectful and abusive environment in which the child lives. (p. 5)

A focus on punishment and deterrence, with zero-tolerance policies leading the way, creates a greater chance of increased juvenile justice sanctions for youth of all backgrounds. In reality, however, it is clear that minority youth face disproportionate outcomes in the juvenile justice system (Kempf-Leonard, 2007; Pope & Feyerham, 1990; Pope, Lovell, & Hsai, 2002). These outcomes may be the result of implicit biases among justices.

Fader, Kurlychek, and Morgan (2014) note that decision making in the justice system is often described using focal concerns theory. This theory maintains that a judge must balance three concerns when making a decision: (1) The defendant's culpability and blameworthiness for a crime, (2) The need for community protection, and (3) The practical consequences of sentencing decisions. It is clear that these criteria require the judge to make a subjective decision, based on discretion and perceptions, about whether or not an offender is a risk to society. When justice officials are left to make these decisions, it can result in racial disparities. Indeed, this view has been supported by studies indicating racial bias even after controlling for other factors (Bridges & Steen, 1998; Wu & Fuentes, 1998).

While many researchers would not dispute the presence of bias in the justice system, Kempf-Leonard (2007) has argued that its relationship to disproportionate outcomes is likely much more complex than originally thought. Many officials still

operate under the mindset of aiding children and providing protection. Some judges decide to place youth in protective custody not as a punishment, but because it may be better for their lives than going back to the communities and families from whence they came. This may result in increased sanctions for youth labeled as at-risk. Of course, there still may be an element of bias involved in this decision-making process, as judges also take into account family dynamics of youth before dispensing decisions. In this case, a “cultural stereotype” of minority families or families in poverty may lead the judge to make a biased decision (Wu & Fuentes, 1998). The fact that many minority families are also poor creates a dynamic in which it is not always clear if disparate outcomes are related more to race or to poverty (Wu & Fuentes, 1998).

Another important consideration is that of when bias is displayed in the juvenile justice process. Research has indicated that minority disadvantage diminishes when similarly situated youths are examined based on offense, prior record, and personal needs (Bishop, 2005). Much like school disciplinary patterns, it is possible that minority youth are arrested at higher rates, but that racial bias decreases as sanctions are given. The necessity for the judge to consider numerous sources related to the chances of recidivism makes it difficult to determine how much racial disparity is related to racial bias and how much is due to several other factors.

This complex relationship between bias and other relevant factors was illustrated in a study that tracked youth receiving court sanctioned intervention services over a ten-year period in Philadelphia (Fader et al., 2014). The study’s goal was to determine the factors that influence the decision-making process when selecting appropriate interventions for adjudicated youth. In it, Fader et al. (2014) found clear racial patterns,

with black youth being sent to programs focusing on a more physical regimen and white youth being sent to programs with a more therapeutic focus. The significance of race remained after controlling for legal and social/familial characteristics. Then, when the researchers added factors including out-of-home placement, history of sibling or parent arrest, and history of substance abuse, many predictors of justice decisions were no longer significant. This suggests that the judges may act with the best interest of the child in mind, though the needs of majority youth are given greater weight.

The juvenile justice system operates under a different framework than its adult counterpart, yet it still faces many of the same issues with disproportionate minority contact (DMC). While research generally indicates that racial bias is an element of what causes disparate racial outcomes, it is not clear exactly how much of the disparity is due to numerous other factors (Bishop, 2005; Fader et al., 2014; Wu & Fuentes, 1998). Focusing on one specific factor is likely to provide inadequate explanatory power.

Personal Factors

While community, school, and justice system factors contribute to the development and perpetuation of the school-to-prison pipeline, there also exist numerous personal/individual factors that influence adjudication. Youth who enter the justice system are more likely to suffer from trauma, mental health disabilities, and cognitive disabilities (Foley, 2001; Gupta et al., 2005). Many also choose to spend their time with delinquent peers and choose to engage in delinquent acts because of peer pressure or other reasons related to motivation and personal choice (Hoffman, 2010). Still, for many youth, the decision to engage in problematic behaviors is much more complicated than

willful defiance. Though still personal choices, their behaviors are often a response to an unjust society and the imitation of role models that surround them (Rios, 2011).

Numerous individual characteristics influence levels of delinquency for youth. Youth who are not socially competent and who are impulsive are more likely to be involved with delinquency (Oyserman & Saltz, 1993). Interestingly, however, many youth do not actively seek delinquent opportunities but instead have a hard time removing themselves from problem situations with peers (Oyserman & Saltz, 1993). Youth have many competing identities and dimensions of self that can influence their probability of delinquent activity. Based on a study involving 238 participants, Oyserman and Markus (1990) created six hypotheses related to possible selves and the motivation to engage in or abstain from delinquency: (1) Adolescents with few positive expected selves are more likely to “drift” into delinquency, (2) Adolescents with positive expected selves but without feared selves are also more likely to drift into delinquency, (3) Adolescents who do not attain positive selves in conventional ways may develop negative expected selves and turn to delinquency, (4) Delinquent activity will be maintained if positive selves are pursued because of them and if there is no balance between positive and feared possible selves, (5) The frequency of delinquency will decline if possible selves are attained in conventional ways or if feared selves are developed that balance out the expected selves in conventional domains, and (6) Delinquency will decline when expected and feared selves are endorsed by others. Research has indicated that future orientation can motivate current behavior and that low self-control, developed in youth through poor parental management, has been consistently linked with delinquency (Clinkinbeard, 2014; Kirchner & Higgins, 2014).

Linking these two, Clinkinbeard (2014) demonstrated that a positive future orientation does affect delinquent behavior, especially through mediating the influence of low self-control.

In addition to arguments on motivation, future orientation, possible selves, and self-control, many behaviors can be interpreted as responses to discrimination. In their seminal work, Majors and Billson (1993) describe how many black males develop a “cool pose” as a response to a racist society. Cool pose includes being confident, not showing weakness or vulnerability, promoting pride, and maintaining control. While it serves as a coping mechanism and promotes pride for black males, which allows them to survive psychologically in a racist society, it also leads to troubled relationships. A lack of vulnerability is characteristic of “cool pose,” and an increase in violence is commonplace as a result of not having legitimate means to display masculine power and strength. Additionally, the posture and demeanor black males display as “cool” may be misinterpreted or misunderstood as defiant and threatening by teachers, law enforcement officers, or judges not familiar with the stylized behavior.

Numerous other works have also documented the impact of racism and/or trauma on blacks’ psychology (Goff, Di Leone, & Kahn, 2012; Hall, Cassidy, & Stevenson, 2008). In a 2008 study, Hall et al. (2008) examined the psychological responses to calamitous events for black males and females. They sought to determine how these youth responded to fear, and they examined depression, anger, kinship support networks, and neighborhood support networks to see if these supports moderated responses in any way. Among other findings, the authors noted that youth with high levels of life-threatening events had both higher levels of family support and all three of the tested

anger expression variables. Many youth exposed to trauma cope in different ways, with some youth, especially males, expressing their anger outward.

More aggressive behaviors can also occur as a response to racism. Some forms of racial discrimination can threaten male masculinity. The response to this threat often differs for black males and white males. Black males, who tend to have fewer avenues for response to discrimination than white males, often display greater physical acts and stereotypical masculine behaviors in order to cope with racial discrimination (Goff et al., 2012). Still, other researchers would like to frame the rebellious or delinquent acts of marginalized youth more in terms of their positive effects (Pyscher & Lozenski, 2014). According to this notion, delinquent acts should be seen as resistance instead of stemming from behavioral deficits. Resistive practices help promote psychological safety and renegotiate power imbalances, allowing youth to resist oppressive institutions and practices.

Whether youths' rebellious personal actions are psychological responses, resistive practices, or responses to trauma does not negate the clear implication that harmful youth decisions will occur within schools. In many cases, actions that are acceptable and necessary for survival on the streets are impermissible within schools; yet, it is not so easy to separate the lives of students in school from their experiences outside of school. As Anderson (1999) notes:

Impacted by profound social isolation, the children face the basic problem of alienation. Many students become smug in their lack of appreciation of what the business of the school is and how it is connected with the world outside. In addition, they seldom encounter successful black people who have gone through school and gone on to do well... Education is thus undermined because the mission of the school cannot equal the mission of the kids. To accept the school would be to give in and act white, to give up the value of the street for some other thing. And the value of that other thing has not been sufficiently explained to the

children to make them want to give up the ways of the street and take on the ideology of the school. So the outpost of mainstream society tries to deliver its message to kids in an environment that has little regard for that society. (p. 97)

The result, according to some, is student behaviors that result in more discipline and subsequent contact with the juvenile justice system. At least some research appears to suggest that disproportionate discipline rates are the result of higher conduct issues, but these studies indicate that gender is the key variable, not race (Skiba et al., 2002). Males do seem to have elevated rates of misbehavior when compared to females, but these disparities do not hold when race is the central variable under investigation.

Differential Involvement versus Differential Selection

A central concern in the debate over the school-to-prison pipeline is whether or not disproportionate discipline rates for students of color are a result of greater misbehavior or higher rates of bias in the discipline process. These two positions can be characterized as differential involvement and differential selection, respectively. Many practitioners contend that overrepresentation is simply a manifestation of greater misbehavior. Indeed, this argument fits nicely with the research highlighting the effects of trauma, the “code of the street,” “cool pose,” and other psychological responses to racism. Using this line of thought, it is understandable for students of color to receive higher numbers of administrative referrals and consequently enter the justice system at disproportionate rates. Research supporting differential involvement, however, comes from official statistics that only show disparities, not the cause of those disparities (Chauhan et al., 2010). There are additional studies that highlight differential involvement through self-report measures of offending (as cited in Chauhan et al., 2010). These studies indicate that black youth offend at significantly higher rates than white

youth, regardless of gender. Aside from official statistics and some self-report studies, however, little research supports differential involvement.

The counterpoint to differential involvement claims that students of color do not misbehave in disproportionate rates when compared to their white peers. Differential selection theorists contend that biases in the policies and practices of schools and justice systems result in overrepresentation for students of color, as well as for sexual minorities (Poteat et al., 2015). This theory is supported by studies refuting the disproportionate self-report measures used to bolster differential involvement. One of the earliest such studies by Wehlage and Rutter (1986) found that black students did not report more misbehavior than white students over a three-year period (as cited in Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Dinkes, Cataldi, and Lin-Kelly (2007) bolstered these claims in a study that had a nationally representative sample and found minor differences in self-reported unsafe behavior across various races. Finally, victimization data also show that white, black, and Latino students report being violently victimized at rates that do not amount to a statistically significant difference (Bauer, Guerino, Nolle, Tang, & Chandler, 2008).

In addition to refutations of disproportionate self-report measures, there exists little evidence that students tend to over-report or under-report their misbehavior (Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Analysis of school discipline data has revealed, in several studies, that white students are more likely to be referred for more objective offenses (e.g. smoking, vandalism, obscene language), while black students are more likely to be referred for subjective offenses (e.g. disrespect, threat, excessive noise) (Fabelo et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002). This may be because of differing cultural practices that can be misinterpreted, or because of bias and negative expectations (Skiba & Noguera, 2010).

In some cases, as Wehlage and Rutter (1986) note, white students report greater levels of offending yet receive disciplinary sanctions at lower rates than black students (as cited in Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Furthermore, black students receive harsher punishments for the same offenses as their white counterparts (as cited in Skiba & Noguera).

Woven throughout many of the studies supporting this notion that inherent biases in the educational and juvenile justice systems lead to disproportionate racial outcomes is Critical Race Theory, which emerged in the 1970s in the legal field. This theory emphasizes race as the primary factor in influencing disparate outcomes for people of color (Wadhwa, 2010). As a result of the social construction of racism and its historical legacy, whiteness has been elevated as the norm in policy, law, and organizational culture. Central to CRT's premise is the validity and pervasiveness of this institutionalized racism. Though originally centered in the legal realm, CRT was also brought into educational analyses beginning with the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). Indeed, within school discipline and juvenile justice processing, a strong case can be made for the significance of race in determining outcomes. As Simson (2014) notes:

Through a complex and interlocking process—influenced by longstanding notions of racial stigma, societal stereotypes and implicit bias derived in part from such stigma, differential perception and evaluation of the same event when engaged in by members of the racial majority and minority, and normative baselines regarding what constitutes appropriate behavior—the disciplinary decision maker evaluates the behavior of the student within an existing framework of social meanings associated with the student's racial category. In situations in which there is at least some ambiguity regarding whether a disciplinary violation has occurred, these meanings can be the decisive factor in evaluating whether a student was defiant or having a bad day, respectful or disrespectful, dangerous and threatening or harmless. (p. 533-534)

Many of the studies described above bolster the support for CRT, and additional studies have explicitly utilized its tenets to analyze school disciplinary interactions (Simson, 2014; Wadhwa, 2010). Furthermore, Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, and Valentine (2009) provide an empirical analysis confirming a link between discipline disproportionality and disproportionate minority contact with juvenile court. Their analysis indicates, even after controlling for other environmental predictors, that racial disproportionality in school discipline outcomes is the primary factor influencing disproportionate referral rates to the juvenile justice system. The centrality of race in their analysis, along with many of the differential selection studies mentioned above, implicates Critical Race Theory as a powerful explanatory tool.

While more research is needed to disentangle the complications of discipline disparities and their consequences, many researchers believe that the disproportionate rates of discipline for students of color is the result of a combination of events rather than a single causal factor (Butler, Robinson, & Walton, 2014). Butler et al. (2014) describe a “perfect storm of discipline” that results when pose, perception, and threat combine within the school setting. Even in broader society, some criminologists note that disparate rates of offending can be explained by greater levels of strain for African-Americans, a lack of resources/support to cope with this strain, cognitive attributions that blame society for problems, and beliefs/values that reinforce crime, even though these values develop as a response to strain (e.g. economic, family, educational, criminal victimization, discrimination, and community strain) (Kaufman, Rebellon, Thaxton, & Agnew, 2008). Skiba and Noguera (2010) note:

Unfortunately, the discourse on racial and ethnic disproportionality seems to be constrained by simplistic dichotomies that artificially pit individual student

characteristics (e.g., student aggression, disengagement from school) against systemic factors (e.g., school administrators' implicit bias, community violence) as the reason why some groups are overrepresented in suspension or expulsion. The multiple and interacting variables that appear to contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in discipline demand a more comprehensive and nuanced approach. (p. 65)

The reality of school discipline and the disparities that so often accompany it are too important to approach without a balanced perspective. Student experiences vary greatly, as do teacher and school approaches. Regardless of reason, exclusionary discipline has a dramatic relationship with achievement, future suspension, and future confinement.

Confinement

Once youth enter a confinement facility, whether short-term, long-term, or simply until their court date, their experiences can drastically shape the ability to transition effectively back into society. While they often bring significant interactions with society that have shaped their development, many find that their struggles only become worse after confinement. In addition to their pre-existing challenges, they face increasing academic difficulties, rigid structures, and identity transitions that continue to be shaped amidst hypermasculine peers and staff members. For others, however, confinement represents the only time in their lives when they are able to predict cause and effect (Rios, 2011). The structure, isolation, and reflection associated with confinement prove to be helpful in turning their lives around, and some youth are able to take advantage of rehabilitative and academic offerings. Unfortunately, for many, the challenges of confinement prevail and profoundly shape their identity and ability to navigate life after release.

Personal experience/identity development. Youth who are held in a confinement facility, no matter the level of security or length, will face experiences uncommon to life

in their communities and schools. As they interact with the processes, policies, and staff members of their confinement facility, their identity continues to take shape. Cross (1991) described the most widely used racial identity development model as consisting of five steps: (1) Pre-encounter, where white culture is absorbed and identity has yet to be examined; (2) Encounter, where an event(s) triggers a greater understanding of racism and forces an individual to grapple with her race; (3) Immersion/emersion, where the focus is on seeking out more information on one's own race and culture and unlearning internalized stereotypes; (4) Internalization, where there is a positive sense of racial identity and willingness to build relationships across boundaries; and (5) Internalization-commitment, where one finds ways to express racial identity in action (as cited in Tatum, 1997). As these steps take place and youth work through internalized stereotypes of their race, males are also deciding what "being a man" looks like in practice. This process often involves adopting or rejecting behaviors and stereotypes that are found in those around them and in the media (Jenkins, 2010). It may also include a response to strain, or the desire to attain traditional notions of masculinity without the proper resources (Butler et al., 2014). Each of these processes continues, and may be stunted or set back, during confinement.

While many males enter these facilities as a result of hypermasculine behaviors, these behaviors will often become further entrenched during confinement. Rather than addressing gender perceptions in order to help youth offenders construct identities that might lead to desistance, confinement facilities often reinforce or exaggerate hegemonic masculinity (Abrams, Anderson-Nathe, & Aguilar, 2008). Abrams et al. (2008) qualitatively demonstrated this in their examination of 19 youth at two different facilities.

They observed the youth's interactions with facility staff and processes to uncover if and how gender was maintained or disrupted. Findings revealed that the hierarchy, competitive interactions of staff with residents, lack of response to hegemonic statements or actions, sometimes-contradictory treatment methods, and subordinate role of female staff reinforced masculine ideals that often contribute to delinquency. As such, it is possible that youth offenders are likely to leave confinement with gender identities that have not been reshaped or challenged to integrate views and behaviors that enable desistance.

Additionally, youth offenders respond and adapt to the values and norms of correctional institutions in different ways. While notions of masculinity form one part of their identity, they also contend with other identity discourses and sometimes undergo identity transitions. These adaptations often take place during treatment portions of the correctional/confinement journey and vary based on previous experiences. Abrams and Hyun (2009) examined youth with various levels of criminal identities to identify how they adapted to their treatments and what changes took place. They found that some had a smooth transition to confinement because the structure/hierarchy resembled what they were accustomed to in their own environment, while others struggled more with the transition because they refused their criminal label and felt they did not need treatment. Some expressed a strong disdain for staff and the treatment process. Additionally, findings revealed that some youth accepted the treatment as a painful process and began renegotiating their identities, others practiced "selective acceptance" where they maintained certain identities and only distanced themselves from previous identities partly, and still others practiced the strategy of manipulation and did not change at all.

These three transition patterns were described as self-synthesis, situational self-transformation, and self-preservation, respectively.

Treatment sessions within confinement afford youth offenders the opportunity to construct new identities and work through problems, yet identity renegotiation depends upon youth being willing to identify their pathways to delinquency. Some choose to engage in this process, while others practice cognitive filtering, where they acknowledge negative patterns but then filter out information that threatens positive images of themselves or their families (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005). Some youth refuse to acknowledge negative patterns at all. This process also often consists of constructing desired possible selves, or the type of person they would like to be in the future. For many youth in confinement, however, their role models may be other individuals with criminal identities (Rios, 2011). For others, time in confinement teaches them better ways to be criminals and make money, which becomes their desire when they reenter society (Inderbitzin, 2009). Even the desire to discard troubled pasts and move toward positive new futures may not lead to action without practical strategies for attaining the desired changes. Confinement facilities may not always provide this support (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005).

As youth enter confinement facilities, their experiences may serve to reinforce hypermasculine behaviors and criminal identities, or be used as a catalyst for change. The path taken depends on many overlapping factors: the prior experiences of youth coming into confinement, the specific experiences of youth in the facility where they are confined, and the willingness of the youth to embrace self-examination and change. Though identity development is a critical component of the experience in confinement

that affects success upon release, the educational development of offenders is also of tremendous importance but comes with numerous challenges.

Educational challenges. Much like the identity development process, educational experiences can vary wildly, but a common theme among the literature is that of multiple overlapping challenges that often inhibit effective academic growth. Many youth offenders display emotional and behavioral problems, and they typically come into confinement with a history of academic struggles (Foley, 2001; Harder et al., 2014). A significant percentage (ranging from 20%-70% depending on the study) possess learning disabilities and have a history of limited success in reading, oral language, written language, and math (Foley, 2001; Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirer, 2005). Furthermore, many have been held back from grade completion at some point because of their struggles (Foley, 2001). Students with this level of need require significant services to help them improve their educational attainment. Confinement facilities, however, often have many impediments to providing the quality that is needed. In addition to often focusing on behavioral issues instead of education and having low expectations of youth in residential care, juvenile correctional facilities possess many structural challenges (Harder et al., 2014).

The structure of educational services within juvenile correctional facilities presents significant obstacles to providing a Free and Appropriate Education to all students, including those with individualized education plans (IEP). Correctional schools typically receive the same per-pupil expenditure as other schools, despite their heightened levels of need, and they often rely on new teachers with no permanent certification (Balfanz, Spiridakis, Nelid, & Letgers, 2003). They lack proper resources to both

accurately assess students and then provide the necessary educational accommodations (Foley, 2001). Furthermore, correctional schools face high levels of student transience, with some youth remaining for a short duration and others remaining for years (Koyama, 2012). These students represent various ages and developmental levels, which translates to a wide variety of needs for the correctional school to accommodate in order to be effective (Koyama, 2012). Younger offenders may need classes that support their development of secure family, school, and peer structures, while older offenders may need vocational, employment, and independent living classes that will prepare them for adulthood upon release (Anthony et al., 2010). These multiple competing factors create an environment in which continuous and effective instruction is a constant struggle and effective programs are limited.

In an examination of 347 short-term detention facilities, Koyama (2012) found that most offered courses in core content areas, but 13% had no accreditation and 33% did not offer No Child Left Behind assessments. Some of the examined facilities focused on providing homework help to students after their assignments were received from their base school instead of creating their own independent curriculum. Reviews of the educational offerings and strategies available in confinement facilities showed that they range from remedial to postsecondary. Classes may be focused on vocational education, GED preparation, or life skills training.

In addition to studies on curriculum offerings within confinement, other researchers have attempted to uncover what academic interventions were used in juvenile facilities and how effective these interventions were (Wexler, Pylar, Flower, Williams, & Cole, 2014). Wexler et al. (2014) examined academic intervention studies in correctional

facilities between 1970 and 2012 and found a variety of strategies used for varying durations, including direct instruction, peer-mediated instruction, group assignments, and computer-assisted instruction. The authors note that there had previously been little evidence to support the claim that successful strategies from the general school setting could be effectively transferred to the correctional setting, but their review indicates that specific interventions have the potential to be beneficial.

In contrast to the sole focus on developing skill sets, some youth receive education in confinement that is described as liberatory education for empowerment. Flores (2012) examined the teaching beliefs and practices taking place inside of a California juvenile detention facility and found evidence of what he referred to as “jail pedagogy.” Jail pedagogy is “a teaching method that embodies a kind, compassionate, and liberatory approach to teaching within a structure that seeks to punish individuals and strip them of their individuality. Furthermore, jail pedagogy is a commitment to bring intellectual empowerment to individuals who have been stripped of their capital, cultures, and freedom” (p. 287). While the educators within this facility noted the challenges they faced—constant flux, wide variance in student ability, having to play multiple roles—they also acknowledged the strengths of their students that were not easily measured and they worked to constantly adapt their teaching strategies.

Though many youth offenders regress in correctional schools, others do find success whether receiving skills-based, remedial education, or liberatory education. Scarce studies examine the students that are successful, but Harder et al. (2014) found that students possessing an “average intelligence level, good academic motivation, and/or relatively few externalizing behavioral problems” have better academic achievement than

students lacking those traits (p. 263). This indicates that while students do not control all variables related to their achievement, personal characteristics and dispositions do make a difference. This does not mean, however, that the inadequacies of confinement facilities should be ignored.

