Examining the Experiences of Men Who Have Recidivated: A Qualitative Analysis

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Examining the Experiences of Men Who Have Recidivated: A Qualitative Analysis

Abstract
This study describes the experiences of 17 men who recidivated and returned to an Oregon prison. Using a semi-structured interview format, the men were interviewed about their past experiences in prison, their experiences after release, and their experience of being incarcerated again. The interviews were then analyzed using a qualitative method, specifically grounded theory. The men's responses were divided into two broad categories: The Prison Experience and The Outside Environment. Related to the prison experience, the men identified both negative and positive aspects of prison. When they discussed life outside of prison the men described reactions to their release, lifestyle choices, and lack of institutional support. The results both supported and added to findings reported in previous research. Directions for future research are recommended, including larger scale studies and utilizing the findings to develop hypotheses for more focused studies.

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EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF MEN WHO HAVE RECIDIVATED:

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the experiences of 17 men who recidivated and returned to an Oregon prison. Using a semi-structured interview format, the men were interviewed about their past experiences in prison, their experiences after release, and their experience of being incarcerated again. The interviews were then analyzed using a qualitative method, specifically grounded theory. The men’s responses were divided into two broad categories: The Prison Experience and The Outside Environment. Related to the prison experience, the men identified both negative and positive aspects of prison. When they discussed life outside of prison the men described reactions to their release, lifestyle choices, and lack of institutional support. The results both supported and added to findings reported in previous research. Directions for future research are recommended, including larger scale studies and utilizing the findings to develop hypotheses for more focused studies.
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INTRODUCTION

Recidivism refers to the arrest and conviction of a person for a new crime following release from prison. Recidivism plagues the correctional community and challenges the deterrent goals of imprisonment. Researchers have attempted to distinguish factors associated with higher risk of recidivism, but rates continue to rise. In a recent study conducted by the Bureau of Justice in 2002 (Langan & Levin, 2002), an estimated 67.5% of all prisoners released in 1994 were rearrested for a new crime within three years following their release. This number has risen over the rate of 62.5% found for prisoners who were released in 1983 (Langan & Levin, 2002).

As evidenced by Langan and Levin’s (2002) report for the Bureau of Justice, recidivism is a problem that continues to plague corrections in America. Many researchers have attempted to identify reasons for this phenomenon and factors that might influence the probability that a prisoner will commit one or more crimes after his or her release. The purpose of the current study was to interview male inmates who had returned to prison to identify potentially valuable information regarding their personal experiences prior to, during, and post-incarceration. This information in turn could contribute to the knowledge base that exists regarding recidivism and factors that contribute to re-offending and reconviction.

The current research was conducted in Oregon, where officials have specifically examined recidivism rates for prisoners released from Oregon prisons. According to their 2004 Annual Performance Report, the Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) had
set for itself a goal of a 28.8% recidivism rate. This rate is substantially lower than the national average identified by the Bureau of Justice. However, according to the Performance Report, this goal was not met, and Oregon’s rate of recidivism has remained in the 30% range for prisoners within three years of release (ODOC, 2004). It is worth noting, however, that this rate is still far below the national average of 67.5% noted above. In addition to providing more general information about recidivism, it was also hoped that, based on results from the current study, recommendations could be made regarding further development of prevention programs at ODOC (where the current research was carried out) and other correctional facilities.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have examined a number of aspects related to recidivism. For the purpose of this study I looked at literature examining factors related to men recidivating. In the following sections I summarize the findings on demographic factors, community factors, and predictive factors related to reincarceration. I also review qualitative studies focused on male inmates and recidivism.

Demographic Factors Related to Recidivism

In 1995, Harer released a study that had been conducted for the Bureau of Prisons on rates of recidivism among 1,205 federal prisoners released in the first half of 1987. He found that 40.8% had recidivated within 3 years of their release. The rates were highest within the first year after release. Harer also found that rates of recidivism were higher among Black and Hispanic inmates than among White and non-Hispanic inmates and that there was little difference between men and women. Prisoners under the age of 25 were much more likely to recidivate (56.6%) than were inmates over the age of 55 (15.3%).

Harer (1995) also found that the type of crime for which an inmate had been convicted seemed to impact whether he or she would commit and be charged with another crime. Robbery and “crimes against person” (p. 98) were associated with the highest rates of recidivism (64% and 65%, respectively), whereas fraud (20.8%) and drug trafficking (34.2%) were associated with the lowest recidivism rates. Inmates who had
recidivated were most likely to be incarcerated for a crime similar in nature to the crime for which they had previously been convicted.

In the most recent study conducted by the Bureau of Justice in 2002 (Langan & Levin, 2002), an estimated 67.5% of all prisoners released in 1994 were found to have been rearrested for a new crime within 3 years following their release. This is a substantial increase compared to the rate of 62.5% found for prisoners who were released in 1983. Nearly half of the prisoners released in 1994 (46.9%) were reconvicted for a new crime. Out of the 272,111 prisoners sampled, 25.4% were re-sentenced to prison and a total of 51.8% returned to prison. (These prisoners may have returned due to another sentence, another arrest, or a violation of the terms set for their release.) Men were more likely to recidivate than were women. Also, the researchers found that there was an ethnic difference such that Black prisoners were more likely to recidivate than were inmates from other ethnic groups. Age seemed to also impact recidivism, with 80% of prisoners under the age of 18 recidivating, compared to only 45.3% of prisoners over 45.

Langan and Levin (2002) also examined whether the type of offense was related to recidivism rates. The researchers found that prisoners who had been convicted of crimes carried out for financial gain were generally more likely to recidivate than inmates convicted of crimes that did not have a financial motive and that those convicted of more serious violent crimes (i.e., homicide and rape) and those convicted of driving under the influence of a substance had the lowest recidivism rates. Overall, the prisoners who were most likely to be rearrested were those convicted of motor vehicle theft (78.8%), possession/sale of stolen property (77.4%), larceny (74.6%), burglary (74%), robbery (70.2%), or possession/sale of illegal weapons (70.2%).
In addition to considering the type of crime for which a prisoner was originally sentenced, Langan and Levin (2002) looked at the impact of other factors on recidivism. They found that the number of prior arrests was a good indicator of a prisoner’s tendency to reoffend. Specifically, prisoners who had 1 prior arrest recidivated at a rate of 40.6% in 3 years, whereas recidivism jumped to 55.2% for prisoners who had been convicted for 3 previous crimes and 82.1% for those with more than 15 arrests in their history. The researchers also found that the number of previous arrests was a good indicator of how quickly a prisoner would commit a crime after release, such that prisoners with longer criminal histories were more likely to commit a new crime sooner after their release.

Finally, Langan and Levin (2002) looked at whether the amount of time spent in prison impacted rates of recidivism and they found mixed results. They found that having spent time in prison prior to the immediate sentence did not increase the probability that a prisoner would recidivate. Additionally, they did not find a difference in recidivism rates between prisoners who had spent less than 6 months in prison compared with those who had spent up to 30 months in prison. However, the researchers did find that those who had served the longest time, defined as 61 months or more, had the lowest recidivism rate when prisoners were grouped by time served.

As evidenced by Langan and Levin’s (2002) report for the Bureau of Justice, recidivism is a problem that continues to plague corrections in America. Many researchers have attempted to identify reasons for this phenomenon and factors that might influence the probability that a prisoner will commit one or more crimes after release. In a study focused on drug offenders, Spohn and Holleran (2002) found that offenders who had been sentenced to prison (rather than probation) were much more likely to recidivate.
and to be sentenced to prison or jail for a new crime than were offenders who were sentenced to probation. They also found that gender, race, age, and previous criminal history impacted rates of recidivism: Specifically, men, Black offenders, young prisoners (those under 30), and those with lengthier criminal histories (two or more prior convictions) were found to be more likely to return to the criminal justice system after their release than their demographic counterparts. Spohn and Holleran also found that drug offenders were no more likely than offenders convicted of non-drug charges to recidivate and that a prisoner’s employment status after release did not affect his or her probability of being charged with a new crime.

Huebner, Varano, and Bynum (2007) executed a study designed to determine the impact of gang affiliation, gun use, and drug addiction/dependence on recidivism among young inmates (age 17-24). Their sample included 322 men released between 1996 and 2005 in a single Midwestern state. Data were collected on gun use, attitudes, involvement with crime, gang affiliation, demographic information, drug use, criminal offense, criminal history, and reconviction. Of the total sample, 37% were reconvicted during the study period. Men who reported gang membership were twice as likely to be reconvicted, and drug dependence had an accelerating effect on reconviction. Gun use did not affect reconviction.

Spohn and Holleran (2002) looked at whether offenders sentenced to prison delayed recidivating longer than did offenders who had been placed on probation. The researchers found that, contrary to previously held beliefs, men and women who had been sentenced to prison recidivated more quickly than men and women who had been
sentenced to a term of probation. Based on these data, Spohn and Holleran suggested that incarceration may not be the best deterrent method.

Harer (1995) examined many different factors that may have influenced a federal inmate’s likelihood of recidivating. He found that lower levels of education, being unemployed and not in school prior to committing a Federal offense, and being under supervision (through parole or probation) prior to the offense increased recidivism rates. Also, a history of drug use, and of heroin use in particular, was found to increase the likelihood that a person would commit another crime after release. Drug treatment programs within the prison did not seem to mitigate this effect. With regard to behavior within prison, Harer found that if an inmate successfully completed education programs within the prison or received a social furlough while in prison, his or her chances of recidivating decreased. Also, those prisoners who had arranged for employment prior to their release and those who lived with a spouse after release were less likely to reoffend.

Vacca (2004) further explored the impact of education on an inmate’s likelihood of recidivism through a review of literature. He found that if a prisoner participated in education programs while in prison, specifically those that focused on literacy, his or her chances of recidivating decreased. The same effect was found if a prisoner earned a college degree or received vocational training while incarcerated. Although the effect was smaller than the effect of having a college degree, even completing two college courses was shown to be associated with a decrease in recidivism.

Stevens and Ward (1997) also examined the effect of educational achievement in prison on rates of recidivism after release. In a study of 60 inmates in North Carolina, the researchers found that at the three-year mark after release, none of the inmates who had
earned a four-year degree had recidivated, and only 5% of the inmates who had earned an Associate’s degree returned to prison (3 men, all of whom had been initially convicted of a violent offense). All but one of the inmates who had earned a Bachelor’s degree found work within their field of education. These data were compared to comparable statistics for the general population of inmates in North Carolina for the same time period. Of the general population, 40% returned to prison within 3 years of their release. The researchers conducted a survey of other correctional institutions across the country and found comparable results for prisons that had also tracked educational achievement and recidivism.

Age has also been shown to affect rates of recidivism. Heide, Spencer, Thompson, and Solomon (2001) looked at 59 juveniles who had been incarcerated in adult prison for murder or attempted murder. The researchers found that, in a span of 16 years after their release, 60% of the juvenile inmates had recidivated (defined as being incarcerated again) at least once. The average amount of time between incarceration and commission of a new crime was 22 months. The highest rates of recidivism occurred within the first 3 years after release, with the highest rates in the first year. This finding is consistent with results of other studies. Although the rates of recidivism were high among this group of inmates, the researchers suggested that racial stereotyping and being well-known for their crimes may have led to increased attention from authorities in the towns in which these boys were released. This attention may have, in turn, led to a higher arrest and conviction rate than might otherwise have occurred.

As shown by the research, there are a number of factors specific to the individual that can potentially have a negative effect on the chance that he will return to prison after
being released. Age and ethnicity are consistently found to be influential in recidivism rates, with younger men and men who are identified as racial minorities (i.e. Black, Hispanic) having higher rates of recidivism (Harer, 1995; Langan & Levin, 2002; Spohn & Holleran, 2002). In addition, researchers have found that most men recidivate within the first three years after they are released and that prior incarcerations are positively related to the chances that they will return (Harer, 1995, Langan & Levin, 2002).

However, the problem of recidivism does not lie entirely in the individual. There are also factors in society and in communities that affect whether a man will return to prison after he is released.

Community Factors Related to Recidivism

A number of the authors cited discussed ethnic differences in recidivism rates (Harer, 1995; Langan & Levin, 2002; Spohn & Holleran, 2002). Reisig, Bales, Hay, and Wang (2007) examined the effect of racial inequality in the county of release on recidivism. The researchers examined 62 counties in Florida. Racial inequality was measured by combining the ratios of White to Black median family income, rates of joblessness, and poverty rates. The authors used the data from all male Black and White male inmates released from prison between 1999 and 2001 ($N = 34,868$). Black inmates made up 61.6% of the total sample ($n = 21,464$). They found that racial inequality did in fact impact rates of recidivism in that men released to counties with higher levels of racial inequality had higher rates of recidivism. The authors posited the theory that the men were returning to communities that were already biased towards the White community. Therefore, it was already difficult for the Black men to succeed in that
community. Their previous incarceration then further hindered their ability to pursue a conventional and crime-free lifestyle.

Kelly and Ekland-Olson (1991) examined the phenomenon of prison overcrowding as it related to recidivism. Specifically, in reaction to prison overcrowding, the authors asserted that many states became more reliant on paroled release. According to the Bureau of Justice (1990, as cited in Kelly & Ekland-Olson, 1991) the number of supervised releases increased by 183% between 1977 and 1988. The authors went on to specifically look at prison overcrowding in Texas, where in 1980 the federal court found the entire state prison system to be unconstitutional due to crowded conditions (*Ruiz v. Estelle*, 1980, as cited in Kelly & Ekland-Olson, 1991). The researchers examined four cohorts of parolees who came out of the Texas Department of Corrections in 1984 (*n* = 1,435), 1985 (*n* = 1,119), 1986 (*n* = 1,671), and 1987 (*n* = 2,063). They found that the federal court decision had little association with the recidivism rates of the early cohorts (1984 and 1985) but that the men released in 1986 and 1987 had higher rates of recidivism. The authors attributed this change to an increased number of men having been released at the discretion of the administration, which led to a higher number of high-risk offenders (defined as offenders who had significant risk factors related to reoffending) being released into the community and to men being returned to prison on technical violations (as opposed to being sentenced for a new crime).

Technical violations, according to the authors (Kelly & Ekland-Olson, 1991), were used at the discretion of the parole officer and therefore were sensitive to the cultural climate. When prisons neared capacity and again were facing overcrowding, the number of technical violators decreased. The authors concluded that the increased rate of
recidivism in the later cohorts was related to administrative responses to prison overcrowding, including a changed composition of paroled offenders and public pressure to technically violate an offender sooner.

Some researchers have found factors outside of the individual to be related to recidivism. The men may be returning to an area that is not conducive to their success because of racism and racial inequality (Reisig et al., 2007). They may be returned to the community before they are ready or before they have served their debt to society because of issues of prison overcrowding. In turn, Kelly and Eckland-Olson (1991) suggested that, with higher early release rates, the courts and parole officers may be quicker to return men to prison than they would be if the men had served a full sentence. This research suggests that factors outside of the recidivating inmate’s control can contribute to his return to prison. These factors are sociological and organizational in nature and would be difficult to account for on a case-by-case basis. However, researchers have also developed a number of factors that are seen as predictive of recidivism.