The numerous personal and institutional struggles in confinement often combine to create an environment in which students with individualized education plans (IEP) (among others) are not properly educated. Various federal mandates and court cases have required youth in detention facilities to receive special education services if necessary, yet there is still a lack of special education teachers in correctional schools and inconsistent communication between base schools and their correctional counterparts (Ochoa & Eckes, 2005). The result is students that are not fairly served and regress further upon entry to a confinement facility. Indeed, the National Center on Education, Disability, and Juvenile Justice had documented 44 class action lawsuits against correctional facilities (juvenile and adult) by 2009 for failing to provide adequate special education services (as cited in Gagnon, Barber, Van Loan, & Leone, 2009).

The importance of providing quality education within confinement is not new to researchers. Though some students have success, there are still far too many problems with the correctional education process. Even within confinement, it remains true that low academic achievement is closely tied to future delinquency (Koyama, 2012). As Bolson, Quinn, and Nelson (2004) note, “Students may more likely return to a general education environment on release if they have experienced success in the short-term detention facility school setting” (p. 39). Malmgren and Leone (2000) also state that youth offenders are better equipped to make a successful transition back into society if

they have maintained or improved their academics in confinement. Indeed, youth with above average achievement during confinement are significantly more likely to return to school, which then increases their chances of future success (Blomberg, Bales, & Piquero, 2012).

Reentry

Once youth offenders are released from confinement, they typically find themselves headed back to the same communities and schools (if they do not drop out) as before confinement. While some are genuinely reformed as a result of their experience in incarceration, others remain either partially or completely committed to their previous values and actions. Additionally, some desire to change but lack the knowledge and support for doing so (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005), and all will likely face numerous barriers to successful reentry regardless of intent (Altschuler & Brash, 2004). Many strategies, solutions, and programs have been designed to enable greater success in reentry, but the fact remains that a majority of youth offenders will later reenter the justice system (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). The challenges, both personal and systemic, remain strong. It is also possible that the lack of a focus on school reentry translates to a lack of understanding and knowledge for how to attach transitioning youth to the institution that most holds their possibility for future success.

Challenges

When youth offenders reenter society from confinement, they typically face many of the same obstacles that they had before. Two of the largest struggles are dealing with/being around old friends and family members that may have criminal identities and coping with financial strain (Abrams, 2006; Abrams, 2012; Inderbitzin, 2009). Youth

often move back in with parents but struggle to have good communication lines and have people to hold them accountable (Todis et al., 2001). They may return to the same neighborhoods with concentrated disadvantage, which leads to an even greater chance of interacting with deviant peers (Wright, Kim, Chassin, Losoya, & Piquero, 2014). Additionally, former youth offenders still possess the same disabilities, health issues, and substance abuse problems as before confinement, and they still struggle to receive proper treatment (Gupta et al., 2005). Any academic difficulties present before confinement are often only worse upon reentry, and correctional facilities and schools' lack of effective communication can lead to difficulty in re-enrollment and gaining proper records and credits (Hirschfield, 2014). Students also may not be best suited for reentry to a traditional school, and efforts are often not taken to address the most appropriate school placement (Hirschfield, 2014). School biases and cultural mismatches still remain and must be navigated effectively for successful reentry. Furthermore, former offenders must now cope with a negative criminogenic label that could restrict access to opportunities (Anderson, 1999; Rios, 2011).

In addition to the many community, school, and relational barriers to success, reentering youth offenders also face developmental challenges as a result of their dual transition into adulthood and society at the same time (Altschuler & Brash, 2004). Steinberg, Chung, and Little (2004) argue that the juvenile justice system and facilities, with their focus on deterrence and the structure of their confinement, impede the development of psychosocial traits necessary for a transition back into society. These traits enable maturing individuals to function independently on their own, yet youth do not have ample opportunity to develop these skills while in confinement. To understand

these developmental tensions, Arditti and Parkman (2011) conducted a phenomenological study on the lived meanings of reentry for nine youth offenders. Using life course theory, they found that there was a “developmental paradox” between what youth offenders described as necessary and desired for their transition into adulthood and what their transitions actually looked like. The overall study indicated that former youth offenders desire to have employment and romantic relationships, but they struggle to attain these things and are often dependent upon parents or other caregivers. This leads to stunted developmental growth, while the struggle to obtain employment often leads to a return to illegal criminal activity.

The response of former offenders to these numerous challenges is diverse. Some have little desire to change, which limits their openness to strategies and their confidence in the ability to change (Abrams, 2012). Some correctly anticipate their challenges, while others minimize them (Abrams, 2006; Abrams, 2012; Inderbitzin, 2009; Hartwell, McMackin, Tansi, & Bartlett, 2010). Many desire to succeed in an acceptable way, yet they do not have the support, resources, or strategies to do so (Hartwell et al., 2010; Abrams, 2012). They cope with challenges in different ways, with some resorting back to selling drugs because of the financial strain and the need to provide for family (Abrams, 2006). Others practice “selective involvement,” a strategy in which they participate in risky behaviors but limit themselves (e.g. still hang with friends, but limit time; still do drugs, but not hard drugs) (Abrams, 2006). Additionally, one study noted that youth offenders were consistent in noting that change was an individual responsibility and that they did not expect to have much help from family or friends (Abrams, 2012). Unfortunately, many former youth offenders do desire change but

struggle to achieve that change, especially without support. Recognizing this, many programs and interventions have been created to aid in reentry success.

Motivational and Support Factors for Successful Reentry

Many researchers have studied the risk and protective factors for juvenile delinquency and attempted to conceptualize, create, or evaluate various programs and interventions aimed at lowering the recidivism rates for former youth offenders (James, Stams, Asscher, De Roo, & der Laan, 2013; Weaver & Campbell, 2015). Each of these interventions has relied on some form of social support (e.g. therapy, substance abuse counseling, mentoring, etc.) provided to former offenders, even if not explicitly mentioned as such (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008; Watson, 2004). Without the motivation to desist from crime, however, social supports may be of little use (Panuccio et al., 2012). Panuccio et al. (2012) also reveal that the two components complement each other and contribute to success.

Community reintegration. In response to the recognition that support and motivation are instrumental for community reintegration, several works in the literature have conceptualized or theorized ways for building these characteristics and reducing recidivism (Bazemore & Erbe, 2003; Mills & Codd, 2004; Settles, 2009). Among these, Braithwaite (1989) presented the idea of a “redemption ritual,” which is a ceremony or process designed to help reintegrate offenders into the community and symbolize their changed lives (as cited in Fader, 2011). In addition to providing a symbol to mark significant change, others have synthesized research on social capital, motivation, and families to make the argument that desistance can be achieved with greater support from families, who have significant influence on positive identity development (Mills & Codd,

2004). Furthermore, some researchers propose theoretical models that emphasize restorative community justice and emphasize the need for community social capital as an aid in desistance (Bazemore & Erbe, 2003).

In their theory, Bazemore and Erbe (2003) present three principles for effective reentry that repair the harm of the crime, involve stakeholders, and transform community and government rules and relationships. In this process, offenders make amends, build reciprocity and relationships, transform their identities, gain social support, and participate in community building. Similarly, Settles (2009) proposes a strategy for effective reentry that combines restorative justice practices and the development of social capital. Like Bazemore and Erbe (2003), she notes that victims, communities, and offenders each have roles to play in restorative justice practice. To delineate how this process would occur, she provides a blueprint consisting of several steps: (1) Reentry must begin inside of prison; (2) Parole supervision is important and creates the foundation for a bridge between status as inmate and community member; (3) Concerted efforts must be made to mend existing and forge new relationships between the victim, offender, and the community; (4) Feasible and safe efforts for restorative conferencing may prove helpful when an emphasis is placed on addressing the needs of direct victims; and (5) Evaluation and accountability are the particular domains of government agencies.

Many community reintegration theories have multiple parts and could be considered complex to administer. As such, most have not been implemented widely and even less have been studied. Fox (2010), however, examined three distinct reentry models in Vermont, a state with a known commitment to restorative justice. The three models were referred to as the panel model, the mentoring model, and the Circles of

Support and Accountability model. Her purpose was to understand how communities might better reintegrate offenders by tackling three key areas: development of a prosocial identity by offenders, changing the community image of offenders, and providing community support for offenders. Much like the theories mentioned above, the “civic engagement model” she discussed aims to have offenders actively contributing to the community’s success rather than simply receiving services. In the process, the offender gains new identities while also receiving support and helping the community embrace him or her. Each of the three programs she studied differed in how they actively engaged former offenders in the reentry process. Additionally, the models differed in how much formal and informal support was offered, as well as how civic engagement was handled. Fox (2010) concluded her study by recommending a combination of best practices from each model and turning away from the more exclusionary focus of the criminal justice system.

Reentry interventions and supports. It is important to note that many of the above theories and studies were developed with a focus on adult offenders. Adults returning from incarceration face many of the same struggles as their juvenile counterparts, but there are significant differences, including developmental processes, family dependence, and school attendance. For both adults and juveniles, however, reentry services that are offered vary greatly by location. Though the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention created a model, the Intensive Aftercare Program, that was intended to spread nationwide, subsequent randomized trials revealed no reduction in recidivism as a result of the model (Abrams & Snyder, 2010). Since then, other models, including Overarching Case Management (OCM) and the Michigan Reentry Model, have been developed in an

effort to connect reentering youth with the resources and support necessary to be successful. Still, there is limited continuity in the implementation of reentry models. There is no federal mandate for reentry services, and states differ significantly in requirements and investments for former youth offenders (Youth Reentry Task Force, 2009).

Despite this lack of continuity, research has revealed several important points that contribute, or could contribute, to greater success in lowering recidivism rates.

Traditional reentry services, which focus mainly on supervision (e.g. probation) without other supports, have resulted in minimal to no positive results (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008). Alternately, services that have combined supervision, mentorship, and pre-release planning have been shown to result in greater success (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008).

Length of services also matters, as one study illustrated that youth who participated in a reentry program for an average of 8.9 months had greater success in not obtaining new convictions than youth who participated for an average of 6.6 months (Abrams, Terry, & Franke, 2011). Moreover, youth from different genders and races may require different types of services for reentry to be most effective (Fields & Abrams, 2010; Vaughn et al., 2008). Males and females have similar concerns about education, employment, and staying out of trouble after reentry, but females are more likely to hold higher education aspirations, resort to criminal activity as a result of home and family instability, and suffer from depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and sexual abuse (Fields & Abrams, 2010). As a result, Fields and Abrams (2010) conclude that it may be more beneficial to offer Functional Family Therapy to females during reentry.

Similarly, youth offender needs can often be dissected by race/ethnicity. Since African-American and Caucasian youth often have different experiences leading to confinement, their reentry services should reflect and deal with those differences in order to be successful (Vaughn et al., 2008). In their study, Vaughn et al. (2008) report that African-American youth had higher levels of overall delinquency and violence, while Caucasian youth had higher levels of mental health issues and substance abuse. They conclude that, “individual-level interventions may be less successful for African American youth who require change in neighborhood conditions. Yet, for White youth, direct mental health and substance abuse services may be entirely appropriate” (Vaughn et al., 2008, p. 327). Indeed, changing the environment to which many youth offenders return is critical to sustained success (Grunwald, Lockwood, Harris, & Mennis, 2010).

In an effort to tailor services more directly to student needs, reentry programs would also benefit from addressing the numerous health and substance abuse problems associated with many former offenders (Gupta et al., 2004; Watson, 2004). Addressing substance abuse issues alone has the potential to significantly reduce recidivism (Watson, 2004). Furthermore, providing effective services for those offenders with disabilities has proven beneficial in reentry success (Clark et al., 2011). Support in general, rather than focusing on deterrence, is important for success. Studies qualitatively examining the reentry experiences and perspectives of former youth offenders have revealed that informal supports play a key role in success, and those that reenter the justice system often have a lack of support (Abrams, 2012; Abrams & Aguilar, 2005; Beal, 2014; Panuccio et al., 2012; Inderbitzin, 2009; Todis et al., 2001). Social support has also been demonstrated (in adult offenders) to directly affect feelings of hostility, which is

theoretically linked to crime (Hochstetler et al., 2010). It can also lead to greater motivation to desist (Panuccio et al., 2012) and to positive masculine identity development (Fader, 2013).

Though many individual studies have examined various factors leading to success for certain reentry programs or certain offenders, there have also been several comprehensive literature reviews and meta-analyses conducted that have evaluated the scope of reentry services and attempted to understand what leads to a reduction in recidivism when high-quality studies are considered all together. Greenwood (2008) reviewed programs focusing on both prevention and intervention, reviewed the cost-benefit ratio of each one, determined an effect size, and discussed both methods and problems for implementation. He found that programs involving the family were far more successful than those that focused only on individual offenders, and programs utilizing fear or punishment were not as successful. While similar to Greenwood (2008) in their finding that control approaches were not generally successful, Evans-Chase and Zhou (2012) also noted that therapeutic approaches are more successful than those focused solely on reentry services like probation and traditional mental health. Therapeutic approaches, multi-systemic therapy, and other similar styles seem to be most effective because of their provision of supports and counseling, as well as a strengths-based focus.

Recent meta-analyses have also examined the effects of aftercare programs on recidivism for returning youth offenders. James et al. (2013) revealed that aftercare programs are effective if they are well-implemented, individual-focused, intensive, and aimed at older and high-risk youth. Focusing on a system yields some results, but not as

high as individual treatments, which led to a recommendation for substance abuse programs. Their findings also contradicted some previous studies, including those that indicate the age of first arrest and number of prior arrests increases recidivism. Weaver and Campbell (2015), in contrast, updated and revised the previously mentioned meta-analysis and found that the treatment effect tilted toward the treatment group but was not significant. Furthermore, their analysis revealed that youth over 16.5 years of age and with a record of violent crime were less likely to recidivate, and that treatment intensity had little impact on recidivism.

Motivation and reentry. Rather than focus solely on what services and supports are given to former youth offenders, it is also important to note what characteristics of former offenders lead to successful reentry. Motivation has been shown to be important, and many former offenders desire to create new, positive selves (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005). Though they desire to change their trajectories, they often fail to create specific strategies for doing so, fail to receive support necessary to achieve their desired selves, and/or fail to resist pressures that get in the way of their stated desires (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005). Youth who possess positive expected selves, or expect a positive future, are less likely to engage in delinquent acts than youth with negative expected selves (Oyserman & Markus, 1990a). One of the challenges for reentry programs is to figure out how to cultivate a balance in youth between their feared selves and their expected selves so as to enhance motivational capital (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012).

In a 2012 study, Clinkinbeard and Zohra (2012) examined the motivational capital of 543 juvenile offenders across several geographic regions of the United States. They noted that many youth had strategies for achieving their expected selves and avoiding

their feared selves, but their strategies were not specific and concrete. Sixty percent had at least one concrete expected strategy and 52% had at least one concrete feared strategy. This led to only 14% of youth having the most developed level of motivational capital (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012). Youth who are successful in their reentry seem to have many motivators for desistance (e.g. the confinement experience, children, education, employment, maturation, and support) and clear goals/visions for their future (Panuccio et al., 2012; Todis et al., 2001). Furthermore, social support can often lead to increased motivation for change, and when support falters, motivation to desist may decrease (Panuccio et al., 2012). Finally, resilience studies indicate that hope for the future can boost students' school success, but the maintenance of hope is often affected by factors including neighborhood safety and parental relationships (McCoy & Bowen, 2015). Thus, motivation to desist from crime and graduate from school likely stems internally from future aspirations with concrete goals, even as the achievement of these aspirations is affected externally by social context.

Additional literature on motivation reveals other theories and the complex nature of factors that influence goal-setting, visions of future possible selves, and the cognitive processes that lead to human agency (Bandura, 1989; Bandura, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). Indeed, psychological studies have led to an increased understanding of what motivates individuals, and the subsequent theories are numerous and sometimes complex. These theories, however, strengthen the understanding of the factors that contribute to motivational capital and provide insights into possible reasons for reentry success.

A cursory overview of additional motivation theories reveals that motivation is not singular in dimension. People differ in both levels of motivation (how much) and orientation (what type) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation arises because of a natural interest in something, while extrinsic motivation stems from a desire to achieve a particular outcome. Even within this domain, attitudes may differ. Someone can perform an extrinsically motivated action with resentment or with willingness. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation may be enhanced or undermined by social and environmental factors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These types of motivation are closely related to value constructs within the expectancy-value theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). This theory notes that intrinsic value is enjoyment from a particular task, utility value is the usefulness of a task for future plans, and cost is how one decision limits access to other activities, how much effort is required, and how much emotion is invested (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Taken together, these related constructs illustrate that varying factors, values, and costs can motivate an individual, and the goal setting that occurs with motivational capital may be influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic values. And similar to the concept of motivational capital, motivation may be enhanced when a balance is present between value and cost.

Another highly influential concept that has been shown to drastically impact motivation levels is that of self-efficacy. First introduced by Bandura in 1977 as a key component of social cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to personal beliefs about the ability to attain designated goals (Zimmerman, 2000). When an individual believes that he or she can accomplish something and has the requisite strategies/tools to do so, motivation and achievement increase. Of course, self-efficacy also varies based on activity, context, and other factors. Someone may be very efficacious in one area and

lack efficacy in another. Nonetheless, self-efficacy beliefs have been shown to influence self-regulation, goal setting, strategy selection, and self-evaluation—all things important to the development of strong motivational capital.

Perhaps most directly related to motivational capital, however, is the effect of self-efficacy on goal setting. As Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992) note, “Self-regulation of motivation depends on self-efficacy beliefs as well as on personal goals. Perceived self-efficacy influences the level of goal challenge people set for themselves, the amount of effort they mobilize, and their persistence in the face of difficulties” (p. 664). Bandura (1997) also notes that efficacy beliefs influence emotional reactions when difficulties are encountered, thus enabling or undermining success in achieving goals. For former youth offenders, self-efficacy beliefs become critical as they try to set goals for themselves, envision positive futures, make difficult choices, and persist in the face of numerous obstacles. Though youth offenders may desist from crime because of their belief that they can achieve a different life (social efficacy), they may also benefit from increased academic attainment as a result of academic self-efficacy. Research has illustrated that academic achievement is significantly related to the beliefs one holds about his or her academic ability (Zimmerman et al., 1992). These beliefs influence how one regulates learning as well as what academic goals are set. Low educational and interpersonal goal setting, low self-regulatory efficacy, and low goal commitment have all been linked to delinquency (Carroll, Gordon, Haynes, & Houghton, 2012). Additionally, an individual’s beliefs about his or her abilities and the goals that are set are influenced by a variety of direct and indirect factors, including social

environment and parental aspirations (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Zimmerman et al., 1992).

In general, former youth offenders who desire to be successful in both their school reentry and their desistance from crime must possess some internal motivation that leads to human agency. Human agency refers to the ability of humans, or lack thereof, to control their own actions and futures. Proponents of autonomous agency argue that humans have complete control over all actions, while proponents of mechanical agency argue that humans have limited capacity to influence their own motivation and actions—everything is a product of environmental forces (Bandura, 1989). Situated between these two is the view known as emergent interactive agency. This idea, of which social cognitive theory is a part, acknowledges that humans are influenced by social situations and social structures. It also acknowledges, however, that humans are partly self-determined and can change themselves or their situations by their own efforts (Bandura, 1989). There are four key factors that influence this process: (1) intentionality—people develop action plans for accomplishing goals, (2) forethought—people anticipate likely outcomes to guide and motivate them, (3) self-reactiveness—people not only plan, they self-regulate and construct courses of action, and (4) self-reflectiveness—people examine their thoughts and actions and change where necessary (Bandura, 2006). Additionally, it is also important to note that human agency does not merely occur in a vacuum. While people can and do use their influence to change their lives or the lives of others, sometimes it is also necessary to lean upon others with greater access to resources, expertise, or power to help accomplish goals (Bandura, 2002). For former youth offenders, the belief in human agency is critical to change. While many have been

significantly shaped by their experiences before, during, and after reentry, they ultimately have some control over the decisions they make and the futures they have. Admittedly, the level of control is arguable and tenuous, as many have little control of the environments and events they will encounter. On the other hand, what they do control is their response to these situations.

The breadth of literature on successful reentry illustrates that there are many overlapping factors that must be considered. Since youth offenders often enter confinement with myriad problems and exit with even greater struggles, reentry programs should be prepared to address youth holistically with multiple forms of support and strategies for boosting motivation. Many studies have acknowledged the necessity of working across silos and connecting youth to numerous services, in addition to focusing on their strengths as opposed to their deficits (Altschuler, 2011; Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Anthony et al., 2010). It is clear that various forms of social support related to health services, substance abuse services, mentorship, and racial/gender needs contribute to youth offenders' success. Similarly, motivation is necessary for change, and both social support and motivation interact with one another. What most studies on reentry services fail to highlight, however, is the importance of a connection to school and how to motivate and support reentering youth offenders through graduation.

School Connection

The connection between academic achievement/school attachment and delinquency has been documented throughout the 20th century and into the 21st (Katsiyannis et al., 2008; N. Silberberg & M. Silberberg, 1971). Similarly, as mentioned earlier in this literature review, academic success, or the lack thereof, has a connection to

exclusionary school discipline, dropping out, and subsequent justice involvement (Christle et al., 2005; Skiba et al., 2014). Once students enter the justice system and then reenter the community, their level of school engagement decreases even further. It is estimated that less than half of reentering youth offenders actually reenter school (as cited in Stone & Zibulsky, 2015). Furthermore, Merlo and Wolpin (2009) note that black males not attending school at age 16 are four times more likely to be incarcerated between the ages of 19 and 22 than those in school (as cited in Abrams & Franke, 2013). On the other hand, former youth offenders who attend school regularly post-release are significantly less likely to be rearrested within one or two years (Blomberg, Bales, Mann, Piquero, & Berk, 2011). Those that are rearrested are more likely to have committed a less serious offense (Blomberg et al., 2011). As a result of this, many studies have acknowledged the necessity of getting former youth offenders attached to school (or work) immediately upon reentry (Abrams, Terry, & Franke, 2011; Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller, & Havel, 2002). Despite the recognition of the importance of school engagement for overall reentry success, limited studies have focused on school reentry—studies typically center on community reentry with a minimal focus on schools (Novotny & Burnstein, 1974; Todis et al., 2001). Even fewer have focused on success stories of reentering students in order to determine the social supports and motivational factors that contribute to graduation and desistance (Todis et al., 2001).

One study centering on public school reentry of delinquent boys was published in 1974 and aimed to uncover how the examined boys performed after release (Novotny & Burstein, 1974). They compared the public school status of the boys on multiple categories, including legal outcomes, ethnic group, disturbed reality testing, and poor

impulse control. They also made comparisons between public school outcomes and grade placement, suspension/expulsion, attitude toward authority, verbal IQ, and arithmetic achievement level. After running analyses with chi-square tests, they qualitatively examined further information about the 14 boys who graduated from high school and what made them successful. The authors found that 72% of the youth went back to public school and 78% of those dropped out before graduating. Results revealed, among other things, that recidivism was reduced in the boys who attended public school, while those who graduated recidivated least of all. Additionally, the follow-up period (three years) revealed that only 14% of graduates had received a felony conviction, whereas 40% of those who dropped out had a felony conviction. Qualitative interviews revealed that the 14 boys that graduated from high school all benefitted from support networks that were instrumental in their success, while there were no significant differences on any other criteria examined.

In addition to this limited focus on school reentry, most studies do not focus solely on success stories of reentry youth. In one such study, Todis et al. (2001) highlight the overall reentry experience of successful youth offenders as opposed to school reentry specifically. Among their findings, however, they note the importance of successful school reentry to overall reentry success. They list six factors that contributed to their definition of success: (1) active family involvement and communication, (2) *successful return to school*, (3) *engagement in school* and work activities, (4) association with peers who were not engaged in illegal activity, (5) abstaining from drug use, and (6) consistent involvement with one or more adults other than parents. Additionally, the authors highlight that successful youth were determined, had a positive outlook and approach to

life, and had a strong future orientation (related to motivation). Still, little is known about the school challenges of these youth after reentry and what specifically contributed to their school success. Indeed, the authors note that, with a few exceptions, there has been little research on resilience and education, and most of these have been quantitative. In their concluding statements, they state, “The absence of schools as a factor in the post-transition adjustment of potentially resilient youth is glaring. Schools could and should be a mechanism, both for at-risk youth and for potentially resilient youth returning from correctional facilities, to access structure, positive adult influence, skills, and problem-solving experiences” (Todis et al., 2001, p. 138).

The importance of schools in successful reentry is clear, yet more research needs to be done to understand what motivates certain youth to return to school after incarceration, graduate, and stay out of the justice system. Additionally, there is a paucity of research on the school challenges that are overcome by successful offenders, as well as the motivating factors and social supports that enabled their school success. If school success is so closely correlated to reduced delinquency and recidivism, understanding how to connect and support former youth offenders within school is of critical importance.

Summary

This literature review illustrated the myriad circumstances and experiences that frame youth offender reentry. The first section described the components that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. In this, it was revealed that youth are often born into community environments that limit opportunities, assign labels, and surround them with detrimental influences. As a response to racism, trauma, and lack of supervision, they

may develop behaviors that are likely to contribute to future justice involvement, either through committing punishable behaviors or being perceived as threatening. As the youth go through school, they often encounter cultural misunderstandings, discriminatory policies and actions, negative expectations, low academic achievement, and negative school climates. Their behaviors may justifiably call for exclusionary discipline, or they may be victims of implicit bias and the criminalization of discretionary offenses. In either case, youth then proceed through the justice system, where they possibly encounter more biased decision-making before entering confinement.

The second section focused on the confinement experiences of youth offenders, illustrating how these experiences support or deter reentry success. Youth offenders' experience in confinement may be positive and life changing, but more than likely they regress with further challenges as a result of hypermasculine identity developments and educational struggles. Confinement facilities are not often structured in such a way that supports positive identity development and academic achievement. As a result, youth offenders often fall further behind academically, leading to a greater chance of school failure/dropping out and recidivism after reentry.

The third section of the review provided an overview of reentry challenges and factors that contribute to success. It was made clear that upon reentering the community after their confinement period is over, former youth offenders are faced with the same temptations and struggles that plagued their lives before confinement. Additionally, developmental transitions, negative labels, and a lack of effective supports mean that most will come back into the justice system. There are, however, social supports and motivational factors that improve success rates—longer term transition planning and

support, mental health services, family involvement, substance abuse treatment, employment, and school engagement, to name a few. Though knowledge of these factors exists, they are implemented inconsistently and often ineffectively. The last protective factor, school engagement, is a critically important yet underexplored area of reentry.

It would be a fallacy to assume that every student reentering school from a juvenile confinement facility began his or her journey into the pipeline as a result of systemic biases, discriminatory policies, and inequitable actions. There are certainly students of all races and backgrounds that make bad choices—some have experienced systemic bias, others have not. Unfortunately, however, many students of color, especially those in urban contexts, have had community, school, and justice system experiences that profoundly shape their entrance into the school-to-prison pipeline. While they often carry some of the blame, they certainly should not carry it all. This literature review illustrates the complexity of discipline and justice in today's urban schools, communities, and court systems. More research is needed to disentangle the effects of race, poverty, gender, and a host of other variables on disparate outcomes. Additional studies are also needed to clearly explain the relationship between personal choice and systemic biases. Perhaps most helpful, however, research is also needed that focuses on success stories and how successful reentry can be achieved.

Though the process into the justice system is complex, the process out is perhaps best described as daunting. There is no one reason, no single story, for how youth experience their environment, school, and justice system. Similarly, there is no one story for how youth reenter their communities and schools successfully. What is clear, however, is that academic success and school engagement are closely related to

delinquency and recidivism, yet research does not indicate how certain reentering youth offenders become engaged with school and overcome myriad school and personal challenges to be successful. This study aims to fill that void.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The literature review revealed that students reentering public high schools from juvenile confinement facilities face numerous challenges to achieve success, graduate, and stay out of the criminal justice system (Calley, 2012). These challenges are both external and internal, existing within their communities, schools, and relationship networks as well as within themselves (Fields & Abrams, 2010; Hoffman, 2010; Rios, 2011). Despite these challenges, some students ultimately do succeed. This study investigated their stories, focusing on the school setting, to uncover exactly how they achieved their success. The purpose, more specifically, was to focus on *school* challenges of *successfully* reintegrated former youth offenders and to examine the social supports and motivational factors that enabled their success. Accordingly, four research questions were addressed:

- 1) How do successful former youth offenders describe their high school reentry challenges?
- 2) What social supports do these former youth offenders describe as helpful to their success?
- 3) What motivated these former youth offenders to desist from crime?
- 4) What motivated these former youth offenders to graduate from high school?

The remainder of this chapter addresses how the study was designed in order to effectively answer the above questions. It begins with a discussion of the overall

research design and why this design was selected for the examination of former youth offenders' school reentry challenges and experiences. Following this, the chapter reviews the sampling procedures that were used, including recruitment practices and selection criteria. It then proceeds to elaborate on the data collection and data analysis processes, while verification practices are discussed immediately after. The next section of the chapter provides a discussion of ethical considerations and strategies undertaken to minimize these issues. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting my role and connection to the topic under investigation in an effort to position myself within the research and acknowledge possible biases that may influence the interpretation of the data.

The Research Design

A single case study design with four embedded units of analysis was the selected design for this study. Case studies can utilize qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, but the central concern is the examination of a bounded phenomenon, event, or person (Creswell, 2013). Indeed, Yin (2003) describes a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p.13). Others have elaborated on this definition, noting that case studies are particularistic, heuristic, and descriptive (Merriam, 1998). They are particularistic in their focus on a specific phenomenon or context, heuristic in their insight into the phenomenon being studied, and descriptive in their “rich” description of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). While case studies may include each of these components, it is important to note that there are also numerous conceptions of the inherent qualities for various types of case studies. Intrinsic

case studies refer to those that are studied as a means of gaining knowledge about one particular case, whereas instrumental case studies refer to those that are examined as representative of more general phenomena (Stake, 1995). Additionally, case studies can serve four primary purposes: (1) exploratory, (2) descriptive, (3), explanatory, or (4) evaluative (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam, 1998). These differing purposes vary in level of analysis and content, with the latter two including greater analysis and evaluative case studies including some form of judgment.

A qualitative design was selected for this study because of the focus on uncovering student experiences and examining processes, supports, and personal motivations that lead to school reentry success. These designs enable in-depth exploration and a focus on numerous interconnected variables and relationships. Furthermore, the purpose and research questions for this study fit well within the interpretivist paradigm, which proposes that knowledge and meaning are dependent upon the thinking and reasoning of each individual (Gephart, 1999). Interpretivist studies seek to understand “how individuals or members of society apprehend, understand and make sense of social events and settings (the idea of interpretation) and how this sensemaking produces features of the very settings to which sensemaking is responsive (the concern for reflexivity)” (Gephart, 1999, p. 5).

Within the field of qualitative inquiry, a single case study design was selected because of this study’s focus on a specific context (incarceration and successful reentry) and the use of four units of analysis to provide detailed analysis of this context. While multiple case studies are typically selected to investigate different parts of the central research question, or to examine purposeful contrasts among cases, single case designs

with embedded units of analysis often include cases within a very similar context (Yin, 2014). With former youth offenders who were successful in their school reentry, the numerous internal and external factors that influence success create a context that is difficult to disentangle without thorough descriptions and analysis. While each individual represents a unique story, the goal was to uncover common themes that help to represent a rare occurrence—graduation and success after reentry. The single case study design also allowed for an investigation of each individual story to take place using a variety of data collection tools. Since this study focused on participants who were reflecting on previous experiences, observations in the school context were not possible. Nevertheless, the case study design allowed for in-depth retrospective interviews with participants, as well as the collection of data through questionnaires. There is no single accepted data collection strategy for case studies, and this flexibility was invaluable to the execution of this study.

Participant Selection

Qualitative studies most often select participants based on certain criteria that the researcher desires to be investigated purposively and intensively (Ezzy, 2002). More specifically, case studies have been deemed as useful when trying to analyze extreme cases instead of those that are more “average” or “general” (Flyvbjerg, 2011). In keeping with this ability, four criteria were used for the selection of four male former youth offenders in this study. Participants must have: (1) Been placed in either a juvenile confinement facility or an adult facility with a juvenile section, (2) Transitioned back into their public school and graduated (no GEDs), (3) Remained out of the criminal justice system after graduation and (4) Were no older than 28 years of age at the time of

interview. Participants had to show proof of graduation by presenting their diploma. Other criteria were self-reported.

The inclusion of these criteria sought to limit the participants to former youth offenders who achieved a specific definition of success. Though success can be defined in varying and broader ways, this study aimed to understand what enabled both successful graduation and desistance from crime. The typical marker of successful reentry is desistance, but successful graduation is also relevant because of the greater rate of success (both in desistance and economically) for those who accomplish this challenge (Novotny & Burstein, 1974; Todis et al., 2001). Additionally, this study focused on former offenders who had received a diploma instead of a GED because the former has been noted as carrying more weight in the professional world (Tuck, 2012). The inclusion of the final selection point was to guard against the effects of memory loss over time. There are successful former youth offenders who are now older than 28, but their recollection of high school experiences may not be as keen as desired.

The number of participants (four) was determined based on the ability to effectively address the research questions with thick data descriptions and analysis. While some scholars have noted that four to five cases are adequate for case study research (Creswell, 2013), Wolcott (2008) suggested beginning with just one case, as additional cases reduce detail (as cited in Creswell, 2013). In contrast, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) determined that a sample size of six in their study was adequate for gaining thorough data and insights. Four cases were ultimately deemed adequate because of the ability to increase the depth of the study and deepen the analysis.

To achieve the desired number of participants that met the selection criteria, a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling was used. The researcher used contacts in the local community to identify possible candidates for the study. An initial contact was made with a reentry services manager for a large nonprofit in Charlotte, North Carolina. She put the researcher in contact with one participant, but she was also helpful in giving the names of others in Charlotte that had connections with youth offenders.

The researcher eventually connected with two other reentry coordinators at a detention center open house. The two reentry coordinators worked together for the same nonprofit and had started their own mentorship program for youth offenders. The researcher gave the coordinators a recruiting email (Appendix A) and an informed consent document (Appendix B) to provide background information on the study. A “talking points” document (Appendix C) was also created to offer guidance on what to say to candidates. These documents, collectively, provided enough information for the local contacts to understand the scope of the study and aid in identifying potential participants. These documents briefly described the study, how it would be conducted, any risks involved, and how participation would be beneficial. They also indicated that each participant would receive a 50-dollar VISA gift card for participation.

The community contacts were directed to refer candidates to the researcher if there was any interest in participating or if there were any questions. Some also provided names and phone numbers for the researcher to initiate contact himself. The researcher received interest from five candidates, though one stopped responding to his attempts at contact and was therefore left out of the study. The remaining four participants were

included in the study. Their demographic information is listed below in Table 1.

Additionally, a pilot participant was selected to review and give feedback on interview questions and the clarity of the protocol. The pilot participant was formerly incarcerated and had not been back into the justice system since then, but he had not yet graduated from high school, thereby making him ineligible to be a full participant. Each selected candidate was then called to further discuss the study and answer any questions before setting up a date and time to meet.

Table 1: Participant demographic information

Name	Race	Age	# Times Incarcerated	Length of Time Incarcerated
Dante	Black/African-American	19	1	3-4 days before bond
Vegas	Black/African-American	23	3	1 st time- 1 night 2 nd time- 2 weeks 3 rd time- 2 months
Latrell	Black/African-American	21	1	30 days
Damian	Black/African-American	19	2	1 st time- 2 hours 2 nd time- 1 week

Data Sources

The primary sources of data for this study were questionnaires, in-depth interviews with multiple participants, and interview observation notes. Observations of these experiences were not possible because of the nature of asking former youth offenders to reflect on their previous school reentry experiences. In order to gain a rich understanding of their experiences and the supports/processes that enabled their success, interviews were thus conducted with each participant. Each interview yielded varying

perspectives and additional data that helped to enrich the picture of reentry for each participant. In addition, a questionnaire was designed by the researcher to gain basic background information and details that would be useful in narrowing the participant pool. These questionnaires included questions on demographics, academics, prior juvenile justice history, social supports, and motivational factors (see Appendix D).

The interview protocol was also designed by the researcher and was semi-structured in nature. The questions were created to align to each research question, offer room for extensive elaboration, and allow for unplanned follow-up questions if necessary. In order to enhance the validity of the study, the interview protocol was pilot-tested with at least one former youth offender who was not included as part of the main study design. This step offered the researcher the chance to test interview questions for clarity and the ability to obtain desired results. The pilot participant(s) offered feedback on the content and flow of the questions, allowing the researcher to understand and anticipate where possible confusion might occur in an interview. A copy of the interview protocol for the participants can be found in Appendix E.

Data Collection

After the researcher called each participant and discussed the study further, a meeting was scheduled with the date, time, and location being selected based on the preference of the participant. At the beginning of each meeting, an informed consent form was given to each participant to review. The researcher then talked through the main points to ensure understanding, highlighting the right of the participant to not answer any question, to review and alter any responses as necessary, and to withdraw

from the study if necessary. Participants were also informed that the interview would be audio-recorded.

After reviewing these initial reminders, each participant then signed the informed consent and was given a copy. A questionnaire was then given to each participant to complete. Upon completion and collection of the questionnaire, semi-structured retrospective interviews proceeded. In these interviews, questions centered first on the general interests and lives of each participant before progressively delving deeper into the school reentry experiences and challenges of each (Appendix E). The interview protocol divided the interview into sections based on the questions being asked, but it also allowed for connection between each section and for elaboration by the participants.

Furthermore, the researcher stopped to probe and ask additional questions where necessary in an effort to elicit greater detail and information. This interviewing style is consistent with a semi-structured style in which the desire is to understand each participant's experience fully, not ensure that each participant is only asked the exact same questions (Glesne, 2011). Each interview lasted for approximately 60-90 minutes. Upon the conclusion of the interview, participants were given a 50-dollar VISA gift card. They were also reminded that the transcribed interview would be hand-delivered to them within a week for review, if desired.

Occurring during each interview was the additional process of completing observation comments about the interviews. These notes were strictly the researcher's perspective, but they offered information on demeanor, body language, and actions while questions were being answered. Upon returning from an interview, these notes were typed and attached to the appropriate interview transcription.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed for this study using a form of thematic analysis. In this process, the detailed experiences and characteristics of the former youth offenders were first described to offer a portrait of each participant and the background information that helped to shape their unique experience. These descriptions were pieced together by reviewing the interviews of each participant and focusing on the key facts of the individual and his experiences surrounding reentry. The events leading up to confinement and during confinement were the focus of this section, while the broader analysis focused on reentry itself. After this, transcripts were reviewed again and open codes were created. These codes purposefully stayed close to the data, but were not representative of line-by-line (in vivo) coding. The selected codes were then aggregated into several code families in a process known as categorical aggregation (Creswell, 2013). From there, the code families were once more collapsed into broad themes that were more encompassing of critical ideas and insights. After broad themes and code families/subthemes were created, the initial codes were reviewed again to ensure compatibility to the selected themes. In general, a majority of participants had to align with the subthemes and themes in order to report them in the findings (one exception is described in chapter 4). This entire analytic process occurred on multiple levels: (1) Data were analyzed concurrently with data collection, thus enabling greater focus, organization, and reflection (Glesne, 2011), (2) Data were analyzed separately for each individual unit, and (3) Data were analyzed across units (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

After each individual unit was described and analyzed, analysis occurred across units and allowed for the examination of common themes. Finally, the analysis

concluded with the development of naturalistic generalizations, from which “people can learn from the case either for themselves or apply to a population” (Creswell, 2013, p. 200). Analytic generalizations were also reported, which allowed for the results to be generalized to inform theory (Yin, 2009).

Throughout the entire analytic process, the researcher practiced reflection in an effort to understand “how researcher, research participants, setting, and research procedures interact and influence each other” (Glesne, 2011, p. 151). This practice of reflexivity was important for the analysis process in that it enabled realizations of how interpretations were shaped. Additionally, it forced critical thinking about how the entire interview process was structured and what effect this structure may have had on participant responses. This process was valuable in contributing to insights and making connections.

Verification

The question of quality in qualitative studies has been (and continues to be) debated by those favoring more positivistic and natural science criteria versus those favoring greater appreciation of subjectivity, political action, and tolerance for complexity (Glesne, 2011). Despite these differences, there are certain issues that qualitative researchers in general find critical. Among these is the necessity of representing participants’ experiences and perspectives accurately, as well as using both enough data and multiple forms of data where possible. The latter two strategies help to ensure that quality insights and generalizations can be effectively made and that credibility is enhanced.

One strategy to achieve quality results is adequate sample size and number of interviews conducted. These considerations were discussed in the sample and data collection sections above. Additionally, however, qualitative researchers often point to several other strategies to increase validity and reliability. This study practiced triangulation in an effort to have multiple forms of data that could be used to verify each other (Mathison, 1988). The use of questionnaires, interviews, and interview observations produced three forms of data that provided a more complete picture of each case. Furthermore, participants had to present copies of their diplomas to objectively show how they satisfied selection criteria number two. These documents added an additional form of verifiable data.

In addition to triangulation, verification was also enhanced by pilot-testing interview questions and offering member checks. All participants were contacted to review their transcripts within one week of their interview, but all declined to either respond or take the opportunity to provide feedback. These steps helped to ensure that the participants' experiences and perspectives were accurately portrayed.

Finally, Creswell (2013) notes that, among others, general qualitative reliability criteria include clarifying researcher bias and providing thick descriptions. The former was satisfied by the initial positionality statements made above, as well as by the continual practice of reflexivity to recognize how biases affected the interpretation of results. The latter was satisfied by including a detailed description of each participant and the accompanying context before proceeding to the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

While no participants faced physical harm from this study and were not asked to divulge confidential information, there were still several ethical issues to be considered. The nature of the topic, dealing with reentry experiences and all its accompanying challenges, can be sensitive for some. It was imperative to consider that some participants might share information that was not necessarily confidential yet still very personal. For others, reflecting on past mistakes and challenges had the potential to be painful. To guard against these issues, participants were routinely reminded that they had to answer no question that they felt uncomfortable answering and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

In an effort to protect confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were used in place of names and participants were reminded that they did not have to share information that they did not desire to be known. As with all qualitative studies, protecting original data is also of critical importance. As a result, all audio-recorded data were deleted after transcriptions were complete and digital transcriptions and analyses were stored on a flash drive, laptop, and Google drive, but always password-protected. Hard copy documents were stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the researcher's advisor. Since emails can be deleted but are never truly removed from the Internet, participants were advised to not send any information through email that they did not want shared with others. The researcher did not send data or confidential information via email.

In addition to protecting against physical and emotional harm, the researcher believes that it is an ethical duty to practice reciprocity with participants (Glesne, 2011).

Since participants willingly give of themselves to contribute to a study, they should be rewarded in ways that are beneficial and helpful to them. In the case of this study, participants were given monetary incentives/rewards for participation, but the researcher also sought to maintain relationships with each and offer assistance wherever necessary. The desire was to ensure that the participants were not simply “used” and discarded.

Finally, ethical obligations of researchers extend to the representation of participants and groups in research. While confidentiality was maintained through the practices mentioned above, it was also important to be careful of how “successful youth offenders” were portrayed to wider society (Ezzy, 2002). To guard against false, incomplete, or simplified portrayals, the researcher attempted member checking (with no response) and reflexivity.

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made in the structure and completion of this study. First, the researcher assumed that former youth offender reentry challenges and factors leading to success could be effectively illustrated and that he could understand and portray these experiences accurately. Second, it was assumed that the participants were open and honest for the duration of the study. Understanding their experiences required a level of trust that they were telling the truth and answering fully and completely. Finally, the assumption was made that successful former offenders became successful because of a combination of internal and external factors. The study operated under the belief that there had to have been some level of motivation and support for success, though the interview process did allow for uncovering any participants that did not fit this assumption.

Delimitations

This study was conducted in Charlotte, North Carolina between the months of October 2015 and May 2016. It was also purposefully limited by the use of very specific participant selection criteria (mentioned above). These criteria were used in order to focus the study on individuals who could be classified as “success stories,” at least in one sense of the phrase. The decision was made to not impose more restrictive selection criteria (i.e. success as defined by one or two years after graduation with no additional arrests) because of the already limited and hard to find pool of possible participants. Finally, the study was designed to focus on reentry challenges, social support, and motivation within the school setting. While school and its relationships and effects cannot be divorced completely from other areas of life, the focus of this study remained on school in an effort to position it as central in the reentry experience.

Limitations

This study was limited in part by the nature of the sample selection and recruitment process. Those former offenders that were able and willing to participate in the study largely had experience with reentry services from a specific nonprofit. All had also only been incarcerated in a local jail for relatively short periods of time. There were no participants who had experienced long-term confinement. Both the nonprofit experience and the short-term confinement experience limited (somewhat) the diversity of experiences that participants described. Additionally, the participants had graduated from high school and fit the selection criteria, but two had not been out of confinement for a long period of time. As a result of this, there was a greater possibility that a participant could recidivate even shortly after being studied for success. Finally, though

not necessarily a central thematic focus of this study, it should be mentioned that the researcher was of a different race (white) than the participants. While it cannot be clearly stated that this impacted interactions, it is nonetheless important to mention the possibility of racial differences altering the level of comfort and disclosure for participants.

Role of the Researcher

I came to this study with certain hopes, presuppositions, experiences, and opinions. I was never a youth offender myself and I cannot say that I was ever particularly close to any youth offenders throughout my life. To be honest, I cannot even say that I have known the backgrounds of all of my students or friends. As a result of this, people ask me frequently about my connection to the study. They want to know why I chose to study adjudicated youth and their struggles with reentry. That is a reasonable question, and the answer to it begins during my first year of teaching.