Predictive Factors Related to Recidivism

Messina et al. (2006) examined predictors of treatment outcomes in both male and female offenders who were sent to prison-based treatment programs, specifically therapeutic communities designed to treat substance abuse. The researchers were examining differential effects of the treatment programs on men and women. They found that men were much more likely to be returned to prison within 12 months of their release (40% of men vs. 31% of women) even after other factors were controlled for statistically. The researchers then examined which factors significantly predicted a return to prison. They found that the presence of co-occurring disorders, race, length of lifetime
incarceration, age, employment, and total days in aftercare were related to recidivism. Compared to men with no other disorders, men with co-occurring disorders were 40% more likely to recidivate. For each year of lifetime incarceration the odds of returning to prison within a year increased by 8%. Conversely, men who had been employed prior to their incarceration were 29% less likely to return to prison, and for each additional day of aftercare the chances of recidivating were reduced by 1%. Age was also found to be a protective factor, with each additional year equaling a 4% reduction in the chance that an offender would return to prison. Time in treatment, education, the substance diagnosis (i.e., alcohol or cocaine), and prior marital status were not found to be predictive.

Bonta, Law, and Hanson (1998) performed a meta-analysis of 58 studies (with a mean sample size of 238) of predictors of recidivism among mentally disordered offenders. They found a significant degree of overlap between nonclinical populations and mentally disordered populations in terms of well-documented predictors of recidivism. Younger age, male gender, and single marital status were found to significantly predict recidivism, but ethnicity and social class did not. Similar to findings in other studies, criminal history was a positive predictor of recidivism, with more violent offenses (e.g., rape and murder) being inversely correlated with recidivating. Although serious violent offenses did not significantly predict future recidivism, a history of violent behavior was shown to increase the likelihood that an inmate would return to prison. According to Bonta et al. (1998), a diagnosis of Antisocial Personality Disorder was found to be a reliable predictor of violent recidivism compared to other diagnoses, but mentally disordered inmates were less likely as a whole to violently recidivate than were inmates without a mental health diagnosis.
Other researchers have examined the potential predictive factors related to recidivism among Icelandic inmates (Peersen, Sigurdsson, Gudjonsson, & Gretarsson, 2004). In a follow-up study of juvenile offenders, inmates who had recidivated after being released scored lower on a test designed to measure the internalization of social rules, values, and mores; they also scored lower on tests purported to measure social desirability and self-deception. Also, those inmates who recidivated had a longer criminal history, were younger at the time of their first arrest, and had used substances more frequently than those who avoided reconviction. These results were slightly different from the results of other studies. Specifically, Peersen et al. found that younger inmates and substance users were at a higher risk of recidivating than were older inmates and those without a documented substance problem. The authors discussed many possible reasons for the discrepancy from prior research. Among them was the difference in learning styles and reactions between adult and juvenile offenders, which was identified as an area for future research.

Related to life outside of prison, Peersen et al. (2004) found that poor living situations, relationships, substance use, and dysfunctional families were predictive of future crimes and incarcerations. Substance use was a better predictor of recidivism than was educational achievement, although it was unclear if the researchers examined education achieved while incarcerated. Specific to inmates with mental illness, psychosis was negatively correlated with recidivism, and no significant effects were found for intelligence, mood disorders, or treatment history in terms of a diagnosed mental illness.

Dhami, Mandel, Loewenstein, and Ayton (2006) surveyed samples of United States ($n = 241$) and United Kingdom ($n = 283$) adult male prisoners to assess inmates’
forecast for their own post-prison success. The researchers found that prisoners were very optimistic in their post-prison forecasts. The U.S. inmates believed they had a good chance of finding a place to live (81.6%) and a job (70.3%). The same inmates believed they had a low probability of reoffending (30.5%) and being reincarcerated (26.2%). The U.K. inmates estimated their chances of finding housing to be 71.6%, finding a job to be 60.2%, reoffending to be 29.3% and being reincarcerated to be 27.9%. When the reported forecasts of reoffending and being reincarcerated were averaged, the U.S. and U.K. inmates indicated similar beliefs regarding the perceived chances of recidivating (28.2% and 28.6%, respectively). Compared to national recidivism statistics for the United States and the United Kingdom of 41% and 55%, respectively, the researchers found that inmates were overly optimistic when assessing their own chances of returning to prison. However, the researchers also found that the inmates’ forecasts explained a statistically significant amount of the variance (34% for U.S. inmates and 51% for U.K. inmates) in recidivism rates within the sample.

As shown above, age has been found to be both a contributing (Harer, 1995) and protective (Messina et al., 2006) factor in recidivism, with young men being more likely to recidivate and increased age decreasing the probability that a man will return to prison. Bonta et al. (1998) found that being convicted of a violent crime was not predictive of recidivism but a history of violence was predictive. Peerson et al. (2004) found that substance use was a positive predictor of future recidivism. It is possible that this is related to relapse and the offender using drugs and alcohol after he is released, which may lead to crime and/or parole violations. Finally, Dhami et al. (2006) found that although inmates were generally over-optimistic about their chances of returning to
prison, an optimistic outlook was protective and did contribute to some men being successful after their release. These researchers have posited ideas about what factors and situations need to be addressed and mediated in order to reduce recidivism. Other researchers have addressed this issue by examining the experiences of individual inmates, allowing the participants to guide the study through qualitative research.

Qualitative Research on Recidivism

As seen in the prior sections, many risk factors, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and mental health diagnosis have been examined to determine their impact on rates of reoffending and recidivism. Dynamic factors such as substance use and social relationships have also been explored. These studies are helpful in identifying areas for treatment and policy change within the prison setting. However, another area of research that can help to reduce recidivism is the experience of an ex-inmate once he or she is released. By looking at factors with which these men and women struggle, researchers can identify other potential areas for intervention prior to release.

In a qualitative study of recidivism in a South African prison, Gaum, Hoffman, and Venter (2006) examined the incidence, possible reasons for, and treatments of recidivism in this particular prison. They conducted focus groups and semi-structured interviews with prisoners who had served one or more previous sentences. A number of themes emerged from their discussions. The researchers learned that the positive behavior of a prisoner within prison did not necessarily translate into successful rehabilitation. Instead, it appeared to be a way to survive in the restrictive and sometimes punitive prison environment. Another theme that emerged was the feeling that rehabilitative services were provided too late to effectively benefit the prisoner. The researchers posited
that, in learning to cope within the prison environment, the inmate developed negative skills that could lead to recidivism. If they were denied adequate rehabilitation services in a timely manner, they were unable to learn more effective coping strategies that they could use upon release. A number of recommendations were made based on the results. Among them were the institution of more halfway houses, where inmates could slowly acclimate to living life outside of prison; effective delivery of psychological and educational services to inmates; and further research.

Kenemore and Roldan (2005) also found that being released from prison was seen as overwhelming and traumatic. Participants reported fear of an unstructured, chaotic environment and feelings of not being prepared to leave prison. One major theme was the idea that the ex-inmates were much more conscientious about their day-to-day lives and more focused on staying out of prison than they had been prior to their incarceration. The participants listed having hope, a mission to leave their mark on society, and a spiritual belief system as being influential in maintaining their lives as free men and women. Utilization of mental health services in the community was discussed, but overall the ex-inmates felt that the providers were not genuine and that they could not trust in the assurance of confidentiality. With regard to their experiences within prison, a number of ex-inmates identified prison as a negative experience, filled with the continuation of destructive habits (e.g., drug use), fear, and the loss of connections with outside family and friends. However, other participants viewed their time in prison as life-changing or life-saving, with emphasis placed on the relationships that were made within prison, especially with fellow inmates who acted as mentors (Kenemore & Roldan, 2005).
Bahr, Armstrong, Gibbs, Harris, and Fisher (2005) examined how parolees adjusted to their release from prison. They interviewed 51 parolees three times over a period of 3 months after release and then, through the help of parole officers, tracked each participant for 6 months after release. Of those 51 parolees, 10 had recidivated within 6 months. One significant finding that was unique to this study was the effect that the parent-child relationship had on a parolee’s ability to adjust to life outside of prison. Specifically, the researchers found that a positive relationship between the offender and his or her child was helpful in reducing reoffending and recidivism.

According to Austin and Hardyman (2004), in 1997 approximately 1 out of every 50 children in the United States, most under the age of 15, had an incarcerated parent. This relatively high number of children with an incarcerated parent, combined with the detrimental effect of having a criminally dysfunctional family (Austin & Hardyman, 2004), illustrates the need for more focus on parenting and positive parenting skills both in prison and after parole.

Employment, consistent with other studies, was found to help the transition to life outside of prison, and social networks and involvement with drugs were found to be contributors to recidivism. Specifically, the more time that a parolee spent with friends known from pre-incarceration days (more than four times per week), the more likely he or she was to return to pre-incarceration criminal activities. This research suggests that more focus needs to be given to the role of parent held by many inmates, more support should be given to families of parolees, and employment and education opportunities would help parolees after release (Austin & Hardyman, 2004).
By using qualitative methods, researchers have provided a different viewpoint from which to examine the issue of recidivism. Through examining the words and experiences of recidivators, researchers have uncovered issues that may not have been addressed in previous research. For example, Gaum et al. (2006) and Kenemore and Roldan (2005) found that if a man developed the skills necessary to be a successful inmate, those same skills may hinder his ability to successfully reenter into society. Mistrust and outward compliance were helpful to the men while they were incarcerated but may have negatively impacted the men’s ability to remain outside the prison walls.

Summary and Conclusion

Based on the research addressed above, it appears that a large number of factors are related to higher risk of recidivism. Age, gender, and criminal history have been identified as strong indicators of the prisoner’s likelihood to reoffend after being released (Harer, 1995; Langan & Levin, 2002). Langen and Levin (2002) posited that those people who have been convicted of money-seeking crimes such as burglary were more likely to recidivate compared to those who had been convicted of more violent interpersonal crimes such as rape and murder. This finding was supported by the research done by Bonta et al. (1998). Also of note is the finding that education and educational achievement was a mitigating factor in the probability of recidivism. Many researchers found that higher educational achievement and participation in educational programs while incarcerated reduced an inmate’s risk of recidivating after his or her release (Harer, 1995; Stevens & Ward, 1997; Vacca, 2004). Qualitative researchers have begun to examine the problem of recidivism through the exploration of the experience of recently
released ex-inmates in order to identify issues and obstacles that have not already been explored in the literature.

Many static and dynamic factors have been identified as having an impact on an inmate’s probability of reoffending and reentering the prison system. However, the continued trend of rising rates of recidivism as shown by both the Bureau of Justice (Langan & Levin, 2002) and the Bureau of Prison statistics (Harer, 1995) show that there is still work to be done. Inmates continue to return to prison at increasing rates in spite of emerging research, increased understanding of the obstacles faced by inmates reentering into society, and new programs being instituted within the prisons. Based on the research, programs have been designed and implemented, yet rates of recidivism continue to rise. Qualitative research remains an underutilized tool in examining recidivism in the literature. Most of the currently available studies have been reviewed above. Other researchers have focused on recidivism among juveniles (e.g., Abrams, 2006; Halsey, 2008), sexual offenders (i.e., Allan, Dawson, & Allan, 2004; Broadhurst & Loh, 2003), and women (Bradley & Devino, 2002; Stuart & Brice-Baker, 2004) and so the results cannot be generalized to a male, adult population.

The purpose and aim of the current study was to use qualitative methods to identify and clarify additional factors that may contribute to the rising trend of recidivism among male inmates. Additionally, qualitative research may provide a more thorough understanding of the experience of a man returning to prison.
METHOD

A qualitative research method was chosen for use in this study because of the focus on the inmates’ individual, lived experiences. It was my hope that by examining the individual experiences of these men I would be able to develop themes across experiences, which then could be used to develop hypotheses in future research. The specific qualitative method used is described in a later section.

Interview

The semi-structured interview (see Appendix A) was developed in conjunction with another researcher who was examining recidivism among female inmates (Carey, 2009). This cooperation allows for comparisons between men and women who have recidivated in Oregon. The interview questions reflected a number of different aims and sources. They were based on the findings from current literature, included questions to obtain information desired by the ODOC, and reflected the experiences of a prison clinician also involved in the project. The demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) was designed in the same manner.

Procedure

Names of potential participants were provided by ODOC staff at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF), where all inmates are housed for intake prior to placement in a ODOC facility. As the inmates’ information was processed into the computer, the staff member separated all of the men who had previously been in an ODOC facility. Inmates’ face sheets were screened for research criteria (English fluency and sufficient
time spent in the community), organized by living unit. Once the inmates had been identified by intake staff, their face sheets were collected and given on a weekly basis to the researcher. In total, over 100 potential participants were identified. Appropriate men were chosen for interview based on their availability on the day of data collection.

Interviews were conducted on weekends only. This schedule was chosen based on the availability of the researcher and the lack of programming in the institution on weekends. Each interview day, I arrived at the prison, chose an individual living unit, and set up my materials in a classroom or interview room. I would then take two to three face sheets to the officer on duty. Multiple face sheets were taken in case one of the inmates was not on the unit at the time. The officer would call the inmate to the staff desk, where I would say, “I’m talking to men who have been in prison before. Would you be interested in talking to me?” This first informal consent was used for two reasons. The first reason was to avoid taking inmates out of the living unit if they did not wish to at least consider participation. This was done for both security and time purposes. The second reason was to protect the participant’s privacy as much as possible. Due to the open floor plan of the living unit, it was not feasible to introduce the study and explain why the participant had been chosen without other inmates hearing this information. Only one man refused to participate after the initial consent.

If the inmate agreed to participate, he was taken to an interview room. I then described the study in further detail and the formal informed consent form (see Appendix C) was read by the inmate and reviewed by the researcher. I answered any questions the inmate had, and the inmate signed the consent form. The interview immediately followed.
The individual interviews took place in interview rooms or classrooms in the pods (groups of two units). These rooms were removed from the general living area and were deemed to be as private as the environment would allow. Once consent was obtained and the consent form signed, I began the interview with the demographic questionnaire. Although the demographic questionnaire was designed to be filled out by the participant, it was more conducive to the research and the environment to read the questions and have the participant answer verbally. This allowed me to establish a relationship with the participant prior to the interview. Also, at times participants would begin talking about their experiences prior to the start of the interview and so it was beneficial to obtain demographics verbally and to audio-record the answers.

The semi-structured interview followed. Both the demographic and semi-structured interview responses were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Each participant was given a unique identification number, and only that number was used on the recording and the demographic questionnaire. The names of participants and their identification numbers were listed in a confidential document.

The interview was designed to take approximately 1 to 2 hr, depending on the nature and length of the participant’s responses. However, the interviews were much shorter than anticipated. They ranged in length from 10 min to 1.5 hr. Probes were used to try to elicit more information after an inmate responded, but I did not deviate from the previously developed questions, with the exception of adding a question regarding gang affiliation. This addition was based on the responses of three initial interviews and was done in conjunction with a co-researcher.
After the interviews were completed, I transcribed them into a word processing program. Information from the demographic questionnaire was analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. If the information from the ODOC face sheet for the inmate conflicted with information given by the inmate, the inmate’s information was used. This choice was made because a number of face sheets were found to be incorrect with regard to age or sentence. In cases in which the information given by the inmate and the information on the face sheet, specifically regarding current charges, were very discrepant the inmate was asked to further clarify. In most cases the information given by the inmate was used. Age, ethnicity, prior incarcerations, charges, program participation, marital status, and number of children were all taken from the inmates’ reports. The face sheets were primarily used as a way to organize and identify the participants.

Participants

The participants were 17 ODOC inmates who were identified by ODOC staff as having returned to prison after a period of at least 3 months but no more than 3 years after their last incarceration. This period of time was chosen for two reasons. First, government agencies often use 3 years as the cutoff for recidivism statistics (Langan & Levin, 2002). Second, in this study I was seeking to understand the experiences of the recidivating inmate both during and between incarcerations. Three months appeared to be sufficient time to have allowed the inmate to reenter society but to still be experiencing the effects of prior incarceration. The 3 months included time out of any form of incarcerations, including county jail, and had to have been continuous.