Directly out of college and with no teaching credentials, I was hired at my former high school to be a history teacher and coach. I still remember that first year very well, especially my fifth period class. Fifth period that year was especially difficult for me. The class started out the year overcrowded and had somehow been set up to include about 15 students (out of 27) with discipline issues. In the right corner of the class sat one particular boy named Trey (pseudonym). Trey was smart and respectful, but liked to goof around in class to get the attention of girls. He could be disruptive at times, but was someone I would characterize as harmless. Later that year, however, Trey also helped begin my interest in adjudicated youth and reentry.

About mid-way through the year, Trey did not show up to class. His fellow classmates told me that he had been arrested that day in school. As it turns out, he was riding in a car with some other guys who had robbed a convenience store and shot the clerk in the head. Trey had not participated in the shooting and had not driven the car, but he was considered an accomplice because of his presence. He ended up testifying against the other boys and received a reduced sentence, but was still sent to a local juvenile detention center. I am not sure what happened to him after that, or if he ever managed to graduate school. I never saw him again.

A couple of years later, a friend of mine began a youth development program in the high school where he taught. This program was designed to provide mentorship and positive opportunities for young men in particular. It was formed after a large drug bust at his school had resulted in the arrest of the school's two star athletes, both young men who had received Division I football scholarships and seemingly had everything going for them. After a couple years in existence, the program had grown in popularity and was expanding to other schools. In addition, a local juvenile judge had requested to set up a meeting with my friend to see about assigning some of his adjudicated youth to the program as a condition of their probation. This is when my interest in adjudicated youth and reentry started expanding.

In the years since Trey's arrest, I had also had other students who, based on casual comments and suspicions, I thought were in my class after a stint in confinement. I figured that Trey would reenter somewhere at some point, and I figured that there were other students in my school that had been in detention. How, then, were we supposed to know which students were "reentry students" and what supports they needed? To my

knowledge, there were no special programs or support systems for reentry students. I do not recall ever hearing anything about it.

A couple of years later, I decided to enter into a doctoral program that focused on urban education. When we were encouraged to pick topics that interested us and were important to us, I often chose to focus on reentry. I typically try to help where I see the most need, and I could tell that reentry students needed additional support. I wanted to figure out how to expand reentry services effectively, and I desired to learn more about the specific struggles and experiences of former youth offenders themselves. My studies helped me understand these things both on a theoretical and practical level, but there seemed to be one consistency in almost all of the studies on reentry—scholars noted an incredibly high recidivism rate. As studies were undertaken to uncover youth experiences and other characteristics, they would predictably note the failures and discuss why so many youth had failed in the reentry process. Very few studies chose to focus explicitly on success stories, even though success stories can often lead to greater insights than the examination of failures. Furthermore, researchers seemed to study reentry as a whole instead of focusing on dissecting specific reentry segments (i.e. reentry to the family, reentry to the community, reentry to the church, etc.). This led to the neglect of a specific examination of school reentry, despite the fact that school is so intimately connected to overall reentry success.

Considering all these things and my studies to date, I admit that my experiences shape my perspective. I believe in the ability of former youth offenders to succeed with the proper supports and motivation. I believe in their potential. I believe that future Treys will succeed if more efforts are focused on understanding what enables success and

how to expand these efforts. These beliefs shape how I structured my study, but my acknowledgement of them also allows me to examine how they shape my interpretation and understanding of former youth offenders' stories.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the methods that were employed in an effort to analyze and convey what exactly enabled the school success of former youth offenders after their reentry. A qualitative case study design was used to examine four individuals, each as an embedded unit. These participants were selected through purposeful and snowball sampling procedures and data were gathered about their experiences through questionnaires, interviews with the participants, and interview observations. Data were analyzed concurrently with data collection in a categorical aggregation/thematic analysis process. This analysis occurred first on each individual unit and then moved on to produce generalizations across units. The data and analysis were bolstered by triangulation and member checking, while confidentiality and ethical issues were resolved through the use of pseudonyms, encoded digital storage, locked hard copy storage, and reciprocity. While the study was contingent upon several assumptions and limitations, its rigor was asserted through acknowledgement of these issues, reflexivity, multiple data sources and forms, and active involvement of participants. These structures and processes enabled the researcher to carry out the study and effectively address each research question.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This single case study design was conducted with four embedded units of analysis, each represented by a male former youth offender who had successfully reentered high school, graduated, and remained out of the justice system after graduation. In order to effectively tell their stories, this chapter begins with a detailed description of each participant and some of his experiences leading up to incarceration and reentry. The aim is to offer a compelling portrait of what makes each individual unique. In doing so, it is the researcher's hope that the reader will gain an understanding of the complexity of each individual and how former youth offenders, as well as their reentry success stories, should not be simplified into a single narrative.

After providing the participant descriptions, this chapter discusses the findings of the study. Three forms of data collection were used, including questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and interview observation notes. Thematic analysis was then used to generate four common themes, each with multiple subthemes. These themes and subthemes are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Study themes and subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Managing and Balancing: Dealing with School Reentry Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Differential Treatment• School Culture• Adjustments/Transitions
I Did It, With Help: The Types and Role of Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interpersonal-based• Skills-based• Materials-based

No Other Choice: Motivating Factors for Reentry Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Punitive Consequences • Self-Actualization • Economic Benefits
It's a Process: Sustaining Motivation for Reentry Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals and Strategies • Coping Mechanisms • Efficacy and Doubt

Due to significant overlap in participant motivation for desistance from crime and graduation, research questions three and four are answered collectively with themes three and four, though important distinctions are made as necessary to indicate where motivations differ. Table 3 below indicates the alignment of themes and research questions. Furthermore, the analysis revealed several nuances surrounding participant motivation to desist from crime and graduate from high school. Rather than simplistic affirmations of existing motivational theories, these participants both affirmed *and* complicated notions of what contributes to motivation and, more importantly, how motivation leads to success. It is in this area that the analysis reached its peak complexity, highlighting that a lack of confidence in one's ability to succeed can be more beneficial in reentry than possessing confidence, a process-based orientation may be more beneficial than an outcomes-based orientation, and motivation is not static or linear, but rather highly contextual and interactive. After discussing the motivation components of the participants, the chapter ends with a summary of all findings.

Table 3: Alignment of themes and research questions

Theme	Research Question Addressed
1	1
2	2
3	3&4
4	3&4

Participant Descriptions and Background

While each participant had their own unique experiences leading up to incarceration and during reentry, their similar backgrounds also helped provide a quality context for the embedded case study analysis that follows. The descriptions below reveal some of the facts of their backgrounds, but what is not told is the striking confidence with which the participants discussed their experiences and their lives now. During the interview process, each of the four participants seemed confident in himself and his accomplishments, not hesitating to discuss the past or reflect on mistakes that were made and how he progressed through them. While this could be seen as a coping mechanism in the face of unfamiliar territory, it could also be an indication of their genuine pride in their success and their desire to share with others their experiences.

Dante

Dante is a 19-year old black male who grew up in Charlotte, NC and has lived with his grandmother and grandfather since he was three years old. His mother passed away when he was young and he did not know his father. Though he was bullied in middle school, he enjoyed his years in school before high school because he felt he had more support and accountability from teachers and administrators. Upon entering high school, however, he struggled to transition effectively and was more concerned with getting different girls and playing around than focusing on his work. He claims that his teachers said he was a great student, but that he did not focus or follow directions. Early in high school is also when Dante began standing up for himself and getting into fights. Whereas before 10th grade he had few friends, after he began gaining a reputation for fighting he gained more friends and also began getting into more trouble outside of

school. The high school he attended was located in a predominately black community and was almost completely attended by students of color. It was persistently one of the lowest-performing high schools in the district and, as he noted, was disorganized and distraction-filled. The neighborhood he lived in was described as “the hood,” and he was focused on survival, always fighting and watching his back. While he constantly skipped class, did not give effort in school, was consistently referred to in-school suspension, and acknowledged his role in failing classes, Dante also observed how some teachers did not help him out but rather repeatedly told him that he was not going to graduate. Dante entered jail for the first and only time in 11th grade. He stayed there for three to four days before posting bond and leaving. His incarceration was so short that it seemed to him more like a short suspension from school. After reentry, Dante continued to go back and forth between improving and getting into trouble. His grades were still bad and he was placed in an alternative school where he received more structure and support, which ultimately helped him graduate. He currently works full-time at a large chain store and enjoys hanging out with his girlfriend and her son, as well as doing activities that are mellow and calm. He also added that he would like to have a job where he can tell others his story and help them think about what they can do to improve their future situation.

Vegas

Vegas is a 23-year old black male who lived in several states in the western and mid-western United States before moving to Charlotte after his 9th grade year in high school. Growing up, Vegas was a well-rounded kid who also got into significant trouble several times. He has been expelled from school three times, beginning in 6th grade when he shot at some other students with a BB gun after school. He was sent to an opportunity

school and then later reentered his regular school district only to be expelled again the following year during summer school when there “was an incident with, like, a taser, a gun, and a knife.” After this, Vegas was expelled permanently from his school district and his mom placed him in a private school from 7th to 9th grade. There, Vegas became a state track champion as a freshman and had a 3.5 GPA. He also had a diverse group of friends before incarceration, including friends that were in chess club, liked playing Yugioh, ran track and played sports, and were involved in gang activity and drugs.

Upon moving to Charlotte after his 9th grade year, Vegas attended a large high school in a wealthy area of the city. He was bussed in and did not live in the neighborhood where the school was located. He recalls a large cultural adjustment and identity crisis that took place when he moved to Charlotte, which contributed to his involvement in crime. Whereas the area where he lived out west was culturally diverse, in Charlotte and in his high school he noticed segregation between students of different races. Since he felt like he had to choose between groups, he gravitated towards the peers that had his same background, culture, and appearance. Unfortunately, these were also students who were in gangs and selling drugs. Additionally, Vegas had no father at home and no male mentors in a new city, so he struggled to understand what it meant to be a black male in American society. He received his cues from his peers and from the images portrayed in media. In the midst of this social crisis, however, Vegas was also labeled gifted and placed in International Baccalaureate classes.

Without the necessary social support in a large school, and with mounting frustration as he did not understand the relevance of the memorization/testing emphasis in school, Vegas’ actions quickly focused on peer acceptance and illegal activity. His first

arrest and incarceration lasted only one night, but his second arrest and incarceration stemmed from much more severe charges and he spent two weeks in jail and was then expelled from his high school. He was deemed a threat to the general population by the school district and placed in an alternative school for a month before transferring to a different high school that, according to Vegas, was known as “hood” and had a high-minority, high-poverty student population. At this new school, he continued to engage in illegal activities with friends and was arrested for the third time, where he then spent two months in jail during the winter of his senior year in high school. Ironically, the school that was labeled as “hood” by others was also the school that wrapped its arms around Vegas upon reentry and gave him the support and encouragement he needed to turn his life around and graduate. Since high school graduation, Vegas has also graduated from college in four years and is now currently working full-time at his alma mater while he is also taking classes to obtain a Master’s in Business Administration. In his words:

(I) enjoy working with young people and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds and serving as an advocate on their behalf and really being a face and a visual image or a, essentially a walking billboard for possibility and change, and what can happen when sometimes people are given a second or a third or fourth chance...I have to show people my mug shot for them to believe that I’ve been to jail. They’re like, “You never went to jail.” And so, it’s really great being able to like...I don’t know, just being able to dispel those myths and rumors and stigmas and show that people can do better when provided with the right opportunities.

Latrell

Latrell, a 21-year old black male, chronicles his story beginning around the age of 13 or 14 when his parents got divorced. That divorce was “devastating” and triggered some of the changes that took place in his life. Both parents remarried and Latrell struggled with the dynamics of a large blended family with a lot of fighting. He also recalls moving around a lot within Charlotte and attending schools with very different

demographics. Through most of elementary school he attended a predominately black school before switching to a predominately white school towards the end of his primary years. His middle school was mostly white, and for high school he went back to a majority black school. This led to some “culture shock” and the feeling that he was always trying to “find himself.” While he has always been a social person and had many friends, his best friends in elementary and middle school were, in his words, “quiet, nerdy dudes.” Then, in high school, his friend group became composed primarily of “thugs.”

In addition to having a peer group that was involved in destructive activities, Latrell was constantly getting into trouble in school. He was not a bad student academically. On the contrary, he notes that he always got As on tests even though he never took notes or did homework. His focus, however, was being the class clown. This filled a void from the lack of attention he was receiving in his home, but it also landed him in the principal’s office consistently. There, he always had a “cop out story” and “never took responsibility for anything.” His interactions with destructive peers continued until his arrest during the summer before his senior year in high school. He stayed in jail for one month before being released to begin his last year of school two weeks later. He completed his final year without getting in trouble and graduated in June of 2012. Now, Latrell is enrolled in college and works at a local boxing gym, where he also trains for his upcoming transition to professional boxing. If he could do anything in life, Latrell stated that he would influence those around him to get on a straight path and be more mentally sound because “life is about relationships and life is about people you love and people that are around you.”

Damian

Damian is a 19-year old black male who was born and raised in Charlotte, NC. He notes that he loved school until he began 9th grade, when there was less accountability and less support. He never got into much trouble until he started high school, which was located in a predominately black community and attended mostly by low-income students of color. His friends were a bad influence in his life, but he also loved his teachers and administrators. Despite this, the influence of friends proved to be more powerful. Additionally, while he noted that playing football for the school was important to him and he was a good athlete, receiving respect from those around him was more critical. Once, when he felt like a fellow student disrespected him, he decided that he could not let it go and had to fight the other boy. Damian's first arrest was after this aforementioned incident in his 9th grade year. It was very short-lived as he was put in jail for a couple of hours, had his photograph taken, and was then released.

After this initial arrest, Damian was kicked out of his regular school and enrolled in an alternative school approximately two weeks later. Then, while enrolled in this alternative school, Damian was arrested for his second time and placed in jail for one week. He also received an ankle monitor because of the level of the charge. He later reentered his regular public school and attended there for a time period before he was sent to a different alternative school that was affiliated with his home school. While attending this school one day, police officers came to get him and told him that he was trespassing. His charges meant that he was not allowed in regular district schools, though he had not realized this and no one had told him otherwise. He later returned to the initial alternative school (which was specifically for students with expulsions, long-term

suspensions, and delinquent records), but not after being out of school for eight months. Damian recalls that time period as the “longest eight months of my life.” Despite these setbacks, he finished his work at the alternative school and successfully graduated. He now works at a fast food restaurant and would like to begin community college to get an associate’s degree. He has two little daughters and said that, if he could do anything in life, he would want to be a judge, “because a judge determines the future of a lot of people’s lives...every human make mistakes and every human deserves a second chance.”

Managing and Balancing: Dealing with School Reentry Challenges

The analysis revealed numerous challenges that the participants faced in reentering school after their incarceration. Overall, these challenges reflected several different obstacles to overcome, or as Vegas noted, issues that had to be managed and balanced simultaneously in order to be successful. Underlying this main theme are three subthemes: (1) Differential Treatment, (2) School Culture, and (3) Adjustments/Transitions. It is also important to note that the school reentry challenges varied significantly based on the school cited. All of the participants (except for Latrell) attended more than one school after reentry, including alternative schools. In addition, Vegas’ story highlights even greater complexity because he was incarcerated three different times and attended three different schools after his initial arrest. These school distinctions are made in the presentation of the sub-themes below.

Differential Treatment

Among the many challenges that the participants faced in school reentry, the presence of differential treatment as a result of being incarcerated was common. The

notion of being labeled and looked down upon, or judged prematurely, affected their schooling experience and presented additional barriers to overcome. Dante notes that one of his greatest challenges was showing his teachers that he had changed and could do better. According to him, they were:

Still focused on the old Dante instead of the new one...When I reentered I was, it was like showing my teachers that I could, um, be better and they was always focused on the old Dante, you know, and it was, it was the type of teachers that would be like, "Oh, I read your background, do a background check on you." So then it's like, "Oh, that kid. I know him. I read about you." And it's like, "You're bad." I'm like, "No, I'm good."

Vegas also experienced the stigma associated with his past, especially when he reentered his initial Charlotte high school and when he was placed in an alternative school. He said that, "I have all these barriers in place because I have all these people that know I've been to jail. They know what my charges were and now they view me in that light...Now it's not just Vegas the student, now it's Vegas this delinquent." In fact, Vegas' label was more than just reputation; his was codified by the school district when they deemed him a "threat to the general population." This delinquent label led to some people speaking in a condescending manner to him, and he noticed that his peers were treated differently than he was. In addition, while at the alternative school, he observed that he was treated as a "second-class citizen" and had to go through metal detectors and pat downs. He was not allowed to question authority or the system, even if it was not in a disrespectful way and done in an attempt to understand why things were done the way they were.

Dante and Damian also noted the lack of freedom that was present in the alternative schools, especially those that required uniforms and metal detectors, as well as enhanced security and structure. Damian even described one of the alternative schools he

went to as “like a cage.” While the enhanced structure of the alternative schools benefitted Dante and Damian, they also received differential treatment that frustrated them, and in some cases hindered their access to needed services. After Damian was kicked out of his regular school and the affiliated alternative school for trespassing, he was placed in a different alternative school that was specifically for students with long-term suspensions, expulsions, and delinquent records. Once there, however, he could not frequently access the needed mentorship and development services that he had previously been receiving. His charges meant that he could not step foot on regular school grounds, which is where the provided services were held. As a result, his reentry coordinator had to always come to him and had to set up separate events off of school grounds for him to attend.

School Culture

The participants in this study often struggled with the climate of their schools after reentry, though these struggles did not necessarily begin solely after incarceration and reentry. In the instances in which participants returned to their original schools after incarceration, they still had to fight against many of the same challenges as before being placed in jail. Dante described his home school as “unorganized” and filled with “distraction” and “drama.” He stated that, “The teachers, they, they’re more concerned about getting you in trouble than trying to get you out of there.” Additionally, the school campus could best be described as an open layout with students having to walk outside to get to various classes. This allowed for easy skipping and misbehavior—issues that still tempted Dante during his reentry. In his words:

My reentry, it, it was different because I mean, I'm thinking like I was gonna be missed and nobody even noticed I was gone. And it was like, wow. It's like I

wasn't nothing. And the teachers didn't even ask me, "Hey, where were you? What was going on?" They didn't ask me was I sick or anything... It made me, it made me feel like I ain't...that's why I was skipping.

Dante skipped classes so frequently because he felt like nobody cared, and because it was too easy and tempting to simply leave campus and hang out with his friends.

Latrell, on the other hand, did not comment on the disorganization of the school, but rather on the lack of his relationships with teachers and administrators. For him, the relationships were surface level and he did not feel like he could go to them and “actually tell them anything real.” He said, “It’s like this in the predominately black schools, man. It’s like you have the teachers that care, right? That really care about the students and then you have the teachers that’s like, ‘Man, this dude is not even going anywhere anyway. Like why waste my time on him?’” Though there were teachers in his school who cared, because he classified himself as a master at navigating social situations, he was always able to tell his teachers what they wanted to hear rather than go beyond the surface level. This possibly represents both an issue with school climate as well as a personal issue, but it nonetheless reflects a challenge to successful reentry when there are teachers that feel like they are wasting time on students and therefore do not put the time or effort into supporting their students wholeheartedly.

Vegas’ school experience after his first arrest and incarceration was also similar to his experience before in terms of apathetic teachers. Though he did not indicate that the teachers were purposefully indifferent to him, he did note that the school was so large that it felt impersonal and he felt like “just a number.” As a gifted student, this meant that his social needs were overlooked because the focus was on academics. He stated:

I was seen as like a, a gifted student and so I feel like I didn’t get the resources I needed. Uh, I think, because they thought, “ Oh well, you know, he’s

excelling academically. He's fine. Let's put our attention and resources towards these students who are coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds or who are acting out or getting into fights at school." Whereas, I mean, I was good academically, but socially, um, I was miserable and was struggling. And so, I don't think there was enough focus placed on that...

These struggles with the school culture before incarceration were just as present during reentry, and as noted above in the participant descriptions, all but one participant (Latrell) continued to struggle after reentry until their situations gradually improved upon transferring to an alternative school or a different home school (in the case of Vegas). For Vegas, the experience in an alternative school was marked by an overwhelmingly negative and restrictive culture. He said:

Uh, I really saw how a school not being supported, uh, affects learning quality and having to share textbooks that were like four years dated, missing pages, not having calculators with batteries. Um, it was really frustrating because it was like, here I am, doing what I'm supposed to be doing, trying to be a good student, and I can't even get a pencil. And it was really frustrating because I was trying so hard to, you know, be like the best me or whatever, and it was like these continuous obstacles and roadblocks that kept presenting themselves.

Rather than supporting him and providing him with the resources and encouragement he needed to be successful, Vegas felt as if the staff at the alternative school were more interesting in imposing their authority on the students.

Adjustments/Transitions

A primary challenge to successful school reentry was learning how to adapt academically in order to catch up on make-up work and to learn new instructional styles. In some cases, the adjustment from jail to school was difficult, while in other cases the transition from one school to another proved to be another challenge to overcome. One of the common struggles was coming back into school and having a tremendous amount of work to catch up on and racing against time to pass the required assignments in time to

graduate. In addition to his short incarceration, Dante continued to get in trouble after reentry and was suspended on multiple occasions. For a student who was already failing most of his classes, the incarceration and subsequent suspensions put him behind even further. When he transferred to an alternative school, he had to catch up on a lot of work in addition to completing his senior graduation project. He said:

Then GP (graduation project) time was around when you had to do your graduation paper. It was so much required for that. I was behind on that. Like it was...I was just pressed against a lot of time with a whole bunch of work, and I ended up, like at the end of the year, and before I graduated, I ended up doing like a whole year worth of work, like a whole unit, one through eight, section five, section one, unit eight. Like a whole book of paperwork that they just copied out the book and had you filling out answers. Like I had to do all that in less than two weeks.

Vegas also noted that trying to catch up was a big issue for him, especially since he had been in jail three different times, with the final time lasting for two months during his senior year of high school. Additionally, since he was 18 at the time of his last incarceration, the jail would not let him take any of the classes that were offered in the juvenile wing of the jail and he was simply told to get his GED. Realizing that he was only one semester away from graduating, he had his reentry coordinator bring assignments to him in jail each week and he worked on completing schoolwork by himself. After he returned to school, he was in classes from 7am to 7pm, taking regular classes during the day and make-up classes in the evening. This led him to do approximately two years worth of work in one year. Of the struggle to catch up, Vegas noted:

There's no cushion. There's no special treatment. It's you're picked up, you know, you're picked up out of the jail, you're dropped in school. And from that first second your foot walked to the front door, you're expected to perform as if nothing happened and that's a challenge considering everything thing that that

person just went through, going through a school day and then going home and having to deal with all that.

Similarly, Damian had to complete a large amount of work not immediately after he reentered from jail, but after he came back to an alternative school from eight months without being enrolled in any school at all. With this lapse in schooling, his grades had dropped to all Fs and he had to stay after school five days a week and attend summer school in order to graduate. Damian benefitted in some ways from the computer-based structure of the alternative school, however. Though he preferred learning “physically” and in a regular classroom with interactive instruction, the computer-based system at the alternative school allowed him to “jump right in” with what everybody else was doing as it skipped by itself to fit Damian’s needs.