The 17 participants were all fluent English speakers who were 18 years of age or older. An additional 5 inmates began the interview process but were later determined to
be inappropriate for the study (3 men had not been in the community for a period of at least 3 months between incarcerations, and 2 were determined to be suffering from a mental illness that impacted their ability to participate). The men who were excluded were thanked for their participation to that point and told that they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The information from these interviews was not included in the data analysis.

The 17 men included in this study ranged in age from 23 to 63 ($M = 36.12$, $SD = 11.47$, $Mdn = 36$). Of the 17 men, 11 (65%) identified themselves as White or Caucasian, 3 (18%) as Black or African-American, 2 (12%) as Hispanic/Latino, and 1 (6%) as American Indian. These numbers are similar to the overall demographics of inmates in Oregon prisons. In total, Oregon inmates are identified as 75% Caucasian, 12% Hispanic, 10% Black, and 2% American Indian (ODOC, 2008). In the current sample Black men are slightly over-represented and Caucasian men are slightly under-represented. Age at first arrest ranged from 10 to 51 years ($M = 19.94$, $SD = 10.63$, $Mdn = 17$). The number of previous incarcerations ranged from 1 to 6 ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.29$, $Mdn = 2$), and in total the men had served 37 previous prison sentences, ranging from 7 to 216 months ($M = 41.62$, $SD = 39.51$, $Mdn = 19$). Of the 17 men, 12 (71%) had received either a high-school diploma or GED and 3 (18%) had attended some college. Slightly more than half (53%) of the men had children, ranging between one and six children between the ages of 7 months and 36 years old. None of the men were currently married. Nearly half (47%) reported that they had never been married, 35% reported that they were divorced, and another 18% described themselves as separated.
The length of the current sentence varied from 13 months to 10 years ($M = 36.76$ months, $SD = 34.9$ months). The men’s charges fell into four categories: person crimes (i.e., homicide, robbery, identity theft; $n = 9$), property crimes (i.e., burglary; $n = 6$), drug crimes (i.e., possession; $n = 5$), and crimes against the correctional institution (i.e., possession of contraband, felony driving; $n = 4$). Most of the men ($n = 14$) were incarcerated on an entirely new crime, but 3 had been incarcerated at least in part because of parole or probation violations. Many inmates had been charged with more than one crime ($M = 1.65$, $SD = 0.90$, $Md = 1$). The men reported having been incarcerated from 5 days to 1 year ($M = 60.18$, $SD = 86.29$, $Md = 30$). Only one man reported being incarcerated for more than 4 months. When that value was removed, the men had been incarcerated an average of 41.13 days ($SD = 36.89$, $Md = 24$). The discrepancy between reported incarceration times may be attributed to the possibility that some men included time spent in jail and others did not.

Data Analysis

Based on the study and the data, it was determined that phenomenology and grounded theory were the most appropriate qualitative methods of data analysis. One of the core components of grounded theory is that ideas are formulated while analyzing the data, rather than using a preconceived hypothesis (Charmaz, 2003). Aspects of phenomenological methods were also used. The tenets of phenomenological qualitative research are that people’s perceptions of their relationship with the world can provide evidence about the world (Richards & Morse, 2007). The *lived experience* is thought to be especially meaningful and important to the research. In phenomenology the use of a pre-determined interview is not advised because it would constrain the participant’s
ability to describe his or her personal perception. Phenomenological researchers are most interested in the perception of an experience, rather than the empirical truth (Richards & Morse, 2007).

Ideally, this study would have begun in one of two ways. If I had chosen to use a grounded theory approach, it would have begun with the formulation of an interview, which would have been modified throughout the collection period as data analysis occurred simultaneously. This method would have allowed the data to drive the study (Charmaz, 2003). If I had chosen to focus solely on the phenomenological approach, I would have conducted the interviews with only a couple of predetermined questions (Richards & Morse, 2007) However, due to the requirements of the Institutional Review Board and the ODOC, it was necessary to review the literature and develop a semi-structured interview beforehand.

After the data had been collected and transcribed, I began the process of coding. Descriptive coding was used on the demographic section of the interviews in order to analyze and describe the characteristics of the sample. Coding began with topic coding. During this stage each written line of each transcript was named, or coded, according to its content. This process served a number of purposes, including ensuring that I was not imposing any preconceived ideas onto the data as a whole, beginning the analytical process, and allowing me to remain close to the interviews (Richards & Morse, 2007). After the initial topic coding, I analyzed the interviews again using focused coding. At this stage, I used the most frequently appearing codes to help further analyze the data. The focused coding moved the analysis away from the individual lines and allowed me to explore the data as a whole. At this point codes that appeared infrequently were discarded.
because it was assumed that they reflected individual experience rather than a common experience of men who recidivate (Charmaz, 2003).

After all of the interviews were coded, the codes were then converted into conceptual categories. During this stage the codes were assessed for relevance to and ability to explain or describe the phenomena of recidivism. These codes, or categories, were then conceptualized and defined. In grounded theory this process is called memo-writing. Memo-writing involves not only defining the categories, but using raw data (quotes) to exemplify the pattern that the researcher is describing (Charmaz, 2003).

Although phenomenology and grounded theory were the primary methods used in this study, aspects of other approaches were also used. As Smith and Osborn (2003) noted, “It is also important to remember that qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at each of the stages” (p. 66). Aspects of interpretative phenomenological analysis were used to help determine and clarify themes within the data. Specifically, in addition to the line-by-line coding, the transcripts were analyzed for themes and theme titles. These themes were used to help identify, define, and sort the categories described by grounded theory. The themes were then listed and clustered to determine any connections between themes that may inform or lead to the development of subordinate themes related to recidivism (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Once themes had been identified in the data, a theory could be formulated about the experience and phenomenon of recidivism among male inmates in an Oregon detention facility (Richards & Morse, 2007).

It was important to ensure that the results of the data analysis truly reflected the lived experience of the participants rather than ideas imposed upon the data by the
researcher. For this reason, two methods were used to maintain rigor. The first method was a research journal; I used this journal to document ideas, decisions, biases, and theories that emerged throughout the planning and execution of the project. The journal also provided a paper trail of how decisions were made and allowed me to examine how my own ideas may have influenced analysis of the data. The second method of ensuring accurate results included having a person unrelated to the study analyze four transcripts independent of the primary researcher. Together, these methods provided a form of interrater reliability for the qualitative approach.
RESULTS

Through the course of data collection the participants were asked broad questions relating to their individual experiences of growing up, being in prison, being released, and then returning to prison (see Appendix B). Their answers provided a variety of information, but two major categories emerged relating to the Prison Environment and the Outside Environment. Within each of those two categories, a number of themes and subthemes were established. These are presented in Table 1 and described in detail below.

The Prison Environment

With respect to the prison environment, two themes were found. The first theme, titled *Positive Perceptions of Prison*, was the idea that prison was easy or comfortable, which challenged the deterrent quality of prison. The second theme, titled *Negative Perceptions of Prison*, included subthemes involving *Interactions With Staff* and the men’s relationship with and perceptions of time (*Time Lost*).