In addition to academic adjustments, perhaps the most challenging aspect of the school reentry process was adjusting social interactions and peer groups in order to stay out of trouble. All four participants routinely discussed the influence of friends and indicated that the same peers that had contributed to their delinquency were still around when they reentered from jail. These friendships changed for all four participants, though in different ways. Vegas and Damian were very intentional about cutting friends, while Dante and Damian seemed to gradually change friends or lose touch with their previous friends as a result of circumstances. In any case, navigating socially in high school proved to be a challenge. Vegas’ friends did not encourage him to do better and were involved in a lot of drug use and gang activity. After his last stint in jail, however, he cut 98% of them, especially after only one friend came to visit him and none bothered to send so much as a letter or an email, despite all he had done for them. During this time, Vegas was also “borderline homeless” after getting kicked out of the house by his

mother. He had no other family members in Charlotte and so slept on a friend's couch and ate one sautéed potato (split into thirds for three meals) per day for weeks. This made the challenge to cut off his friends even more difficult. He said:

At any moment all I had to do was make one phone call and I could have been eating at Ruth Chris that night or I could have had enough money to do whatever. And so it was a challenge, not only in just cutting them off, but the resources that came with that and the access that it granted because, I could've, you know, I didn't have to eat a potato a day.

Latrell also restructured his friend group, though he was still accepted by his former friends. Instead of cutting them out completely, he stopped hanging out with them most of the time and they learned his boundaries and so left him out of many of their activities. He said:

I changed everybody I was around. I was more, it was more of solitude thing, man. It was like, I'm, it was like I got to school, I ate breakfast, I went to class, I changed in between classes. Like I felt invisible. You know what I mean? And that feeling of invisibility was not necessarily a good feeling, but I knew that was something that was proven that I knew that would help me get me through what I needed to do, without any, you know, rejection or anything like that, so, I mean that really, it really changed everything.

Latrell noted that these significant changes were not easy for him. His brother, who still lived with him, was one of the main people that got him involved in some destructive activities, while his friends and his environment were always around. Latrell continued:

Living with him and living with all of our, living around all of our friends and stuff like that. And the constant influence of like, of like smoking weed, like going out and drinking like, fuck it. Like just doing, just doing every, everything that we weren't supposed to be doing, basically. And so, just being, that was the hardest thing to overcome, man. Saying no, saying no to these people I used to always say yes to. Saying no to stuff that I used to always do.

For Latrell, this was a particular struggle because he was such a social person. He did not have the knowledge to realize that he could do some of his former activities while still staying away from the activities that got him in jail, so he stayed away from everything.

This left him in a “bad position emotionally” because he neglected such a key part of his personality, though it also enabled him to finish school with getting into more trouble.

In contrast to Vegas and Latrell, Dante and Damian changed or lost touch with friends, but less as a result of intentional actions and more as a result of changing circumstances. In fact, the biggest challenge for Damian after being out of school for eight months was “just the thought of having to go back when you’ve been gone for so long. So that was something I had to get over physically, emotionally, like for real, that was my biggest challenge.” Damian noted that going back to school evoked fear in him mainly because he knew the situation he would be going into and he knew his mindset at the time. This created a social challenge where he was worried about getting in trouble again. According to Damian:

It was kind of like, “Man, I don’t give a fuck about nothing no more.” It is what it is, so I had a fuck everything mentality. So, I use to say I go to school and I’m just going to be like, “It is what it is. Ain’t nobody going to tell me to sit down.” So, I was kind of scared, like I am going to go in and get in trouble and get myself in more.

Damian’s attitude gradually began to change, however, and he also changed friends as he stayed busy with catching up on his work. His ankle monitor, which placed him on strict curfew and limited the places he could go, also contributed to the distancing of friends.

According to Damian, his friendships simply changed and he moved on:

Yeah, it just kind of changed man, like I didn’t even see it. My best man told me like, “Your boys ain’t your boys.” And this was like my friend like this we all got kicked out of this together. But it was because I was going to school and I was actually doing something, we was all in the same class at Freedom (alternative school) they put us all back together. Even the people that I got kicked out of school with, they put us back together in the classroom. And I didn’t mess with nobody, went in school for a couple hours. I sleep my first block but after that I’m by myself. I’m doing my work. And then we jacking and fooling around after school but my friends were like, “Man, you know, you don’t F with me no more, why you don’t F with me no more?” And that’s where the problems came

in at. And it wasn't cause I didn't mess with them, it was just because I am trying to get my diploma and everything. And then I was on 6 to 6 (house arrest) at the same time so I had no time for my friends. It was school, home, work. That's all I could do. So it was like, "Dang bro you think cause you got a job now, you making money, you gon try to flex and do all that, you don't hang with us because you make money." That was that's kind of what it was so I just like, "You win some, you lose some."

While Damian's loss of friends may have created some social adjustments, it was also likely beneficial for him in completing school and staying out of jail. Similarly, Dante also gradually moved away from his friends. He first spoke of hanging out with friends and then, "whenever they start talking crazy, I'd break off and be like, 'No, bro, I ain't with that.'" Later in the interview, however, he used more forceful language in stating that he gradually dropped his friends and relied more on his support system:

Like I was my own friend. If I wanted to shake my own hand, I shake my hand. I don't need anybody. That's how I was. You know what I'm saying? 'Cause I had the support team so what friends did I need? I was already failing. Wasn't nobody helping me. Y'all not putting no money in my pocket. I don't need no friends. So that was pretty much what I used.

Collectively, the challenges of differential treatment, school culture, and social and academic adjustments created additional barriers to overcome in order to be successful in reentry. Perhaps this is why, when asked to describe his reentry experience in one word or phrase, Vegas chose "challenge to compete to be average." Indeed, overcoming each layer of challenges would likely have been impossible if not for the numerous supports that were provided and used by each of the participants.

I Did It, With Help: The Types and Role of Social Support

All four participants expressed how critical various forms of support were in their ability to stay out of crime and graduate. In response, the title for this theme comes from

the words of Dante, who said, “I led myself to success, with the help of others.” Three subthemes emerged in the analysis of forms of social support: (1) Interpersonal-based, (2) Skills-based, and (3) Materials-based. Each represents a variety of actual supports that were given to the participants throughout their reentry experience. Before discussing these different forms, however, it is also important to note the sources of support for each participant. Table 4 below lists this information.

Table 4: Sources of support

Participant Name	Family	School	Organization	Job	Faith-based Institution
Dante	Grandmother, Grandfather	Teachers, Administrators	Communities in Schools, Youth Development Initiatives	None	None
Vegas	Mother	Teachers, Administrators, Counselors	Communities in Schools	None	None
Latrell	Dad, Stepmother, Mother, other family members	None	None	Boxing gym peers	None
Damian	Mother, Grandfather, Sister	Teachers, Administrators	Communities in Schools, Y Achievers	Fast food restaurant manager	None

Interpersonal-based

Not surprisingly, various relationships formed the core support mechanisms for the participants in the study and provided many forms of support that ultimately aided in their reentry success. Similar to the expressive element of Social Support Theory (Cullen, 1994), the interpersonal-based supports served as both a means and an end, providing nurturing relationships that were positive on their own, as well as important in

achieving desistance and graduation. In particular, interpersonal-based supports provided encouragement, mentorship, accountability, and exposure to other individuals and opportunities.

Of the interpersonal-based supports, encouragement and mental reinforcement perhaps proved to be most critical. This encouragement was provided by family members as well as mentors and school staff. Vegas described the staff at his final high school as supportive and really invested in him as a student. For the first time in his educational career, he remembered someone actually asking him what was going on and listening to him instead of making quick judgments about what he needed to do. He noted that they cared about him as a person and did not just view him as a delinquent or treat him as simply another student.

Um, the people at Womack (school pseudonym) were really caring...as soon as I got back to Womack, um, the school immediately wrapped me in arms of support and encouragement and said that everything would be okay and we'd work it out and I would graduate...I needed people to talk to, people that would let me know what to expect, that it would be okay. It's such a, it's so much uncertainty and ambiguousness getting out of jail, and going back and wondering what it's going to be like. And what are people going to say? But they really just sat down and talked with me and when they needed to pulled me out of class...There were times where I just couldn't handle it. I just had to walk out of class and go to the field and just sit down and breathe or what not. And so, even in those times they didn't suspend me or, or, or anything like, or impose disciplinary action because I was adjusting. They met me where I was at and just worked with me and, and really counseled me through it.

The staff at Womack clearly understood the challenges Vegas faced and recognized that he was going through an adjustment process. Rather than suspending him or imposing disciplinary sanctions for every minor infraction he had, they chose to listen to him, encourage him, and meet him where he was. Though his mother was supportive in many ways, Vegas commented that she was always working to provide for them so she was

rarely around. He felt like he was missing a family, and the school and Communities in Schools staff eventually filled that void by becoming like a family for him.

Dante also often described the support he received in terms of encouragement. His grandmother was his main source of support, and he noted that, “She always would talk to me and tell me that I am worth something when others told me I wasn’t. She was like, ‘You can do it,’ and things like that, pushing me and striving, until I finally did it.” Similarly, Latrell highlighted the importance of his dad and stepmother in providing encouragement and mental support even when he did not feel like he had strong relationships with teachers from which to draw. His family reaffirmed that he was on the right path and that his mistake did not define who he was. He stated, “The mental support was, was the biggest thing that I don’t even see anything else being more important than that, I mean because mentally, I mean, that’s all you really have at the end of the day.” For Latrell, who received the least amount of services of any of the participants, and had the most linear reentry process, mental reinforcement from his family proved to be enough encouragement for him to succeed.

Beyond encouragement, however, the participants highlighted the importance of mentorship and further development. Vegas, Dante, and Damian all received support services from Communities in Schools, and they noted that the relationships formed with their male mentors were key to their reentry success. Additionally, Vegas received even further mentoring when he enrolled in community college after graduation. His experience highlighted an important contribution of mentors for youth of color when he said that it was the first time he had a consistent black male in his life that became a quasi-parental figure. This “made a world of difference” and helped him to understand

what it meant to be a black male in society apart from what was portrayed on television and in music.

Rather than simply benefitting from increased encouragement, guidance, and personal development, the participants also improved because of increased accountability from their newly formed relationships. Much of this accountability came through Communities in Schools, though Vegas and Dante also cited teachers at their final schools as providing accountability as well. In Vegas' words, "It wasn't just me anymore. You know, when it was just me and no one was on me then I could skip class and nobody said anything." In fact, at one point, Vegas had between 60-90 absences per class. After he reentered his last time, however, things changed:

If I'm in class first block and I miss second block, well now Jack's standing at the door in my third block class like, 'Where were you at Vegas?' And so it held me accountable where I couldn't just, just skip anymore. I couldn't just not do assignments anymore because there were people there, um, rain or shine, love or hate, that would ask me...

Dante echoed these comments when he stated, "They made sure I always made it to class on time... Mr. uh, Mitch was always making some type of way where security is like on me, so I, I couldn't leave like that no more, really. That's why I started going to class..." Damian, on the other hand, received accountability both from Communities in Schools but also from his job manager. She was invested in his education and affirmed to him the importance of school over work. She cut back his hours for him to focus on school and then actually checked on him to see how he was doing. He stated, "She did a pop up one day at my school and I wasn't there, they was like, 'Well, actually Damian barely even come to school.' So it was messing with school was not only affecting the way I thought about school and I thought about life, it was affecting my money." This

accountability, for all three, illustrated the importance of structure and someone simply following up to check on them. Aside from helping them stay out of trouble, it enabled them to make gains on the academic side and provided a consistent check-in from someone who cared.

Finally, another form of interpersonal-based support occurred when the participants' mentors or support systems provided them with connections to other individuals and outside opportunities/experiences. This exposure helped them to see a world outside of the one that they inhabited and see that there were possibilities for their lives different from those they had ever known. Damian spoke of the influence Y Achievers (after-school program run by a local YMCA) had on his life:

Y Achievers man, they actually showed me about the adult world and like how you can make mistakes and still be somebody in life. That what Y Achievers was, you could make a mistake and still be somebody... You got like pamphlets and books and stuff, yeah you got books on life. You met people that wrote the books, you would go to the YMCA's and you would meet all kinds of rich people that has been through the mud but now they are like an entrepreneur. They was giving you key strategies on how they did it and you can be like them or be better than them...

Damian's support from Y Achievers led to opportunities for him to meet and hear from people who had made mistakes but turned their lives around anyway. These exposure opportunities and connections allowed him to envision a life beyond his own. Similarly, Vegas recalled going on college trips with Communities and Schools and being exposed to a world that was unfamiliar to him:

I went to a, um, a college fair with them, um, shortly after I got out. And I didn't even had any ideas about college, what it was, what to expect or anything, but had I not gone to that college fair with Communities in Schools, I never would have thought of college. It never would have entered my mind...

The simple notion of bringing the outside world in and exposing former youth offenders to new individuals and opportunities has the potential to contribute to the envisioning of a new future, or in the language of motivational capital, a future positive self.

Interpersonal-based supports played a critical role in the reentry success of all four participants in this study. While encouragement and mental reinforcement was clearly necessary, they also benefitted from other supports that were relational in nature. Accountability, mentorship, and exposure to new experiences were all important, even while often coming from many of the same individuals and organizations.

Skills-based

Skills-based supports refer to the supports that participants received that enabled them to succeed academically, gain new life skills, and conquer old struggles. They are, in some ways, similar to the instrumental supports referenced by Social Support Theory (Cullen, 1994) in that the focus is on achieving an end goal and not also on developing a relationship. Indeed, rather than being relationally centered, skills-based supports focus on acquiring the intangible parts necessary for a successful reentry. These supports were administered mainly by schools and nonprofit organizations like Youth Development Initiatives, Communities in Schools, and Y Achievers.

As a result of incarceration and, in some cases, years of neglecting serious school work, many of the participants had large amounts of work to make up. Since this was one of the chief struggles listed under the reentry challenges theme, it is no surprise that overcoming this struggle included support from school-based staff. Vegas, Dante, and Damian all took advantage of extended school days, including going to after-school sessions and sometimes even taking summer classes. Still, without the intentional

support of their school staff, they likely would not have finished. Dante even noted that he “loved going to school” once he transferred to the alternative site. He claimed that he never missed a day and loved it because of the positive vibe and the fact that there were not very many students. For him, the setup allowed him to receive more individualized help and eventually graduate. In fact, he liked it so much that he did not want to leave.

He stated:

The staff always smiled no matter, no matter what. Like how I could go in there and cuss every one of them out and they’ll smile at me still and be like, “Have a great day.” Like it was so happy. And then it was like once I started failing, cause see, I ain’t gonna lie to you, I started failing in (there) because I liked it so much, I was trying to stay and they was trying to make me leave. So we started falling out.

Of course, a positive environment is not the same as academic assistance, though Dante seemed to get plenty of that as well. The same staff members that were positive and encouraging also made sure that they helped him out academically: “I got help. I mean, actually, I got help. It was, and the staff, they helped me out. They actually took the time.” Dante was also involved with Youth Development Initiatives and took some of their life skills classes. In these classes, Dante was taught how to do finance, fill out a resume, get a house and own his own business, as well as other skills that were aimed at preparing him for his upcoming adult life. Unfortunately, he wished he had paid more attention because he now sees how applicable those lessons really were.

The level of make-up work that Vegas had to complete was also tremendous, but Vegas knew that he was intelligent even though his grades had slipped because he had not been focused on school. For him, academic help was not as much about getting assistance as it was about taking advantage of opportunities to do everything he had to do. Nonetheless, he greatly benefitted from one of his Communities in Schools mentors

while still in jail. Since he was incarcerated for two months in the middle of his senior year, Vegas knew that he had to get work done while he was in jail. Unfortunately, because he was 18 years old he could no longer access the classes in the juvenile wing. As a result, the above-mentioned mentor used his security clearance at the jail to deliver assignments and books to Vegas each week. Vegas completed the work and then gave it back to the mentor to get back to his school. Furthermore, Vegas received needed drug counseling while at his final school, which helped him conquer that struggle and continue to get his life on the right track. Though he did not mention other specific skills that his supports helped him develop, he did note that he participated in numerous activities simply trying to occupy his time. These activities included Think College events and tutoring sessions.

For former youth offenders, developing various academic and life skills are important components of being successful in reentry. The participants in this study underscored this fact and illustrated that formal support systems (e.g. schools and nonprofit organizations) are important contributors to skills-based support. As Damian noted, it is these supports that contribute to the development of maturity in preparation for life after school.

Materials-based

Materials-based supports differ from interpersonal-based supports and skills-based supports in that they are much more tangible. Though often deriving from important relationships, materials-based supports are simply physical items or other benefits given to provide assistance. Despite being distinct from interpersonal and skills-based supports, they are often connected to these supports in some way. The participants

in this study cited monetary supports and transportation supports as two primary forms that were used to help them achieve reentry success.

Latrell has been noticeably absent for much of the discussion on other forms of support. Though he received strong encouragement from his parents, he did not claim strong support from his school or any nonprofit organizations, and he did not discuss accountability or mentorship in his life. What he did highlight frequently, however, was the fact that his parents also supported him by putting him into boxing and paying for his trips, equipment, and membership. Though this will be discussed more in another theme, Latrell's embrace of boxing proved to be a pivotal point for him and helped him occupy his time constructively after incarceration. Without his parents being able to pay for this new activity, it is unlikely that Latrell would have been able to find the outlet that he needed. In addition to this, it is also safe to say that each participant had family members that gave monetary support at least indirectly through housing and food. The only exception was Vegas, who was kicked out of his mother's apartment for *part* of his reentry journey.

Damian provided an excellent example of the housing and other materials-based support he received from his family. He lived with his mother, grandfather, and sister, and both his mother and grandfather supported him with their materials. Rather than simply acknowledge that Damian was being provided with housing, his mother used her provision to require Damian to get his education. In his words:

Well, I would say my mom's support was riding me like the devil. Riding me like, "I don't care what you are doing, how you doing it, you taking your ass back to school." You know what I am saying? Period, point blank, I'm paying for you all you do is live life and you going to live life and go to school while you under my roof and under my rules. My granddad was always like, "Man, I ain't graduate, I regret it. I want you to graduate." My mom was like, "Ain't no I want you to

graduate. You are going to graduate." And you know what I am saying? So, they were always, nobody ever played about education, nobody. Nobody played about that so.

In addition, his grandfather provided transportation to Damian when he overslept, allowing Damian to still attend school even after missing the bus:

Like my granddad would take me to school. I missed the bus often, that was my reason to not go into school, "Ohh, I missed the bus." So, my granddad would be like, "Well, I got a car so come on." So that was his way of encouraging me every single day, "I got a car, get in the car let's go."

Damian's mother and grandfather combined these materials-based forms of support with interpersonal-based accountability and encouragement to help Damian graduate from school. In fact, this example provides an excellent illustration of how multiple forms of support often exist and work together to provide the necessary reinforcement for achieving success.

No Other Choice: Motivating Factors in Reentry Success

The third theme that emerged from the participants' interviews included the motivating factors that led to their desire to desist from crime and graduate high school. There are four subthemes for this section, including: (1) Relationships, (2) Punitive consequences, (3) Self-Actualization, and (4) Economic benefits. These subthemes refer to four areas of motivation that were present in *both* motivation to desist from crime *and* motivation to graduate from high school. Nonetheless, there are specific distinctions that will be made in the text to clarify the differences between the two. To further clarify these distinctions, Table 5 breaks down the subthemes with more specific motivators and highlights those that were present for "motivation to desist" and those that were present for "motivation to graduate." In all, these motivating factors combined to leave many of

the participants with the feeling that they had no other choice than to be successful, which is where the title for the overall theme is derived.

Table 5: Motivating factors

Subtheme	Specific Motivators	Motivation to Desist	Motivation to Graduate
Relationships	Kids/family	Yes	Yes
	Not disappointing others	Yes	Yes
	Seeing others do it	No	Yes
	Encouragement/support	No	Yes
	Expectations of others	No	Yes
Punitive Consequences	Jail/trouble	Yes	Yes
	Tough love/cutting back privileges and resources	Yes	Yes
	Environment/constant reminders	Yes	No
Self-Actualization	Disappointed in self	Yes	No
	Proving to others and self	Yes	Yes
	Comparison to others	Yes	Yes
	Achieving potential/inner sense of greatness	Yes	Yes
Economic Benefits	Make (legal) money for self	Yes	Yes
	Make (legal) money for others	Yes	Yes
	Own business in future/entrepreneurship	No	Yes

Relationships

One of the primary motivating factors for the participants was, unsurprisingly, the relationships that surrounded them. These relationships motivated them in many ways, but they ultimately illustrated an understandable phenomenon—many of the participants were successful in large part *for* somebody else. Their relationships were sources of support and encouragement, sources of expectation, sources of responsibility, and sources of hope.

Of the many ways that relationships served as a motivating factor, disappointing those closest to them proved to be instrumental for most of the participants. Dante was extremely close to his grandmother as she had been his greatest source of support for most of his life, including after incarceration. As a result of their close relationship, Dante was motivated to stay out of jail and graduate in order to not disappoint her anymore and make her proud of his accomplishments. He stated, “She told me like she was disappointed and things like that and it was making me feel bad cause all I wanted to do was, was make my grandma proud of me.” Dante’s grandmother also invoked his deceased mother, asking Dante if he thought she would be proud of his actions. His response was a resounding “no,” and so Dante was spurred on to continue persevering through graduation, despite ups and downs. Similarly, Vegas recalled sitting in jail his third time and seeing the disappointment and sadness on his mother’s face:

One of the worst feelings, if not the, that I’ve ever had in my life was looking at my mom in a jail cell through a glass window, wearing a jumpsuit, speaking to her on a phone and seeing, like, the look of disappointment and shame and anger and frustration and sadness. And that’s not something that, uh, uh, any child should ever have to go through with a parent. And just feeling like I was a failure to her.

Though Vegas cited previously that his mother was rarely around since she worked so much, she had also provided for him and raised him through multiple arrests/incarcerations. He recognized her intense emotions after his final arrest and did not want to make her feel like a failure as a single mother. This motivation also boosted Vegas’ desire to concentrate on his schoolwork and complete his studies, though he also noted that graduation was not his main focus at all.

Latrell also realized that his family had been extremely hurt by his actions. He commented that his dad was most hurt emotionally, but his grandmother was also

disappointed. He stated, “I tore everybody up. Cause when I was younger my grandma took care of me when I was about two to nine so she was like she was like man, she couldn’t believe it, you know what I’m saying.” In contrast to Vegas and Dante, however, Latrell did not mention “disappointing others” as a motivating factor in graduating from high school.

Damian’s motivations often centered more on his two daughters than his other family members. As the only father among the participants, he did not want to disappoint his daughters in the sense of not being able to provide for their needs and wants in the future. For this, he was motivated to push through and graduate. In this sense, not disappointing his daughters overlapped with desiring economic benefits to support them.

He stated:

If I didn’t have two little girls or one little girl that I had to live for I honestly wouldn’t have went back to school. Period, point blank. But everybody said you want to look at your baby and you want her you want to tell her you are not able to buy her something because you didn’t graduate or you want to graduate and go to school and get her what she want?

Damian was honest in recounting that he did not desire to go back to school. In fact, while he was ultimately motivated by others to go back and finish, he was also initially forced to return by the court system. His judge told him that if he did not want to go back to jail he would have to go to school. Once he had reenrolled, Damian was further motivated to graduate from having seen others around him accomplish that feat. Though he did not witness his mother graduate, he knew that she had. He also had seen his brother graduate and knew that his dad had not. This created a desire in him to graduate as well, especially so he could say that he was better than his dad. He said, “This is what

I wanted to say, like, ‘I’m better than you. I ain’t go to prison, I graduated I’m better than you.’”

While much of the motivation previously mentioned stemmed from an internal desire to not disappoint others or to make them proud, the participants were also motivated by expectations being placed on them from their significant relationships, as well as by the encouragement and support from important individuals. For instance, Vegas noted that people challenging him led him to challenge himself. Rather than just setting a high expectation, however, he was encouraged and supported to meet that expectation. Damian also noted that he received tremendous support and encouragement from his significant relationships, which then motivated him to succeed even more. He was reminded that, “ ‘You live once and we are supporting you once,’ ” and he recognized that he had many people that cared about him and wanted him to succeed. In the end, he stated, “It was not only me wanting to be something, it was other people wanting me to be something.”

Dante echoed these statements about encouragement and support leading to motivation when he said, “There was so much positive things being said instead of the negative, that I usually was used to. So it was more motivation because I’m not used to hearing that, so it made me want to do better...” Finally, Latrell was also motivated to graduate for someone else. His mother had been diagnosed with liver cancer during the last couple months of his senior year and, as he stated, “I just really wanted to do it for her.” In the end, relationships clearly mattered a great deal to the participants and they were motivated by doing something for others and not just themselves.

Punitive Consequences

In addition to being motivated by important relationships and the encouragement and expectation that they provided, participants were also strongly motivated by punitive consequences. In fact, punitive consequences were one of the main motivators for all four participants to desist from crime, though there were also some cases in which punitive consequences served as a motivator for school graduation.

By far the most prevalent consequence that was cited as a motivator was the desire of participants to not return to jail. Many of the participants had very dramatic experiences in jail that changed how they looked at their decision-making. These experiences were enough to make the participants not want to return. Of course, this attitude took longer to develop in Damian and Vegas, both of whom had multiple incarcerations. Damian indicated that his first incarceration was so short that he did not have the full jail experience, whereas his second stint in jail actually frightened him. He stated:

And I got the bigger charge, man I had to dress out and go on the elevator, go up, I was like, "Oh, it is real in here, I can't come in here." My first time in jail I saw this man get boomed off. It was like floors in jail. And my first time, I was in there for my second day and the doors opened at like six in the morning and the man ran past me and like tackled another man off the second story, bust his head wide open. I was like, "Never again am I coming here." That was scarce man, that was scarce. So I was like, "I can't ever come back up in here, I see what people be talking about." And since then I ain't been back.

The man described in the quote above actually ended up dying, and this experience on the second day of jail was enough to make Damian never want to go back to jail. He stated that, "everybody breaks the law but I ain't breaking the law to where I am going to jail. I break the law as in jaywalking but not like I was, no."

Vegas, on the other hand, had a life-altering conversation with another convict during his last jail term, and he was also able to observe common trends among the

inmates he was around (e.g. lack of education). This conversation proved to be instrumental in motivating him to not return to jail in the future. He described being in a prisoner transport van with one other inmate who was “super-tatted,” “super buff,” and a “high ranking gang member.” In short, this inmate represented everything that Vegas thought he was trying to be. He had just been sentenced to eight years in prison and had been incarcerated several times before. He proceeded to tell Vegas about his life and Vegas recognized himself in the story. The man then told Vegas that God had spared him and that he was blessed to be able to turn things around. Vegas said:

Him telling me that I had an opportunity to change and that I needed to go back to school and get my education and become somebody, oh man, that was like, that was like getting a blessing from the like the godfather. Like, it really, I don't know, it really just changed my mentality because here was someone who was everything that I wanted to be, had everything, had the, all the drugs, all the drug money, all whatever, but he was telling me that if he could go back, he would change. And telling me that I'm at that point where I still can, it's not too late, uh, made a really big impact on me deciding that I would never go back to jail.

While in jail, Vegas also began to take note of all the people without a diploma. He estimated that there were at least 1,000 people in the jail and that there were around 60 people in his particular pod/cell area. Of those in his pod, two had G.E.D.s and none had high school diplomas. He noticed their quality of life and began to realize that he could not live like that and that a high school diploma would be his key to the next stage of life. In this way, the jail experience served as both a motivator for desisting from crime and graduating for Vegas.

Latrell's experience with jail had some parallels to Vegas and Damian, except that he did not even have to enter the jail for him to decide that he was never going back. In court, his lawyer tried to file a motion for him to serve his sentence on weekends instead of serving the full sentence. Latrell said:

It didn't even take this long. Ten seconds he was like as soon as I...I didn't even need the time, man. As soon as I heard jail, I was like, as soon as I heard, "You've got to go." That was enough for me. I can remember that feeling and the second feeling was...well after that, right, so my parents were watching it happen and I didn't even look. I couldn't even look at them.

Latrell's desire to stay away from jail was even further solidified once he began serving his sentence. Like Vegas, he also recalled an important conversation with another inmate. This particular inmate was only 16 years old and had killed four people. He was facing a long prison sentence at a minimum. This boy told Latrell to stay away from his friends when he got out of jail, which struck him. He never expected to "learn something from somebody like that." As a result of these experiences, Latrell knew he never wanted to be in a position where he could go back to jail again. He said, "I even keep my tag straight, everything man. I am not going to jail for nobody. That's how I feel about that man. I never wanna go back there."

Though the jail experience proved to be a significant motivator to desist from crime, and in at least one case, graduate from high school, other punitive consequences also served to motivate the participants to achieve success. Vegas recounted a period of what he referred to as "tough love" from his mother, where she kicked him out of the house and was not providing anything for him until he got his act together. This occurred because he had been incarcerated multiple times and his drug activity had previously led to them being kicked out of housing. She could not afford that again. For Vegas, this act of tough love motivated him to both stay out of crime and to be successful in school. He slowly started to regain support and access to stay in their apartment as his mother saw that he was continually improving and being more consistent about his behavior and schooling. Vegas noted that this tough love forced him to "man-up." He said:

Sometimes when, um, students or people feel like they have a fallback we don't really give it our all because we know that at the end of the day, well, I have my fallback and I can go back to safety and security. So, by her, um eliminating that perceived sense of safety and security, and although it was there, I perceived that it wasn't, that really pushed me because I was like, "Like oh crap, I can't fail. I get out, I don't have anything or anywhere to go back to." So, for me individually, that really pushed me to succeed, um, just because I like I said, I knew I, or at least I felt I couldn't go back home.

Of the participants in this study, Vegas was the only one that lost his "fallback" during his reentry years. He was also the only one that was incarcerated three different times. While he did not claim that it was the best strategy for everybody, he acknowledged that it worked for him.

While not receiving as extensive a form of "tough love" as Vegas, Damian also recalled different things in his life being cut back or taken away until he started to improve in school. His manager at work began cutting his hours so he could focus more on school, his mentor began cutting their hang out time, and his mother cut small things like his access to Playstation and television. He acknowledged that missing the "small stuff" affected him and motivated him to go to school. Additionally, this punitive consequence combined with not wanting to disappoint others. Damian realized that others were "fading away cause I ain't doing what I suppose to do." In the end, he missed his freedom and his privileges, but he also did not want to let his parents and his mentor down. The "tough love" strategy as a punitive consequence proved to be instrumental for both Vegas and Damian in motivating them to graduate from school, and in the case of Vegas to also stay out of crime.

Self-Actualization

Self-actualization refers to the process of achieving one's potential. For the purposes of this study, it also refers to the motivation that results from desiring to prove

this potential to both self and others. Though there may be an external element to this theme, self-actualization is largely internal and interested in the development of self. It should also be stated that self-actualization was discussed by only two of the participants but was still seen as important enough to include as a subtheme because it was such a clear and strong motivator for half of the participants. It was deemed too important to dismiss.

Self-actualization became a strong driving force for Vegas during his third incarceration. Though the desire to achieve his potential may have been in him all along, he discussed it as manifesting after his last stint in jail, or at least after other distractions became less important in his decision-making. He spoke of a desire to see what he could do in life and positioned his life as a “social experiment” to “see how far he could take this thing.” Shortly thereafter, when asked additional questions about this desire, he referred to it as “spiritual,” a “stirring in my soul,” and “part of my DNA.” Vegas’s motivation was simply to see what he could accomplish if he actually applied himself to something positive and stuck with it. He also mentioned wanting to “prove it to others, my mom, and myself.” When describing this motivation in greater detail, Vegas stated:

I mean, I don’t even think God’s like predestined me for greatness, but it was like this spiritual, it was like this feeling in my core, this stirring in my, well saying soul you’d have to be religious, so I guess yeah, so a stirring in my soul, um, that just knew that greater was possible. And, um, I wasn’t in a point in my faith when I was in and out of jail where I was super religious. I was probably anti-religious, if anything, um, but that is, it’s like a spiritual belief. And more, it was more so of a knowing.

Vegas did not claim to know exactly where his inner sense of potential came from, but he knew it was there and he wanted to see what he could accomplish.

Similar to Vegas' recounting of his sense of potential, Latrell described an inner sense of greatness and wanting to find out what that looked like. He said:

I just always felt that inside me I was supposed to be something great you know what I mean. I was supposed to be something more than what I was. And so that's what really motivated me to graduate high school is because I wanted that, that urge to find out what it was, that urge to kind of grow.

Latrell also knew that he wanted to own a business someday and he was interested in going to college, though at the time college seemed unrealistic. For him to accomplish these visions, he had to graduate high school and see how far he could go. He was also strongly driven by a disappointment in himself, which could be seen as stemming from the realization that he was not achieving his potential or embodying the character and intelligence that he knew he possessed. He said, "I feel like I let down myself cause I knew I was better than that." These feelings enhanced his motivation to achieve his potential and were buttressed by new realizations of how to interact with his friends and maintain his personal integrity. When discussing removing himself from certain situations with his friends, Latrell stated:

It's not my obligation just because I'm around them to put myself in that situation. And that I shouldn't feel bad or I shouldn't feel guilty saying no to the people that I care about, that are my friends. Right? And then it's okay to not do what everybody else is doing and it's okay to be yourself.

Latrell's journey to achieving his potential included the understanding that he had to be himself and that it was okay to say no to his friends. While this particular quote is not representative of a motivator, it does represent a process that he underwent as a result of his self-actualization. In the end, the desire to achieve their potential was important as a motivator in both staying out of crime and graduating from high school, for in order to pursue greatness, it is best to do both.

Economic Benefits

The subtheme of economic benefits includes the participants' desire to make money, either for themselves or for others, as a motivating factor in reentry success. Interestingly, Vegas was the only participant who did not cite economic benefits as a motivator, mainly because he claimed he already had access to plenty of money when he was living life on the streets. The others most likely could have earned money illegally as well, but they specifically desired monetary gain the legitimate way. As a result, money served as a motivator to both desist from crime and graduate from high school.

Dante illustrated the influence of money well when he said, "I'm like more of a, a person, I like taking my grandma out, taking my girl out, things like that. If I want some Js (Jordan brand shoes), I want to go pick them off the shelf cause I can get it like that, you know? That, now that's what motivated me." Dante recognized that staying out of jail and graduating high school would help him get a job, and he knew he did not want to flip burgers. He also recognized that his only other option was to sell drugs or "make some side hustle," and he was not willing to take the risk of getting into trouble. His motivation to graduate in order to gain money was further supported by one of his teachers who used to tell him, "You graduate, you be making them bands." In response, Dante stated that, "All I used to think about is bands, like I want some money. Like go get the money. Why you can't, I mean, you can't be successful if you don't graduate. That's how I feel." In a similar way, Latrell discussed wanting a good job and wanting to start his own business, which he knew would be more likely if he graduated from high school and attended college. Even though he did not discuss the specific

reasons he wanted more money or what he would do with his money, he clearly articulated that there was an economic motivation to be successful in reentry.

As mentioned in an earlier section, Damian also had economic motivations, though his stemmed largely around supporting his daughters and being able to give them what they desired. In fact, he did not mention buying things for himself once. Damian also worked during high school at a local fast food restaurant and so there was added incentive for him to stay out of jail and go to school. By doing those things, he was able to work more hours and keep money in his pocket. Since his manager was a big proponent of education, she chose to cut his hours when he was not taking school seriously, which served as motivation for him to do better. For Damian, this translated easily: "If I stay out of jail, I could make money." Furthermore, Damian knew that going to school and graduating would provide him with a better opportunity for making more money. He noted, "People telling me, 'You don't want you don't want your little girl asking you, telling you she want something and you telling her you can't get it.' So you go to school and you graduate, you will you will guarantee have more money." In the case of economic benefits, there was clearly an overlap with the punitive consequences motivating factor. The participants desired to have money, but they were also afraid of going to jail again and so declined to get their money through an illegal route. This meant that staying out of jail and graduating from high school represented their best chances of getting a legitimate job and providing for themselves and their loved ones.

In sum, four motivating factors provided the reasons for the participants to both desist from crime and graduate from high school. Though they are discussed separately and are distinct in many ways, there was also overlap and connections among factors.

While certain specific motivators were only present for desistance from crime or graduation, most motivators were applicable to both areas and all four subthemes were supported in both areas. In the end, participants had numerous motivators that ultimately combined to motivate them even further. Though they realistically did have a choice, because they knew that they did not want to go back to jail and they had so many people supporting them, the participants felt in some ways like they had to be successful. In the words of Vegas, “It’s either you make it now or you go back to what you just left. And for me, that wasn’t an option.”

It’s a Process: Sustaining Motivation for Reentry Success

While the previous theme discussed what motivated the participants to desist from crime and graduate from high school, another theme focusing on motivation also emerged in the analysis. It became clear that reentry is a process filled with many ups and downs, and motivation is not a static or linear construct, but rather dynamic and changing. In moments of weakness and frustration, the participants still had to sustain their motivation in some way in order to succeed. This section discusses what this process was like and how the motivating factors that spurred them to life-change were buttressed in the face of uncertainty, doubt, and failing confidence. Accordingly, three subthemes are presented: (1) Goals and Strategies, (2) Coping Mechanisms, and (3) Efficacy and Doubt.

Goals and Strategies

Research and literature on motivation capital, as discussed in chapters one and three, has posited that motivation is enhanced when individuals have goals and strategies for accomplishing these goals. Furthermore, concrete and specific strategies are much

better than abstract strategies in increasing motivation. This study revealed that the participants did have some goals and strategies, though they were generally not very specific and much more process-oriented than outcomes-oriented. Nonetheless, the participants relied upon their strategies even when circumstances were challenging and, sometimes, even when they failed and had to pick themselves back up and keep going.

Dante described his process of goal setting as a very informal one in which he simply “took a piece of paper, wrote down as many goals as I would like to have, and I picked out three big ones...” His goals were broad and did not seem very definitive. When asked to repeat them again he mentioned some generalities that were related to the goals he first mentioned but were not the same. Nevertheless, he generally described his goals as being focused, not giving up, staying on task, and working hard. Interestingly, he did not describe staying out of trouble as a goal, nor did he list graduation as a goal. He indicated that graduation was the “headline,” and so his goal was not to graduate but rather to stay focused in order to graduate. The only strategy he mentioned was going back to look at the goals he had written down so that he would not get sidetracked. In some ways, Dante seemed to mix his goals and strategies, but he clearly displayed a focus on process rather than outcome.

Vegas was similarly focused on process. When asked if he had any goals that he set for himself during reentry, he noted that he did not really set goals, but “set things that I wanted to avoid.” Discussing this further, he said:

I knew I couldn't be around a whole bunch of people that smoked. And I knew I shouldn't be out past like 12. And I really tried my best to avoid situations that could potentially end up with me going to jail or me being around people who could cause me to go to jail. And so I just had to be very careful in regards to the environments I chose to spend my time in.

His strategies included the same things he mentioned as his goals—avoiding people, situations, and environments—as well as taking advantage of opportunities, regardless of what they were. He wanted to occupy his time so that there was no free time to get into trouble. This also included being honest with himself and knowing when he should leave an environment/situation or not go there to begin with. He had to consider the patterns and histories of people he was around before he made decisions to do something with them. Though Vegas discussed a desire to graduate when he noted that achieving his potential was one of his motivations, he also indicated that graduation was never really his main focus or goal. He said:

At that point it was really just to, to stay out of trouble. It wasn't about graduating, it was about occupying time and avoiding bad people and situations and really just making it to the next day without an incident. I wasn't looking at graduation, I wasn't like, you know, like, May 13th, here's my graduation day. I'm counting down. I was like, "All right, it's Monday, it's the start of a new week. I'm going to start the week off positive." Yeah I wasn't thinking about graduation. I'm, you know, I'm thinking, "Okay, now it's Tuesday. Okay, Monday was, you know, Monday was good, what'd you do right? What'd you do wrong?" And just doing it day-by-day. And graduation really came upon me on surprise, by surprise. I was kind of, like, they told me I was graduating, but I didn't believe them...

Vegas revealed that though there was a desire to graduate and to achieve his potential, he was so focused on staying out of trouble and just doing what he needed to do that he did not think so much about graduation. In the end, this worked for him as he graduated and was soon after enrolled in a summer transition program for a community college.

Latrell's story indicated that his experience also closely resembled Dante and Vegas. Though he did set concrete goals of graduating without getting in-school or out-of-school suspension, as well as never getting arrested again, graduation for him was something he expressed as not an option. In fact, he said, "When I got out it was like I'm

gonna graduate, like that's not a question." Still, to accomplish this, he adopted strategies much like Dante and Vegas. When asked about them, he said:

Um, nothing specific man. Stay on the straight and narrow, keep my head down. That was literally my strategy. Keep my head down you know what I mean. Keep my head down, keep my eyes closed that was my strategy. And stay out the um, and just stay away from, just stay away from the people that got me in the situation that I didn't wanna be in. Yeah that was my main strategy.

While Latrell was in jail, he thought about the people he was going to avoid when he got out and then followed through upon release. Though his strategy was not easy for him and even caused him some emotional turmoil, he knew that if he stuck with it he would graduate.

Damian also set the goal of graduating high school, and this was the only goal that he mentioned. He did not indicate that his goal was to stay out of trouble, emphasizing instead that he knew he was still going to get into some trouble because he was "Billy Bad Ass" when he came out of jail. To achieve this singular goal of graduating, however, staying out of *jail* is in some ways implied, even if there is no goal to stay out of trouble altogether. Damian's strategies were simple but practical: go to after-school recovery, go to Saturday school, and be determined. In order to graduate he knew that he had a lot of make-up work to do, so he strategized that attending school after regular hours and on Saturdays would help him finish. In the end, this proved true.

The four participants in this study each revealed goals and strategies during the reentry process, though most of what they discussed was more general rather than specific. The focus on process/strategies, however, seemed to pay off in the long run. They knew that they needed to stay focused and determined, and in some cases, stay away from people and situations that could draw them back into their old behavior.

Interestingly, Vegas and Latrell were the only two participants that specifically decided to isolate themselves from others as a strategy. Though grand future-oriented goals were not present and strategies were not always well planned, the analysis revealed that perhaps a simple focus on the day-to-day process is beneficial for successful reentry. It is this process orientation that allowed the participants to sustain their motivation.

Coping Mechanisms

In order to sustain motivation amidst struggles and over time during reentry, the analysis revealed that the participants employed various coping mechanisms. These were essentially ways for them to deal with the changes and the challenges in their lives and remain steadfast in trying to achieve their goals. The isolation tactic by Latrell and Vegas' strategy of staying busy and taking all opportunities that presented themselves could both be seen as coping mechanisms as well. Additionally, Dante practiced quite a bit of self-talk to cope with his struggles and failures. More than this, however, some coping mechanisms also provided emotional and physical outlets and replaced destructive friends/activities with positive ones.

Perhaps the most obvious coping mechanism that was discussed was involvement in sports. Vegas had grown up as a successful athlete and decided to play football in high school because his friends played. Ultimately, sports did not keep him out of trouble for good because he was incarcerated for his third time not long after football season ended, but it did provide something constructive that filled up his time and kept him out of trouble at least during season. He claimed that he only played football because his "boys from the hood were doing it," yet it still proved to have a positive influence. In this case, it was also important that his friends were participants with him. After football season

ended Vegas joined the wrestling team. There, because none of his friends were involved and were back to pursuing destructive activities, he got involved and was soon arrested.

He explained it like this:

Because all my boys were playing it (football), um, when we got home we were like tired as I don't know what, and then, especially like for games. Um, after games we'd all just go home and go to sleep for like a day and a half. And so, it gave me something, it gave me a productive outlet to express my energy and that's probably why I got arrested during wrestling season because none of my boys wrestled. So, all my boys I was chilling with, we, you know, we played football and so it was good. We were, you know, not in the street as much, you know, we're physically exhausted, tired, and what not. But then it got to wrestling seas-, season they didn't, none of them wrestled. So it was just kind of me and I got lost again.

After his last incarceration, Vegas learned that he needed to stay away from those friends whether they were playing sports or not, and so he developed new coping mechanisms by getting involved in all kinds of productive activities. Still, his example illustrated the importance of having an outlet to occupy time and energy.

Damian was also a football player and noted how important football was to him. It was even an incentive to keep his grades up. It was not, however, more important than addressing the disrespect he received from another boy through fighting. After this incident, Damian never played football in school again, though he clearly loved it and talked about playing in the neighborhood. He also noted that the alternative school he attended did not have any sports teams because most of the students were transient. This lack of an athletic outlet is understandable but is also unfortunate since it could provide one area of emotional and physical release that is desperately needed.

Undoubtedly the most obvious example of a coping mechanism in general, and an athletic coping mechanism in particular, is the participation in boxing by Latrell. Latrell began boxing when his parents suggested it after he was arrested. He found that he loved

it and was also really good. He noted that it gave him something to do with the free time when he would have been engaging in other activities. In fact, he said that he felt boxing saved his life. More than just a productive outlet, boxing actually began to provide Latrell with new friends that he could identify with and it gave him an emotional release. It even boosted his confidence after he realized that he was really good. He said:

That was another thing that really helped me with boxing is that it help, it helped show me that I wasn't the only one trying to overcome the same thing that way. It was the relate-ability of boxing. The fact that I came from this place and then I didn't wanna be, be there anymore and it was all these people on the same path you know what I mean?...It was really, cause every, like every successful boxer, so you hear is like oh man, you came from troubled beginnings. I was like yeah, but literally that's how it happens. It's a sport that really lets you kind of exhale those emotions man you know what I mean?

Boxing was the means by which Latrell expressed himself, and it also proved to be a positive way to fill the void left by not hanging out with his old friends. He eventually gained new friends and appreciated the manner in which boxing illustrated their common identity.

Efficacy and Doubt

As the participants reentered school and worked toward staying out of crime and graduating from high school, they were met with several challenges and, at times, plagued by self-doubt. Understanding how the participants viewed their self-efficacy and sustained their motivation through their doubts proved to be imperative to understanding their overall journey toward success. In the end, reentry proved to be a process with many ups and downs that had to be overcome, and it certainly did not represent a linear path.