*Positive Perceptions of Prison*

Although most of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with their current life circumstances, many also expressed an opinion that prison was not the scary or threatening environment that many people assume it to be. In fact, many men were able to describe positive, comfortable aspects of prison that challenged the deterrent nature of the institution.
### Table 1

Categories, Themes, and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Prison Environment</td>
<td>Positive Perceptions of Prison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative Perceptions of Prison</td>
<td>Interactions with staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Outside Environment</td>
<td>Reactions to Release</td>
<td>Difficulty replacing criminal behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minimizing the need to gradually reintegrate into society</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Institutional Support</td>
<td>Returning to old social circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lifestyle Choices</td>
<td>Drugs and alcohol</td>
</tr>
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Although the men acknowledged that prison was assumed or believed to be a deterrent to crime, they also described opinions and experiences that went against that assumption. One participant stated:

My first time in prison, well, like anybody’s first time in prison, you see what, you see stuff on TV, you hear all the big bad things but you come to Oregon’s prison and its nothing like that so uh, I had a lot of fun my first time in prison actually, it’s just like a, it was more like high school, a high school thing were you, I mean you can’t do nothing you’re told what to do pretty much, when to go to bed but you get to kick it with the fellas, you get to half fun, play football, you
get to do this you gotta, so I had a lot of fun my first time in prison ’cause I only got such a short amount of time and I was young it didn’t bother me.

Another inmate talked about how, because of being involved in the juvenile system, he felt most comfortable in prison. He said:

To be honest, all of uh, it was like a comfort zone because growing up in [location removed] I just like, I felt like prison’s my home….It, they [fellow inmates] were like a family to me. That’s why I kept coming back to prison ’cause it’s what I knew…

Other men talked about how prison is easier than life outside of prison, due to the fact that prison is more structured and there are fewer demands on their time. One participant explained:

Prison doesn’t bother me, it’s more, it would have been easier for the taxpayers to have made me stay out there and work and take care of my family rather than come back to prison and do this, ’cause this is easy. Had nobody to look out for but just me, I just had to take care of me but out there I had to take care of my kids, had to pay bills, had to pay rent and that was harder. So what they did was give me another vacation. This ain’t nothing. It ain’t nothing but rest and relaxation. I get three hots and a cot, I don’t have to worry about no clothes, no nothing. Everything comes to me…It was hard living free, it was hard getting up every morning to go out and fend for yourself and do that. That was difficult. That’s the difficult part.

Another man talked about how prison allowed time to do what individuals liked to do for themselves, without the daily demands of free society. He said:

You know, it’s, it’s like when you get out, like prison, I think like, you’re in here you have so much time on your hands you know. It’s like you can shave real good, you could know maintain yourself all good and stuff and to me that got me used to like you know, I could do everything all calmly and stuff since I had all that time. But once I got out I was like, “Whoa! I can’t sleep, I can’t go to sleep ’cause if I go to sleep I’m going to miss out on doing something really important ’stead of just what, watching TV or something.”

A few of the participants expressed the opinion that the Oregon prison system, compared to prisons in other states, was too safe, which detracted from the deterrent quality of incarceration. One man said:
Oregon’s a safe penitentiary system. But the thing is, it’s the safest penitentiary system I think that’s probably one of the worst things that they do here, it being so safe for the prisoners makes you, well, why not go back there…It’s not scary in prison and you come to prison and you get scared, it’s probably gonna make you not wanna come back here. You come to prison and you get, you come here and it’s just like, it’s kiddy camp.

**Negative Perceptions of Prison**

As noted above, participants identified some positive aspects of prison, specifically that it was safe and comfortable. However, they also identified a number of negative aspects. The two most commonly discussed areas were beliefs that the staff of the correctional institutes treated inmates with disrespect and the idea of time lost because of incarceration.

**Interactions With Staff**

Many of the men discussed their interactions and relationships with the institution staff. One participant stated:

> I feel like some of ’em treat you like, you know, we’re less than or something. I don’t know, or like they’re better than us and you know, maybe we’re in here but I don’t know. I don’t think they’re better than anyone. I don’t think I’m better than anyone so I guess I just, I just feel like they should treat us the same way. If we respect ’em then they should respect us. But some of ’em, they like to use their power, be a little authoritative or whatever, just to assert their position.

Another said, “Regardless of what you try to do for any of the guards, it didn’t seem like you got any respect from them.” Still others discussed feeling judged by the correctional staff. One man said:

> Uh, some of the officers we were just dirt. You know what I mean. Like some of the officers uh, females especially, become corrections officers because they don’t like men. I don’t know, some of ’em are just really mean, you know, but there was a few in there that you could, had some respect for you, you know.

Other men talked about being treated unfairly. One man described his experience thus:
I really got tired of every time I’d get out of the hole I felt like they always like, well just some of ’em, not all of ’em, cause some of ’em were cool you know, but some of ’em just like I don’t know. They just send me back to the hole for just dumb things like they don’t wanna see me or something.

Another man described an officer at a previous institution by saying, “I mean this guy was really dirty, man. And he put this stuff, the stuff I was telling you, the thorazine in your food…Slobberin’ all over my goddamn self.”

_Time Lost_

While talking about their experiences in prison, many men referenced time lost. One man talked about the differences he experienced between short and long prison terms. He said, “…this’ll be 13 years already taken off of my life. If I was doing little 13-month sentences I could do a couple o’ more of ’em, but this is too big of a chunk for me.” Another man used the concept of time to describe why he was motivated to stay out of prison after his release. He said, “I told everybody, ‘I’m done, I’m retired, I don’t want no more of this. They got 17 years of me, they don’t need no more.”’

Other men talked about time and how it related to their relationships outside of prison. One man said:

_Uh, when I was in a county jail my baby was still, I was in a county jail still before I had entered prison yet, my wife sent me pictures of my youngest daughter standing in front with her little lunch box, little smiley getting ready for kindergarten. I get out she’s married with two babies. That’s how I realized how long 17 years really hit me._

Another participant said:

_You know that hurts them ’cause it’s quite obvious that I’m selfish. I don’t think about, you know, the people that I leave behind so now they growing up without a daddy for the next 9 years till they turn 13._

Another man talked about the loss associated with time spent in prison by
saying, “I’ve lost everything pretty much this time ’cause it’s five years. Who’s gonna wait five years?”

In sum, by their accounts, time spent in prison was completely separate from their experiences outside of prison. Prison was seen as easy or comfortable, although some of the men also described feelings of loss, disrespect, and shame associated with being incarcerated. On the other hand, life on the outside was seen as a constant struggle, one in which there were any number of obstacles and pitfalls keeping them from pursuing a conventional lifestyle. Outside factors will be considered in the next section.

The Outside Environment

The men described a number of issues that they had encountered once they had been released from prison previously. The first theme related to the men’s Reactions to Release. This theme is then divided into the subthemes Difficulty Replacing Criminal Behaviors and Minimizing the Need to Reintegrate Gradually. The second theme related to the support, or lack of support, provided by the correctional institutions. Some of these issues were related to their status as parolees, such as release planning and having to report to a parole officer. This theme, titled Lack of Institutional Support, is defined by the fact that the men were required by the correctional system to attend certain programming or meet certain demands, such as reporting to a parole officer and avoiding criminal activity. The final theme found in relation to the outside environment, titled Lifestyle Choices, related to the men’s personal choices. This theme encapsulates choices made in social groups and drug use.
Reactions to Release

The men described struggling to bridge the gap between prison and freedom. This came in the form of reverting back to criminal behavior or attempting to return to, or create, a conventional lifestyle. Often this regression led to behaviors that caused or contributed to their return to prison.

Difficulty Replacing Criminal Behavior

The men in this study encountered difficulties when trying to comply with the demands of the institution after they had been released. Often they found that their previous lifestyle and way of approaching the world was not consistent with the expectations that had been placed on them after they were released from prison. It could be argued that part of the aim of prison is to change behaviors that are a part of or could lead to criminal behavior. However, many men in this study described being unable or unsure of how to replace those old behaviors with more socially acceptable ones.

One man talked about how he struggled with grief, which then led to struggles with his parole requirements. He said:

Well, the first time I got released like from boot camp, the day before I got released my girlfriend died so that was kind of hard and then I just um, I just kind of went into a hole and I didn’t really do much, for like a month and a half, and then it was like, getting to the point my PO [parole officer] was like, “You need, you better get a job or we’re just going to put you back in,” and I did and then I lost my job or, I could’ve stayed there but the guy was like, “Oh you don’t have enough experience and it’s just too dangerous.” So then I was like, “Oh man, I’m gonna have to go find another job,” just kind of fell back on my old things. Started selling drugs again and started doing drugs and then I failed my UA, came back from my UA, failed my lie detector test, came back to prison and then the second time I got out, I looked for a job for a little while and then I just uh, went immediately back to selling drugs.

Another participant described how he had used his criminal activity to help deal with stress brought on by a fight with his partner. He explained:
She told me to get out. I was like, “Wait, wait, wait hold on, I’m trying to explain.” She’s like, “No just get out. Just leave.” … anyway she told me to get out and I get out so I’m driving around and uh, next thing you know I end up robbing one, two, three people that night…. Instead I just go out and just do, fuck it. Just all caution to the wind just, you know just that attitude. Here goes this, for real, honestly, I kind of think I put it like retardation really. I just got retarded. Just for reals, just blanked out so, what do you do? You just go out and hurt innocent people. It didn’t make sense and there ain’t no way I can sugar coat it or anything but yeah, I did that. I went out and the first thing I did was I seen some people, I thought okay, and I pulled out a 14-inch butcher knife went in and robbed those people. For just, nothing. …I mean, she put me out; there was a good reason for her to put me out…

Most of the men talked about obstacles that they had faced after they were released. Many struggled with trying to live a more conventional lifestyle. Money was a challenge because many of the participants had used criminal behavior to support themselves and they found that working in a socially acceptable position was not as financially rewarding as their previous lifestyle. One man said:

The money. You get addicted to you can make a lot of money. So I keep selling a lot of drugs ’cause it’s so easy. You know, I don’t have to work. I can make $5,000 in a day, I can’t, I can’t make a thousand dollars a month, barely. So that’s definitely what caused me to come back, selling drugs.

Another man discussed a financial hardship that he believed led to committing another crime, which then led to another prison sentence. He said, “My payday fell on Christmas so the boss wouldn’t give ’em [paycheck] to me until after Christmas. I wanted to get my family some Christmas presents so I used the [stolen] card. That’s why I’m sitting here.”

Minimizing the Need to Reintegrate Gradually

When discussing the return to society, it seemed that there had been a push to reintegrate as fast as possible. Many reported, often with pride, that they had obtained a job quickly. One man said, “Then I got out, I got out [date removed] and I went straight, I
went to go look for a job. Got a job at the twelve, one o’clock and went straight to work.”

Another said, “One of the rare occasions but uh, when I first got out my whole goal was to hurry up and get a job and rush everything and I got a job within a couple of weeks.”

And yet another man related, “Oh, when I got out, I went straight to work the day after I got out of prison the day after I got out of prison”

The men reported similar haste in entering into or returning to romantic relationships. However, this was not always seen in retrospect as a positive move. One man described it this way:

I could say, honestly, for a person that honestly does a lot of time in prison, don’t go out there and get into a relationship. You need to take time to sit back and observe what’s going on around you, because the world has changed, a lot of things has changed, and honestly, I should have listened…

*Lack of Institutional Support*

The men in this study identified several personal factors that contributed to recidivism. However, they also identified areas in which the correctional system did not support post-release success. When asked about release planning, some of the men did not know what the concept was. One man said,

No, well, uh, no what is release planning?

[Researcher] Did anyone work with you about transitioning out of prison?

No.

[Researcher] Ok.

Well, uh, I bet they do, they call you in when you have three months left, but I think it’s as brief as, “Where you gonna live?”

[Researcher] Ok.

You know, like “What’s your address going to be?” or something to that effect but nothing like no planning.

Other men described release planning in prison as very limited or restricted to certain inmates. One man summed up his experience thus:
[Researcher] ...did anyone do any programming with you about what you’re going to do when you get out?
No, just pretty much, “Are you gonna need help?” like, they gave me a food card and stuff. They provided all that stuff for me. They got me my ticket.
[Researcher] Your, like, bus ticket?
Yeah and um, what else did they do? That’s pretty much it.
[Researcher] Ok.
Other than programs they don’t really have any programs.
[Researcher] They don’t?
Well they do, but it’s like really limited to certain people.
[Researcher] What do you mean?
Like [institution] is like a whole different experience, man,
[Researcher] Yeah, I don’t know much about [institution].
…[ institution] is like, its weird. It’s like, I don’t know. Only the certain people get to get programs but to get to there you got be, I don’t know, like a tattletale or something.

Other men felt that the effort to plan was appropriate but the information and programs offered were unrealistic or detrimental. One man described his experiences and feelings of frustration. He said:

I uh, they put us in a, well, there’s two things they did with us at [institution] which I think is really good, I really do. They have a release program there that this lady runs and uh, and she had all types of people come in. Job sites from all over, housing people, the welfare people, I mean everything. And uh, and we go to these classes like three times a week, you know, it’s all about housing, uh SSI, uh drug programs, things like that. But it don’t be like they say, though, when you get there. It’s different.
[Researcher] What do you mean?
They, ain’t none of that shit’s available.
[Researcher] So they make you think all this stuff is there...
Yeah, but none of that shit’s available and they bring all of them people in there and none of that, and then it’s like you can’t get shit. You can’t get no job, they can bring in the job fair people, people from housing authority, people from welfare, all these all different places, people from this temp service, shit, they can’t get a job. ’Bout out of 500, maybe 4, at the most.

Another man talked about the struggles he faced attending his parole-mandated drug classes. He said:

Anyway, I tried to surround myself with people that were clean, that weren’t you know, and uh that was alright except for every Friday I had to go to these classes at the parole and probation office where I run into all these people and one of the
main people that was, you know, he showed me how to make dope, it was the guy
that I got arrested with … he was dangling that carrot out there quite a bit,
dumped a big pile of dope out the night we got arrested so you know, I wouldn’t a
been out there doing what we were doing if I didn’t have a bunch of dope in me.

Several men also described their parole agent as distant or overworked. The men
replied that they were often able to avoid the scrutiny of a parole officer because of the
parole officers’ heavy caseloads. One man said, “Um, we got along, I guess, but he just
had so many people on his case that you can, you have free reign.” Another said that his
parole officer was “easy going; you know, she was busy, so she seeing a lot of people,
and I just kind of coached my way through.” One man used the fact that he did not have a
constant parole officer to his advantage. He said, “I had a parole officer which every time
I go it be a different one, they didn’t have enough staff for us and so I go in there, psh,
you don’t even have to show up…” One participant described his inability to connect or
trust his officer because of the demands on the officer’s time and resources. He described
his relationship with the parole officer as “not very good. They say they’re there for you,
[but] I couldn’t, I can’t trust ’em. I can’t trust ’em one bit. They’re really not there
because they got so much of a caseload.”

As they were discussing their return to society, the men seemed to focus on the
hardships that they faced. Many of these were described as being outside of the men’s
control (overworked parole officer, returning to the same community, not having any
money). However, the men also described individual characteristics and personal choices
that may have contributed to their return to prison.

*Lifestyle Choices*

The men interviewed were restricted in their freedom by the constraints of the
correctional system. However, they also discussed personal choices they had made that
contributed to their return to prison or made living outside of prison difficult. The main subthemes found were *Returning to old social circles* and *Drugs and alcohol*.

**Returning to Old Social Circles**

The men also talked about how difficult it was for them to avoid their old social circles. After they were released many of the men returned to the city where they had lived and committed their crimes. This location led to difficulties because the people whom they knew and associated with were frequently also involved in a criminal lifestyle. One man said:

> Well, it’s real easy to get back into old habits being around people that you think are okay but they’re really not. So it’s like, um, what caused me to come back is my actions. I did that to myself basically ’cause if I wasn’t around the people that I was around at that time I wouldn’t be here.

Another man said:

> My downfall is you know, I still had my old friends and started using again…I went back to [location removed] and where I’m originally from and uh, started hanging around all my old friends and I guess it hurt so bad that I just wanted to get drunk and high as I could just to kill the pain you know?