Many of the participants cited turning points in their lives that shifted their mindset or life choices in some way. For Vegas, it was talking to the inmate in the

prisoner transport van and seeing all of the prisoners with no education or quality of life. For Dante, it was a conversation he had with his grandmother in which she expressed disappointment in him. For Latrell, it was simply hearing the judge order him to serve his sentence in jail. And for Damian, it was seeing the inmate get tackled off of the second floor in jail and crack his head on the ground below. In reality, turning points are much more complicated than a singular event that definitively shapes someone's life. Often, there are several events preceding the turning point that contribute to a willingness to turn one's life around. For instance, Vegas reached his turning point only after being incarcerated three times and realizing that it just was not the life that he wanted to live. He had disappointed his mother, failed at being a good criminal (because he had got caught so many times), and realized that he was leading a dual life. His conversation with the inmate and his observations in jail solidified what was already being worked out in his mind. On the other hand, Damian indicated that there was no turning point at all for his desire to graduate, just a combination of people putting pressure on him over time.

Finally, there are also those that have turning points and then still struggle with ups and downs, failures, and setbacks. A perfect example of this is Dante, who even after recounting his turning point noted, multiple times, that he had gone back to his "old ways." He even described his reentry as a beach wave, with him floating at the top. In the midst of figuring out how to make life adjustments and dealing with temptations that are still around, it is not surprising that the reentry process is more jagged than smooth for most. For some of these participants, the process included significant doubt and lack of confidence. After his reentry but before his turning point, Dante commented:

I was failing so bad, I just gave up. I felt like there wasn't no way, no type of light, no sign, no nothing. I just felt like if I would have kept trying, I

wouldn't have amounted to nothing because I had so many negative people telling me I wasn't, and it was just like I started believing it and doubting myself.

After his turning point conversation with his grandmother, Dante still continued to struggle. He said:

Now mind you, I, I told you I was skipping like every first block half and maybe I'd get to school around 12, and this was at, towards the end, by graduation. And, um, I, I messed up and got behind on my grades and I gave up again. I was...cause they were telling me, like, "Oh, you're trying to go to summer school or you'll be here another year," and I, and I just flipped out and was like, "Forget it."

No sooner than he had decided to "forget it," however, Dante turned around and decided to stick with it, which ultimately ended well for him.

Similarly, Vegas recounted feelings of doubt that stemmed from "little rain drops of people of negativity trying to put out your fire." At times when he did not feel like he was getting "that continuous, positive flow and stream and positive and optimism," self-doubt crept in. And though Vegas generally had confidence in his academic abilities and his intelligence, he began doubting himself after a long time period of squandering his abilities. Furthermore, he stated that he never had confidence that he could stay out of jail:

I don't think I had a confidence that I could, um, that's why I had, like, those things set in place where, uh, you know, I tried to avoid situations or people or times of day and environments because as much as I, as far as I had came, I mean, at any point, I could have saw one person from my past and because of a decision I had made months ago, ended up right back in jail.

In a very similar situation, Latrell knew that he was intelligent but lacked the confidence that he would stay out of trouble.

I would say that I never really had that. I don't think I ever had a feeling of confidence. I feel like that I kinda had to keep myself convicted and keep myself um, kind of keep myself on the edge and on my toes and to continue. I never really felt like the confidence that like no matter what I'm never going to do this.

Rather than confidence serving as a boost to motivation and reentry success, Vegas and Latrell clearly lacked confidence in their abilities and yet were still able to be successful in reentry. As a result of their lack of confidence, they placed more boundaries and were more careful in their reentry process. In an interesting twist, their lack of confidence actually contributed to their success. Dante and Damian, on the other hand, lacked confidence in their academic abilities and belief that they would graduate. They came back to school and gave some effort, however, and over time they began to enjoy school more and realize that they could achieve academically. All four participants demonstrated that a lack of confidence was not detrimental to their reentry success.

While self-doubt and a lack of efficacy did not derail the overall outcomes of the four participants, it is important to note that they were able to sustain motivation in the midst of doubt because of constant reminders all around them and the support of others. Dante noted that he sustained his motivation because there were “too many heads to disappoint” and it was a “constant memory.” Vegas reflected on his past experiences and also had people that “poured” into him when he most needed it. Damian likewise reflected on his time in jail, indicating that he still thinks about it frequently to this day. Latrell was constantly reminded of the path he wanted to be on because he consistently knew people going to jail or getting shot and hurt.

On top of all the above-mentioned things, however, the prevalence of support could not be ignored. Though their relationships with others served to motivate them initially, it also served to sustain their motivation throughout difficult times and struggles. All had people that encouraged them and stuck with them throughout the process, believing in them even when they did not believe in themselves. Of course, it was also

the job of the participants to utilize the support that was offered. The ups and downs of the journey seemed to help in this endeavor in that they seemed to create a sense of humility in some. The participants knew they could fail—they had done so repeatedly. As Dante noted, “I took advantage of them (supports) because I got tired of myself falling down, and I, I couldn’t pick myself up on my own because my load was heavy. So I went and asked for help cause I ain’t had nobody else to turn to.” The process of reentry revealed that the strength of the participants and their confidence in their own abilities were not always what led to success. In fact, it was, in some cases, their ability to embrace their own weaknesses and lean on others that gave them their greatest strength.

Summary

School reentry, much like general community reentry, is a complicated process with many variables and challenges. This study revealed no differently, as it shed light on the school reentry challenges of four former youth offenders and how they overcame these challenges to graduate and stay out of the justice system. Four themes emerged from the analysis, including: (1) Managing and Balancing: Dealing with School Reentry Challenges, (2) I Did It, With Help: The Types and Roles of Social Support, (3) No Other Choice: Motivating Factors for Reentry Success, and (4) It’s a Process: Sustaining Motivation for Reentry Success. Each of these themes revealed the complexity and the dynamic process of what ultimately leads to former youth offenders turning their lives around.

As students come out of a confinement facility, their reentry experience varies based on their own unique past, their experience in confinement, their personality, and the school where they reenter. Despite these variables, the participants in this study

illustrated that they received differential treatment in comparison to their peers, had trouble with the culture of some of the schools they were in (with that culture improving as they switched schools), and struggled with the numerous academic and social adjustments that needed to be made. For them, school was another place where they were labeled and saddled with some of the same temptations and difficulties that they faced before reentry. This changed, however, as most adjusted schools and as they figured out how to manage their transition back into school more effectively.

As the students transitioned back into school, their success ultimately depended in part upon the support they received from others, including the staff at their schools. Their support systems, which varied but typically included family members, school staff, and outside organizations, supported them interpersonally by providing constant encouragement, setting expectations, and holding them accountable. They also supported them by teaching them valuable skills for their future success and providing materials that enabled them to stay on track and pursue positive outlets. The importance of relationships was evident in this theme, and the participants in the study had no shortage of those that wrapped their arms around them in support.

In addition to social support, the participants in the study discussed the numerous factors that motivated them to take advantage of that support and to stay out of jail and graduate. These motivating factors were often overlapping, but included relationships, punitive consequences, self-actualization, and economic benefits. The participants were motivated to turn their lives around as a result of mainly external motivators, focusing on avoiding jail again (fear) and pleasing/supporting their loved ones. This motivation of doing better for others and because of others is central to the understanding of how

motivation relates to support. Participants were often motivated because of the support they received from significant relationships.

The final theme of the study underscored that motivation is not something that occurs consistently or linearly. In fact, all but one participant experienced their reentry very much as a process with many ups and downs. There were failures and setbacks as well as successes. For them to succeed, however, motivation had to be sustained in some way. In addition to initial motivating factors and the fact that some of these factors helped to maintain motivation over time, it is also important to note that motivation was sustained in part through a process-oriented focus (rather than outcomes-oriented) in which participants keyed in on the day to day rather than distant outcomes or visions of their future. The analysis also revealed that a lack of confidence is not necessarily a detriment to success. In fact, a lack of confidence helped the participants achieve success by leading them to establish more strict boundaries on people and activities, as well as encouraging them to lean on their supports for strength.

There is a common illustration depicting an individual with an angel over one shoulder and a devil over the other. This image highlights the competing interests and desires of every person, and it is also a portrait of the four participants of this study. While often possessing many good qualities and characteristics, they also struggled with a “bad side” that led them into trouble. Their respective reentries were successful in the end not because the good versus evil tension was wholly resolved, but rather because they ultimately found strength in their weakness.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous chapters demonstrated the purpose and goals of this study, the related literature on factors affecting youth offenders' reentry, the process for collecting and analyzing data to address the research questions, and the findings of that analysis. This chapter concludes the study by bringing all of these aforementioned elements together to illustrate what has been learned about successful youth offender reentry and how these successes can be expanded in the future. The findings revealed many overlapping similarities in experience to go along with the expected nuances of how each reentry process unfolded. Four themes, each with multiple subthemes, best described these findings.

The rest of this chapter summarizes each theme and documents how the findings fit in with previously conducted research. It is important to note that research question one is answered with the first theme, research question two is answered with the second theme, and research questions three and four are both answered with themes three and four. There was significant overlap in the motivations for the former youth offenders to stay out of crime and to graduate, though analysis of motivation also revealed complexity in how motivation was sustained. Following this discussion, the study's contribution to the guiding frameworks, as well as how these frameworks related to the overall scope of the study, is reviewed. The chapter ends with several recommendations for policy, practice, and research, in addition to an explanation of the prevailing limitations.

Summary and Discussion of Results

As mentioned above, the analysis revealed four central themes: (1) Managing and Balancing: Overcoming School Reentry Challenges, (2) I Did It, With Help: The Types and Role of Social Support, (3) No Other Choice: Motivating Factors for Reentry Success, and (4) It's a Process: Sustaining Motivation for Reentry Success. Each theme had three or four subthemes, which are mentioned below. The combination of these themes illustrated several unsurprising challenges and supports, though the examination of motivation proved to be much more nuanced and interactive than many motivation theories often indicate. As stated in the previous chapter, the participants' stories both complicated *and* affirmed many existing ideas surrounding motivation and how it contributes to success. These stories illustrated that a lack of confidence in one's ability to succeed can be more beneficial in reentry than possessing confidence, a process-based orientation may be more beneficial than an outcomes-based orientation, and motivation is not static or linear, but rather highly contextual and interactive.

Managing and Balancing: Overcoming School Reentry Challenges

The first theme addressed research question one: How do successful youth offenders describe their high school reentry challenges? The participants discussed numerous challenges they faced in school after reentry, with these challenges being grouped in three different subthemes: (1) Differential treatment, (2) School culture, and (3) Adjustments/transitions. The school reentry experience proved to be difficult in part because many of the participants felt like they were treated differently upon reentry. They discussed having "delinquent" labels and being judged by teachers and school staff without being given the chance to show improved behavior and responsibility first. In

addition, many of the participants spent time in alternative school at some point after reentry. At times their experiences with these facilities left them feeling frustrated or neglected due to metal detectors, strict rules with no questioning allowed, computer-based learning, and a lack of proper resources.

In addition to this, participants struggled with school climate and culture after reentry. It should be noted, however, that all but one participant attended two or more schools after reentry, and their reentry experiences varied greatly depending upon the school they were in. Initially after reentry, schools were often described as disorganized and distraction-filled. School staff was described as apathetic, restrictive, and, in one case, so overworked that they did not have time to provide necessary guidance and support. As the former offenders changed schools, however, their experiences changed. Though they did not like all aspects of their new schools, whether alternative or traditional, they felt like they received the support and care from teachers that they had needed all along.

The most pervasive and complex challenge that the participants faced in school reentry was that of adjustments/transitions. These adjustments were both academic and social, as participants had to navigate new instructional styles (going from teacher-based to computer-based), piles of make-up work, and staying away from the friends that helped to get them in trouble. They did not receive any “cushion” when they reentered, but often had to stay after school or on weekends to complete make-up work. In addition, navigating the social environment of the school and neighborhood proved to also be difficult but important. All participants eventually changed their friends and stopped

hanging out as much with those that were bad influences. This transition, however, often created further tension and stress.

The challenges of school reentry are closely related to the challenges that former youth offenders face when reentering broader society. Though the transition to school has rarely been the focus of research, many of the challenges that were revealed in this current study are unsurprising. Like most former youth offenders, the participants reentered their same neighborhoods and schools and were surrounded by delinquent peers. This challenge has been widely documented in extant research, as has the struggle to separate from these peers (Abrams, 2006; Abrams, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2008, Wright et al., 2014). Similarly, the differential treatment that participants received is noted in studies that discuss delinquency and general community reentry (Anderson, 1999; Rios, 2011), so it is not surprising that there would be differential treatment and labeling present within schools as well. Though school culture/climate is not typically a focus for reentry studies, the negative and punitive environment of many urban schools has been noted extensively (Hirschfield, 2008; Kozol, 2005). This study found that the school climate of some of the schools the participants attended supported these other studies, even though the school climate was not unique to the reentry experience. Finally, it is important to note that the prevalence of significant make-up work after reentry, while understandable, is a challenge that is not typically discussed in research about broader community reentry. A lack of access to proper materials and work during confinement exacerbates this issue.

I Did It, With Help: The Types and Role of Social Support

The second theme addressed research question two: What social supports do these former youth offenders describe as helpful to their success? This included the sources of social support and the types of social support that were given to the participants.

Findings revealed that participants received support from a variety of sources, including family members, school staff, and outside organization staff. In particular, Communities in Schools provided critical reentry support for three of the participants. The types of social support stemming from these sources were grouped into three subthemes: (1) Interpersonal-based, (2) Skills-based, and (3) Materials-based, with each combining and often overlapping to contribute to the success of the participants.

The analysis revealed that the former youth offenders relied heavily on interpersonal-based supports, or those that stem from relationships. Similar to expressive supports as described by Cullen (1994), interpersonal-based supports provided relationships that were both a means (the relationship itself was significant) and a means to an end (with the end being desistance and graduation). These supports included encouragement, mental reinforcement, mentorship, accountability, and exposure to outside opportunities and individuals. The critical relationships that provided these forms of support were instrumental in helping the participants get back on track and pick themselves up when they continued to struggle. This form of support coincides with research that indicates the benefit of mentorship in successful reentry (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008).

Skills-based supports, in this study, are those that provided individuals with practical strategies, lessons, and assistance to succeed in life. Like instrumental supports

in Cullen's Social Support Theory (1994), skills-based supports primarily focus on achieving a goal and are not as concerned with developing a relationship. The participants in this study described academic assistance and tutoring, drug counseling, and life-skills classes as providing them with additional help to overcome challenges and think about the future. While not cited as the most important forms of support, they were nonetheless important to the participants' success.

The final form of support that participants described was materials-based support, which included tangible benefits given to help the participants achieve their goals. The most common materials-based support was housing provided by family members. Participants were also provided with basic resources for living, transportation to school, and additional coping outlets that would have been unavailable without the financial assistance of family. These materials-based supports provided extra opportunities and allowed the participants to focus their efforts more on staying out of trouble and graduating.

The support offered to the participants was both informal and formal, being offered to participants through family members and formal organizations. Despite this combination, it was the informal relationships that seemed to be the most important and the most helpful to the participants' success. The critical nature of social support in youth offender reentry has been documented empirically as well as theoretically (Pannucio et al., 2012). In addition, there have been several studies indicating the importance of informal supports specifically, and the fact that much recidivism coincides with a lack of social support (Abrams, 2012; Abrams & Aguilar, 2005; Beal, 2014; Inderbitzin, 2009; Todis et al., 2001). In these areas, this study confirmed previous

findings and simply added additional research on the specific types of support that enabled success.

No Other Choice: Motivating Factors in Reentry Success

The third theme answered, in part, research questions three and four: (3) What motivated these former youth offenders to desist from crime? and (4) What motivated these former youth offenders to graduate from high school. Numerous motivating factors were discussed by the participants in this study, and these were grouped into four distinct subthemes: (1) Relationships, (2) Punitive consequences, (3) Self-actualization, and (4) Economic benefits. These motivating factors were present for both desistance from crime and graduation from high school, though there were some distinctions in the specific motivators under the subthemes.

Not surprisingly, relationships were a key motivating factor for all of the former youth offenders. This factor encompassed many different characteristics, however, as participants were motivated to succeed so that they did not disappoint loved ones, so that they could prove themselves better than someone else, or so that they could provide for family. Additionally, these relationships provided encouragement, high expectations, and the ability to see others around them succeed. As the participants discussed their motivations for success, it was clear that relationships were central to their decisions and their trajectory. In fact, while their motivations were decidedly mixed, they often portrayed a sense that they were successful *for* others, because without them they either would not have cared or would not have received the push that they needed to achieve success.

A second, and powerful, motivator for the participants was that of punitive consequences. The primary motivator in this subtheme was the desire to not go back to jail. Each participant had had frightening or life-altering experiences in jail and was determined to never step foot in a confinement facility again. For some, it took being incarcerated once to come to this conclusion, while for others it took two or three times. Jail was not the only punitive consequence that served as a motivator, however. Some participants also received “tough love” from family members and employers who cut back on privileges, work hours, and even provision of housing in order to hold them accountable and not enable their behavior. In addition, the added dimension of being surrounded by friends and acquaintances getting arrested or getting killed provided ample reminders of the negative consequences that awaited the participants should they return to their old behaviors.

While most of the motivating factors were extrinsic in nature, the desire for self-actualization, or fulfilling one’s potential, was the single intrinsic motivator described. Participants were disappointed in themselves for having acted in a way that put them in jail (though this did not always happen immediately after reentry). They compared themselves to others and felt like they had to prove to others and themselves that they could be successful. Some even described a very specific sense that they knew they were supposed to be or do something great and they wanted the chance to see what they could achieve.

Finally, the participants were motivated to be successful by economic benefits, which consisted mainly of being able to make money legally to provide for themselves and for their loved ones. While selling drugs or engaging in some sort of other “side

hustle” would have provided money, the participants decided that the risk was not worth the reward. There was also some interest in graduating because there was a desire to achieve a better job or own a business in the future and they knew that obtaining a diploma would help in this endeavor. The combination of all the above motivating factors created conditions in which the participants felt like they had too many people that they could not let down. They also knew that they did not want to return to jail. As a result, they seemed to have no other choice than to be motivated to stay out of crime and graduate.

The relationship between motivation and success in reentry is both common sense and research-based (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005). Additionally, the notion that social support boosts motivation was corroborated in the findings of this study (Panuccio et al., 2012). The many different motivations of the former youth offenders, including the desire to not reenter jail, the desire to provide for others, the desire to make others proud (support), and the desire to obtain legitimate economic benefits (employment) are similar to those cited in prior research (Panuccio et al., 2012). This study confirms those findings and adds that the desire to achieve one’s potential is also important, especially given that it is more intrinsic than most of the other motivators.

It’s a Process: Sustaining Motivation for Reentry Success

The final theme of this study also addressed research questions three and four and encompassed the notion that motivation is not static or linear, but rather must be sustained over a period of time. Instead of simply having motivating factors that provided the “push” needed to be successful once and for all, motivation for the participants proved to be much more complex as they struggled with old temptations,

faced setbacks, and pushed through personal failures. To overcome the odds and be successful in reentry was clearly a process for most participants. This process was described with three subthemes: (1) Goals and strategies, (2) Coping mechanisms, and (3) Efficacy and doubt.

The findings revealed that the participants utilized goals and strategies to help achieve success, though their focus was much more process-oriented rather than outcomes-oriented. Though research has indicated that having concrete goals and strategies enhances motivational capital (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005; Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012), the participants in this study seemed to have much more general goals and strategies. In fact, while they desired to graduate, for instance, their focus was more on day-to-day actions as opposed to an end goal. This strategy or process focus helped the participants maintain their motivation in the face of failures and weaknesses. Rather than giving up when they encountered hardships or setbacks, they stuck to the strategies and kept on pushing forward.

In addition to the process-orientation discussed above, participants also employed various coping mechanisms to sustain their motivation. These included strategies or activities that provided an outlet or helped participants deal with challenges in constructive ways. Coping mechanisms that were described included isolation from former friends/activities, self-talk, staying busy with positive opportunities, and participating in athletic outlets (school-based or outside of school). While these coping mechanisms were not necessarily initial motivators, they did help participants sustain motivation by allowing them to release emotions and energy, stay away from negativity, and reinforce positive interactions.

The findings revealed a final subtheme pertaining to motivation maintenance that illustrated the nuances of how motivation contributes to success. The participants did not have simple, uncomplicated paths to stay out of crime and graduate. They faced challenges, failures, and setbacks. As a result, and possibly also as a cause, the participants endured numerous ups and downs in the reentry process. Though they each described turning points in their journey in which they knew they wanted to do and be better, they arrived at their turning points in different ways and over different amounts of time. Some even struggled to hold onto their stated desires after they had reached a turning point. These experiences created battles with efficacy and doubt. The participants often lacked the confidence that they could be successful in all the ways they hoped. They did not always believe that they could stay out of trouble or that they could graduate. According to self-efficacy theories, confidence generally leads to greater motivation and greater achievement (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000). For those in this study, however, their lack of confidence actually led them to establish more strict boundaries and to rely on others more for help. This proved to be extremely beneficial because, as it turned out, humility and knowing that failure was so easy and prevalent in their lives helped them lean on others more. In the face of wavering motivation, they were ultimately sustained by their support from others.

The process of sustaining motivation revealed that the participants did have goals and strategies for achieving success, but these were not numerous and often not very specific. Additionally, they did not always resist pressures and temptations and account for potential roadblocks. These things, along with the fact that they did not necessarily expect to be successful, would suggest that the participants should not have been

successful in reentry, and yet they were (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005; Oyserman & Markus, 1990a). Furthermore, this study contradicted research by Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992) indicating that perceived self-efficacy influences persistence in the face of difficulties. Despite weak efficacy levels, the participants sustained their motivation and ultimately achieved success.

Relation to Frameworks

As discussed in the first chapter, this study utilized two frameworks: Social Support Theory and Motivational capital. These frameworks guided the research questions and the interview protocol with the goal of understanding what supports successful youth offenders used and what motivated them to be successful. Rather than highlighting the external factors or the internal factors, the goal was to investigate both. While the frameworks are important separately, they also interact with and influence each other. Before moving to a discussion of how the findings for this study informed the research surrounding these frameworks, a brief review is in order.

Social Support Theory (Cullen, 1994) is based on the simple proposition that crime is inversely related to social support. As such, crime decreases as social support increases. There are four separate distinctions of social support that should be noted: (1) There is a difference between objective support and the perception of support, (2) There are instrumental and expressive forms of support, (3) Support can vary based on social level, and (4) Support can be delivered informally or formally. Motivational capital, on the other hand, builds on the concept of possible selves and argues that motivation is enhanced when there is a balance between how much an individual fears something negative and expects something positive. Furthermore, motivational capital has been said

to increase when there are concrete goals and strategies for achieving the positive and avoiding the negative. On an interactive basis, motivation has been shown to increase as a result of social support (Panuccio et al., 2012), while motivation must also be present to take advantage of the social supports offered. These two guiding frameworks were used to frame the area of interest and develop the research questions and interview protocol.

Interestingly, this study both affirmed and complicated research surrounding the dual frameworks, while also indicating that the interactions between motivational capital and other motivation constructs are important and should be integrated further. The findings were consistent with the basic premise of Social Support Theory and supporting research in illustrating that social support is instrumental in reentry success (Panuccio et al., 2012). Furthermore, many of the distinctions of social support outlined in Cullen's theory were present in the responses of the participants. Participants benefitted from instrumental forms of support (skill-based support and materials-based support), while they also benefitted from expressive supports (interpersonal-based support). They received support from informal relationships (especially family) and formal agencies (especially Communities in Schools), while most support did occur on the micro, personal level. These results indicate that the participants had a variety of social supports surrounding them from multiple sources, which increased their chances of success and supported the theoretical basis and existing research on social support.

The findings related to motivation were much more complicated than those surrounding social supports. Most of the participants did seem to possess feared possible selves and positive possible selves. They discussed their fear of going back to jail and disappointing others as well as their desire to make more money, fulfill their potential,

and provide for others. A key distinction to make, however, is that their positive selves were more *desired* instead of *expected*. This is critical because “expected” implies a confidence in something becoming true. While the participants were not wholly without confidence, they generally did not possess an expectation that they would become who they wanted to become in the future. This distinction also necessitates an integration of self-efficacy into motivational capital. Self-efficacy theory indicates that individuals are more likely to set higher goals and achieve more if they have confidence that they can do so (Zimmerman, 2000). The findings in this study illustrated the opposite; namely, that the participants benefitted at least in part from low self-efficacy because they utilized more positive boundaries and leaned on their support systems more. This study indicates that motivational capital may be enhanced not just through a balance between fears and positive expectations, but also through a balance between fears and positive desires. Even without the confidence or expectation of success, humility and the ability to lean on others in times of weakness appeared to ultimately lead to success. Since this study also showed that motivation ebbs and flows, relying on others and having a strong support system proved even more critical for persistence.

It has also been noted that research on motivational capital indicates that motivation is enhanced when an individual has concrete goals and specific strategies for achieving those goals, taking barriers and roadblocks into account (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012). The participants in this study did have goals and strategies, but they seemed more generalized and vague, as well as few in number. They did not plan out every phase of their reentry and come up with a formal outline for how to be successful; rather, they focused on the process itself and just kept on trying, absorbing failures along

the way. In a sense, they “put their heads down” and just never gave up. In this way, the findings suggested that concrete goals and strategies are important, but perhaps not positively necessary for success.

This study also indicated that while motivational capital helped to explain success on some level, it was inadequate to fully understand the complexity of motivation in the lives of the participants. Additional motivation constructs and theories, including self-efficacy, emergent interactive agency, and motivation orientation (intrinsic versus extrinsic), indirectly influence motivational capital through goal setting and the envisioning of possible selves. Understanding how feared possible selves and positive expected selves are developed is critical to understanding motivation further. This study revealed, along with other research, that social support is instrumental in this process of developing *and* sustaining motivation. In fact, the overlap between the two frameworks could hardly be understated.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The recommendations that appear below are aimed at implementation through both policy and practice. There are no specific distinctions between recommendations for policy and recommendations for practice because the practical suggestions should be codified in policy to ensure accountability and, hopefully, funding. Unfortunately, the researcher is all too aware that funding limitations severely restrict reentry supports offered in many locations. As a result, suggestions below attempt at providing economically feasible solutions and center the school as the primary location for reentry services. In all, the hope is for these recommendations to serve as practical ways for helping schools become protective factors and safe houses for reentry success.

Recommendation 1: Reentry Pre-planning and Individualized Support

To achieve greater success for a greater number of former youth offenders, reentry pre-planning should be provided while students are still incarcerated. The participants in this study revealed that they did not always know what to expect after incarceration or how they would reorient to school and stay out of trouble. They often lacked well thought out action plans and either succeeded anyway or learned to develop better plans after failures. These struggles could be reduced if the pre-planning process was streamlined and implemented with consistency. This process would include creating specific goals and strategies, talking through potential challenges, and mapping social supports as well as their sources. Pre-planning would also allow for a continuous connection to school to make the post-incarceration transition easier.

In addition, former youth offenders should receive very individualized support while back in school. Their experiences and needs vary considerably, and they need very intentional support to ensure that they get back involved in school and stay on the right track. They need assistance carrying out the plan they created while still incarcerated. Instead of a one size-fits-all approach to reentry, or no approach at all, former offenders would benefit from someone listening and investigating their very particular needs and desires and implementing a plan to achieve that.

Most schools or districts do not likely offer reentry pre-planning and individualized support for former youth offenders. There are personnel and funding limitations to pursuing this. Consequently, it would be beneficial for schools to partner with an organization like Communities in Schools to provide this type of support. Communities in Schools' reentry support was highly influential for the majority of

participants in this study. Each student had individualized support from staff while in jail and after reentry. Since schools do not have to raise the entirety of the funds to support Communities in Schools staff (the rest being supported through fundraising by the nonprofit), it serves as a logical option for cash-strapped districts in need of additional help.

Recommendation 2: Enhanced Communication and Collaboration Within School and With External Entities

The education, juvenile justice, and social work/welfare fields are frequently interconnected, yet collaboration often remains strained and inconsistent. As such, the first part of this recommendation is nothing new—schools must do a better job of bringing other organizations and individuals together to communicate about the reentry of their students and find collaborative ways to best support them. The findings in this study revealed numerous family, work, and outside organization supports. Schools can enhance support and accountability if there is communication amongst these groups.

In addition to increased communication with outside partners, schools should increase communication with teachers and school staff. While a former offender's status need not be broadcast to the entire school in an unprofessional manner, staff should be aware of the reentry and how the student should be supported and encouraged. Without this intentional communication, staff may either treat students based on stereotypes and labels or be unaware that the student was in jail and needs additional support. The schools that helped the students succeed in this study were those that offered plenty of support and positive encouragement, making the participants feel welcome and cared for.

Staff cannot do that without proper notification and explanation of the experiences and needs for former youth offenders.

Both of the above forms of communication can be enhanced in a modification of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for students receiving special services. To come up with the best plan for each student in special education and ensure that it is reviewed and updated regularly, meetings are required in which teachers, counselors, parents, and other important staff from outside entities are all present. A format similar to this could be implemented for students reentering school from incarceration. This would allow various school staff, family members, and outside entities to discuss the progress of the former offender and how to support him better in the future. It would also allow for greater individualized support as discussed in recommendation one. Since this proposal requires only additional meetings and documentation, the cost would be similar to IEP meetings for students in special education. The type of supports a school is willing to take on could drive the cost up considerably, but that is for each school to decide. Increasing communication and creating practical, easily implemented plans are strong first steps.

Recommendation 3: After-school Program Tailored for Reentry Students

A cost effective mechanism to provide former youth offenders with additional supports, reduce down time, and provide community integration can be found in the use of after-school programs. Most juvenile delinquency occurs between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Weisman, 2001), so an after-school program easily fills this void and can provide former offenders with numerous opportunities suited to their needs. They can get extra academic support, mentorship, and positive outlets for emotional and

physical release. They can learn new skills and coping mechanisms. They can lean on each other and be around other pro-social students to build new friend groups. A document for creating these types of after-school programs, written by Glover and Butler (2015), documents the important research-based components of such an after-school program and creates a model for how to implement them in practice. Though federal funding support of after-school programs has never reached its promised amount (Afterschool Alliance, 2012), funding support can be achieved through a variety of sources including 21st Century Community Learning Center grants, independent business and foundation grants, and grants from the Department of Labor and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Recommendations for Future Research

The recommendations for future research below cover areas that this study could not cover, as well as suggest different types of analyses and frameworks to more thoroughly understand the reentry process and its many complexities. While not exhaustive, these suggestions would further strengthen the conclusions that are drawn and enable better services for former youth offenders.

Recommendation 1: Extend Research with Greater Demographic Diversity

This particular study utilized all African-American males, two of which had graduated from high school less than a year before they were interviewed. The oldest participant was 23 years of age. Furthermore, all participants were incarcerated in short-term facilities for no longer than two months and three received support services from Communities in Schools. While these similar characteristics worked well for this particular embedded unit case study analysis, it would be beneficial to expand the study

to examine how former youth offenders with diverse backgrounds and incarceration experiences reenter successfully. It is likely that offenders identifying as a different race, class, gender, or sexual orientation, or any combination thereof, would have vastly different experiences than those studied here. Similarly, offenders' experiences could vary greatly based upon the neighborhood and school they transitioned to, as well as how long they stayed in confinement. Though numerous, the contextual factors are salient and important to investigate.

Recommendation 2: In-depth Ethnographic Study

While many forms of analysis could be recommended to accomplish different perspectives and provide nuanced understanding of youth offender school reentry experiences, a multi-year ethnographic study would provide a compelling account of the day-to-day school reentry experiences of students and how they overcome their challenges. While ethnographic studies have been conducted of students in confinement and during community reentry, there is limited focus on school reentry. This ethnographic perspective would provide a more detailed exploration of “in the moment” observations and experiences, rather than retrospective interviewing. Additionally, this form of investigation would allow for more types of data collection, including the use of family, school staff, and other relevant individuals, to go along with school artifacts.

Recommendation 3: Further Exploration of Motivation

The findings in this study indicated that motivation (generally) and motivational capital (specifically) need to be examined further to provide a better understanding of the *process* of motivation for former youth offenders. Motivational capital is influenced indirectly by numerous other motivation constructs and these relationships should be

clarified. Furthermore, as motivation was clearly a process with numerous ups and downs in this study, it would be beneficial to have a coherent model created to delineate how this process generally takes place and what contributes to the development of feared possible selves and positive expected selves. Emergent interactive agency provides a four step process by which agency is enacted, but it does not describe a specific process for former youth offenders. This specificity could contribute to improving outcomes for these youth.

Recommendation 4: Examination of School-based Policies

The policy and practice recommendations above provided several suggestions for how schools could become protective factors for former youth offenders. Of course, these recommendations should be tested to see both their effectiveness and any monetary benefits. Though undoubtedly requiring additional funds to support, research should be conducted to determine any long-term cost savings (or not) from the school-based reentry recommendations.

Limitations

Though every effort was made to structure this study in a manner to eliminate as many limitations as possible, there were nonetheless several that could not be avoided as the study progressed. Based on the participants that the researcher received through outside contacts, the study could not investigate differences in experience based upon diverse demographics. The homogeneity of the participants and their short-term confinement worked well for the structure of this case study, but it also limited the understanding of successful reentry for different types of students with different identities and backgrounds. Furthermore, a majority of the participants had received reentry

services from Communities in Schools, which significantly aided their reentry success. Many former youth offenders do not have access to these services, so this study is limited by not being able to examine the experiences of those students and how they compare.

Finally, though the researcher did not detect any issues regarding race and a theoretical discussion and analysis of race was not central to this study, it should be mentioned that the participants were all of a different race than the researcher. Every effort was made to make the participants feel comfortable, including meeting them where they desired to interview, providing food, and discussing topics casually before beginning the interview. The participants seemed at ease and confident in the sharing of their stories, but it is possible that the racial difference and the lack of a prior relationship influenced the responses that were given.

Conclusion

This study began with the purpose of highlighting the voices of successful former youth offenders in an effort to understand what led to their successful reentry. More specifically, school reentry was positioned as the focal point for the research since much of the path into and out of incarceration centers on school. Despite this, little is known about the school challenges successful former youth offenders face or the social supports and motivations that contribute to their desistance from crime and graduation from high school. This study helped to fill that void.

A case study was conducted with four former youth offenders, all of who participated in in-depth retrospective interviewing about their experiences and provided objective evidence of their graduation from high school. Their responses generated four key themes with multiple subthemes apiece. The findings revealed that the participants

faced differential treatment in school after reentry and had to cope with distracting school culture and numerous social and academic adjustments in order to be successful. They did not achieve this success on their own, however. Family, school staff, and organizations provided social supports in the form of encouragement, accountability, opportunities, skills-based training, and materials. Still, the participants had to be motivated to take advantage of these supports and to put in the effort necessary to be successful themselves. They were motivated to do so by relationships, punitive consequences, the desire to fulfill their potential, and future economic benefits. Reentry proved to be a process with many ups and downs, however, and motivation had to be sustained throughout these difficult times in order to be successful. It was the participants' lack of confidence in being successful through this process that actually contributed to their success—their weakness and humility led to more boundaries and greater reliance on their support systems.

The above finding provides greater complexity to at least one of the frameworks used in this study. While Social Support Theory was affirmed and its relationship to motivational capital proved critical (unsurprisingly), it was also found that motivational capital may not *necessarily require* a balance between fear and positive expectations to achieve optimal results. This study illustrated that the expectation of success in the future may not be needed, but rather a desire for change and strong social supports. In other words, a lack of efficacy need not limit motivation or achievement.

In order to improve school reentry for more youth offenders in the future, several recommendations were made. It is important to establish reentry pre-planning and individualized support, increase communication and collaboration both within school and

with external entities, and work to establish sustainable and tailored after-school programs that meet the needs of former youth offenders. Furthermore, the education and juvenile justice fields would benefit from expanding research to include former offenders with greater demographic diversity, ethnographic approaches, various motivation constructs, and school intervention evaluations.

While this study desired to position success stories of former youth offenders as central in an effort to reframe the overarching failure narrative and learn new insights from a different vantage point, the intent was never to minimize the numerous obstacles that lead to such high recidivism rates for so many other students. As Kozol (2005) noted, “Studies like these may give us valuable lessons about differences in individuals who can, or cannot, overcome adversities...(But this) ought not to afford us too much easy consolation for the structural inequities that make these victories so rare” (p. 61). There is much work to do for former youth offenders to have social and school systems that enable rehabilitation and success far more than continued incarceration. This study provides some suggestions, but schools must learn from the students themselves and decide that investing in those that are labeled delinquent is a worthwhile endeavor.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear prospective participant:

You are invited to take part in a research study exploring the experiences of former youth offenders who successfully transitioned to public school after leaving a secure juvenile facility. Your participation in this project entails 1-2 face-to-face interviews between January 2016 and March 2016. The interviews will last between 90-120 minutes total. You will be given one \$50 gift card upon completion of the interviews, should you decide to participate. This study is being conducted by Chris Glover, a doctoral student in the UNC Charlotte College of Education.

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality: (1) All interview data will be managed by the researcher and stored in a locked file cabinet in a private location or stored digitally with password protection, (2) The researcher will remove all identifiable information from each interview transcript during the transcription process and use pseudonyms (fictitious names) instead, and (3) Only Dr. Chance Lewis at UNC Charlotte will have access to original data; others will have access only to the final report presenting aggregated data without any identifiable information attached.

The following research questions will be addressed:

- 1) How do successful former youth offenders describe their high school reentry challenges?
- 2) How, if at all, are these challenges different from those that were faced before incarceration and reentry?
- 3) What social supports do these former youth offenders describe as helpful to their success?
- 4) What motivated these former youth offenders to desist from crime?
- 5) What motivated these former youth offenders to graduate from high school?

If you are interested in taking part in the research study, please contact Chris Glover at cglove13@uncc.edu (434-851-6174). He will contact you shortly to discuss the process.

Thank you very much for your attention and cooperation!

Chris Glover

Curriculum and Instruction (Urban Education) Ph.D. student
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title and Purpose

A Multiple Case Study Examination of Male Former Youth Offenders' School Reentry Challenges and Factors Enabling their Success

The purpose of this study is to conduct a multiple case study examination of successful male former youth offenders' school reentry challenges and the factors that enabled their success. In doing so, it is the goal of the researcher to highlight the experiences, motivating factors, and supports that led to successful reentry.

Investigator(s)

This study is being conducted by Chris Glover in the Department of Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education, College of Education. Dr. Chance Lewis serves the role of Responsible Faculty.

Eligibility

You may participate in this project if you are a former male youth offender who (1) transitioned back into a public school from a juvenile confinement facility, (2) graduated, and (3) did not reenter the justice system after the transition back into public school, and (4) are 28 years of age or less.

Overall Description of Participation

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire with 12 total questions aimed at gathering demographic information (age, race, family composition), background information (high school attendance and graduation information, length of time in confinement), and initiating an understanding of your school reentry experiences (supports and motivational factors). These questionnaires will also be used to help select participants for interviews. Those selected will be asked to participate in one-two interviews between January 2016 and March 2016. The initial interview will take about 60-90 minutes and will be based on a loosely structured interview protocol listing several key questions about your experience reentering public school from a confinement facility. A possible follow-up interview, if needed, will last around 30 minutes. This interview will only be scheduled if the researcher decides further questioning is needed to answer previously unaddressed or under addressed topics after reviewing the initial interview data. The researcher, Chris Glover, will schedule and conduct the interviews at a private place that is most convenient and comfortable to you. Your interview will be audio-recorded for verbatim transcription later. A copy of your interview transcript will be hand-delivered within a week of the interview and you will have an opportunity to review and ask for changes as necessary.

Length of Participation

The interviews will be scheduled between January 2016 and March 2016. They will take about 90-120 minutes in total. Transcription review and questionnaire completion will add an additional 30 minutes, bringing the total participation time to 120-150 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

As a result of participating in this study, each you will have the chance to promote positive change and greater understanding while also letting your voice and experience be heard. By themselves, these things are beneficial and therapeutic, especially as you are working to influence something worthwhile. This study also has the potential to provide encouragement and validation, and the results may be used to inform future practices to better support reentering students. You will also be given a \$50 VISA cash gift card at the completion of the interviews as an incentive and token of gratitude. Though the benefits are numerous, there are also some possible risks. Discussing schooling experiences can lead to social critique, which can become political in nature. Critiquing current structures and/or policies, if that is what you choose to do in your description of your experience, has the potential to receive pushback and/or alienate you from some people with whom you may still have relationships. In addition, bringing up past experiences has the potential to become very personal and possibly open up sensitive topics and issues. Because of this, there is always the potential for some emotional turmoil. All efforts will be made to reduce these risks, and you always have the chance to not answer any question, provide further clarification/edits to your comments, and/or drop out of the study at any point.

Possible Injury Statement

Although the risk of participating in these interviews is minimal, if you are hurt during this study, we will make sure you get the medical treatment you need for your injuries. However, the university will not pay for the medical treatment or repay you for those expenses.

Volunteer Statement

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

Confidentiality Statement

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality: (1) All interview data (transcriptions and observation notes) and audio recordings will be managed by the researcher and stored in a locked file cabinet in a private location and stored digitally with password protection, (2) The researcher will remove all identifiable information from each interview transcript during the transcription process and use pseudonyms (fictitious names) instead, and (3) Only Dr. Chance Lewis at UNC Charlotte will have access to original data; others will have access only to the final report presenting aggregated data without any identifiable information attached. No confidential data will be emailed.

Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704-687-1871; uncc-irb@uncc.edu) if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant.

Participant Consent

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the principal investigator of this research study.

Participant Name (PRINT)

DATE

Participant Signature

Investigator Signature

DATE

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT TALKING POINTS

Thank you for agreeing to help me find potential participants for my dissertation on successful former youth offenders. Below are some talking points and guidelines for how you can best provide assistance and communication to possible candidates. You will need copies of the informed consent and recruitment email that were given to you. Please review these documents first so that you have an adequate understanding of my study and what I am looking for in participants. If you have any questions at all, do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanks again,
Chris Glover

- Brainstorm potential participants that meet the selection criteria.
- Ask potential participants if you can talk to them about an opportunity to participate in a research study on former youth offenders who have been successful since their reentry.
- Indicate that the study is being conducted by Chris Glover and explain how you know me.
- Mention that the study is about former youth offenders' experiences, challenges, and reasons for success, including supports and motivations. Also note that participation will include filling out a questionnaire and doing 1-2 interviews with me. In exchange, they will receive a \$50 VISA gift card.
- Provide the informed consent and recruitment email for the participants to review and then direct them to call me (Chris Glover) for more information or if there is an interest in participating...OR simply direct them to call me without providing the documents and I will discuss the study more with them and ensure that they get copies of both the consent and the recruitment email.
- If it is better for me to call a participant than for him to contact me, please simply send me his name and phone number.

*If there are additional questions that the candidate has, please only answer anything that is directly stated on the informed consent form or recruitment email. You can also simply direct them to review the forms and/or call me.

APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Graduation Date: _____

What high school did you attend at the time of confinement?

What high school did you attend immediately upon reentry?

From what high school did you graduate?

Can you provide verification of your graduation (diploma)? _____

Family composition (Who lives with your family?):

What supports did you have in and out of school after you reentered? Think about extracurricular activities, jobs, faith-based institutions, family, friends, mentors, school-based support, reentry support, other activities/programs, etc.

Estimate the **entry and exit date** for your time in confinement, as well as the **grade you were in at time of entry and exit** (please specify type- jail, detention center, etc.). If incarcerated multiple times, please list each time frame.

What motivated you to succeed in reentry? Think about internal and external motivators.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

RQ1: How do successful former youth offenders describe their high school reentry challenges?

RQ2: What social supports do these former youth offenders describe as helpful to their success?

RQ3: What motivated these former youth offenders to desist from crime?

RQ4: What motivated these former youth offenders to graduate from high school?

Establishing Rapport

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. What do you do for fun?
3. If you could do anything in life, what would your choice be? Why?

Background

1. Tell me a little about your schooling experiences growing up (before going into confinement).
 - What were your friends like?
 - What were your relationships with your teachers and administrators like?
 - What was your academic experience like?

General School Reentry

1. In one word or phrase, how would you summarize your overall reentry experience? Why?
2. In more detail, please describe your experience with transitioning back to public schools from a confinement facility.
 - Did the school or any other organization provide you with reentry assistance? If so, what type of assistance? How did they support you?
 - Did you receive support from your family during reentry? If so, how did they support you?
 - Did you receive support from a faith-based institution? If so, how did they support you?
3. What were your greatest challenges to overcome during the reentry process?
4. What do you believe enabled your success after reentry?
5. Was there a definitive turning point in your life that made you decide to change? If so, what was it?

Social Experiences in School

1. Tell me a little about your best friends in school after reentry.
 - What were your highlights and struggles?
2. Describe your relationship with your teachers and administrators after reentry.
 - What were your highlights and struggles?
3. How did you adjust socially after reentry?
4. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities? If so, which one(s)? What impact, if any, did these have on you?

Academic Experiences in School

1. How did you adjust academically after reentry?
2. Tell me about a time when you were really frustrated with school after reentry. Why did you have those feelings? How did you respond? Was this response different than what it would have been before confinement?
3. Did you like or enjoy school either before confinement or after reentry? Why?

Motivation

1. After reentry, did you set goals for yourself? If so, what were your goals?
2. Did you have strategies for achieving these goals? How have you come in completing these goals?
3. What motivated you to be stay out of crime (internal and external; economic motivations)? How did you stay motivated?
4. What motivated you to graduate from high school (internal and external; economic motivations)? How did you stay motivated?
5. What gave you the confidence that you could stay out of crime? What gave you the confidence that you could graduate?
6. What motivated you to take advantage of the social supports provided to you?
7. How do you think your supports influenced your levels of motivation? Your persistence?

Wrap-up

1. Overall, would you say that your reentry experience was different than you expected? In what way?
2. Would you say your overall school experience helped, hindered, or did not impact the success of your reentry process? Why?
3. Do you have anything else you would like to add?