When asked what might help him stay out of prison, one man suggested:

> Get out of the state or at least out of the area. It’s, you can’t be around the same people. You know, you just – it’s like being a drug addict and hanging out with people who do drugs but not doing ’em, it’s just not going to work. It’s, I just need to get away from this area.

Some of the men attributed their inability to break away from these groups to their incarceration. One man stated that he did not know anyone with whom he had not been in prison; consequently, when he had been released from prison, those were his only friends in the community. He said:

> I only lived here like before I caught that case I only lived here maybe a year and the only person I knew was my wife, so when I got out the only people I knew
were the people that I had done time with, so everybody that I had dealt with was, were people that I had been in prison with…

Drugs and Alcohol

The most frequently and consistently discussed aspect of recidivism among the men interviewed was drug use and drug addiction. The issue surpassed the correctional institution, post-release supervision, and even obstacles in the community. Nearly every man discussed drugs as a contributing factor to his return to prison.

Most of the men described a history of drug use. Some talked about how drugs had led to problems in school. For example, one man stated, “School was good until middle school and then when I started doing drugs I just kind of gave up.” Another man said, “I’d start skipping school. That’s 15, 16 years old, that’s when I started doing the drugs on my own, you know, going out on the street whoever wasn’t in school, whoever they could find.” Another participant said, “I got real deeply into drugs and dropped out of school and been, it’s been pretty much downhill from that point on. I been doing drugs pretty much my whole, since I was about 13 years old.”

Many of the men described their drug history leading up to using certain drugs, specifically methamphetamine. One man explained, “I think marijuana is a stepping stone for other drugs… Acid, uh mushrooms, cocaine, then I did, I got introduced to meth and I really liked meth.” Another man described his preference for the drug by saying, “Methamphetamines, just because it feeds my endorphins to, kills the, my thinking and makes the pleasure centers and I don’t know, just numbs everything else for me.” One man summed up his drug use history by saying, “Using drugs is, it’s fun, especially, meth is a totally, I mean the drug itself, it’s nasty if you think about it but it’s a fun drug to use.”
The men discussed the price of their drug use, and the impact that use had had on their returning to prison. One man talked about how he had been evicted and had to live with his family, which then led to feeling hopeless about his situation. He explained:

Well, I got evicted from my place and so I had to go move in with my grandparents… I started stressing out and that was part of the reason that I came back to prison was because I had lost my place and I was stressing out and I thought well I have to go do this 25 days and I already straight had problems at work… it was a bigger issue than I could deal with. So I started getting stressed out and then, I didn’t have enough money to go and get a vehicle… And it just, I thought well, I can go and get stoned or I can get drunk again, you know, and then I went and got stoned and drunk, but in order for me to do that I had to go and steal something, you know what I mean, so I wasn’t thinking clearly, I was, bad process thinking and bad decision making and I just thought well, that’s just it you know what I mean, I’m over with you know what I mean and uh, so I ran from the cops and that’s how I got in trouble. You know what I mean, I thought well, they haven’t caught me yet, they ain’t gonna catch me, you know? That’s just criminal behavior.

Some men discussed how their drug use was the reason that they had returned to prison. One man said, “The reason I’m here is because I went out and tried stealing a bunch of stuff to, so I could, you know, support my drug habit.” Some talked about knowing that when they were released they were going to return to drugs. For example, one man explained, “My biggest downfall is I knew deep down inside that uh, I wasn’t ready to give up my addiction, you know. I mean, throughout my time in here you know, whenever it came around I was all over it. I knew I wasn’t ready.”

Sometimes the cost of the drug use and incarceration was related to their families. One man said:

I’m a [going to have to] sit there and I have to tell my daughter, “Yeah, your dad was a drug addict; yeah, I was a criminal and I was going to prison, it was my fault, it wasn’t your fault, it’s not that I didn’t want to be there for you, but.” Yeah, there was a lot of times in my life that I picked drugs over anybody else and that’s the way it is with being a drug addict.
Another man said, “I knew I was losing my family, I already knew it but I wouldn’t quit using drugs.”

Summary

The men in this study described their own lived experience of being in and returning to prison. Their perception focused on two aspects of the experience, inside prison and outside prison. With regard to the prison experience, the men talked about both the positive and negative characteristics of their time spent incarcerated. They described prison as safe and comfortable, but also described feeling disrespected by staff and grieving the time lost while they were in custody. The outside experience was described in terms that were more related to their success and factors that hindered their ability to remain out of prison. Specifically, the men talked about their own personal reactions to freedom, a lack of support from the correctional institution, and substance use. These will be discussed further in the next section.
DISCUSSION

Although the men interviewed in this study related a variety of experiences and opinions, several experiences were similar across the participants. Most of the men differentiated between life inside prison and life outside of prison. The men talked about their feelings that prison was a positive place to be, that they were comfortable in prison, and that prison was safe. This finding contradicts the idea that prison is a deterrent to crime such that offenders want to avoid returning to prison. One man described this feeling well by saying, “…it would have been easier for the taxpayers to have made me stay out there and work and take care of my family rather than come back to prison and do this, ’cause this is easy.”

Other men described incarceration as a time when they could focus on themselves and avoid the stress and responsibilities of free society. Many of the participants described Oregon prisons as being too safe, to the point that they had no anxiety about returning to prison or interacting with other inmates. Although this finding does not necessarily indicate that prisons need to be dangerous or intimidating, it does illustrate that avoiding prison because of safety or comfort concerns was not a prominent factor when these men chose to commit crimes again.

On the other hand, the men also discussed negative aspects of prison in relation to their internal experience. They reported feeling disrespected or oppressed by staff and they commented on the implications of being incarcerated for a period of time, removed from their loved ones and lives on the outside. With this in mind, it is possible that the
men described prison as safe, easy, and comfortable in an effort to mitigate or minimize their emotional experiences in prison, which were described as feelings of loss, grief, and shame. Feeling physically comfortable and safe and focusing on positive experiences in prison may help them to survive the internal experiences of being incarcerated.

The men described their experiences subsequent to their prior release in a pragmatic manner. Rather than discuss their emotional experience of regaining freedom, they focused on situations and complications. The main themes that were evident when the participants talked about release were their reactions to their release, a lack of institutional support, and lifestyle choices made by the men that then led them back to prison. The stipulation that the men had to return to the county in which they had been arrested was often referenced as a challenge to changing or modifying the way they lived. Often they found it difficult to avoid familiar people and situations, which in turn made it difficult to avoid committing crimes. Some men reported feeling pressured to comply with parole demands (e.g., getting a job) and would sometimes use negative coping strategies to deal with that stress (e.g., using drugs, avoiding their parole officer). They also talked about how it had been difficult to work honestly and closely with their parole officers because the officers were perceived as being overworked or as having an especially large caseload.

The men often spoke proudly of how quickly they had been able to reintegrate into the community. However, in hindsight many of the men saw this as a mistake because they had not appreciated the changes they had gone through and the need for time to readjust.
Drugs were the most commonly referenced issue in this study. Nearly every participant reported a drug history and most also described difficulties with addiction and the connection between drugs and their crime. This is consistent with ODOC reports that indicate that 58.9% of the inmates in ODOC custody have a severe problem with substance abuse. Another 15% have a moderate problem with substance abuse (ODOC, 2008). Many of the men identified returning to drugs as a large contributing factor to their return to prison. Methamphetamine was specifically described as being toxic to living a conventional lifestyle. Along with drugs, the men in this study talked about how returning to their old social circles and neighborhoods made it difficult to institute any real lifestyle change, which then led to rearrest and reincarceration.

Upon reflection, many of the topics discussed seemed to be both discrepant with other topics and/or to minimize the offender’s personal responsibility in their current situation. As stated above, the responses related to the prison environment focused on descriptions of the prison environment, and the experience of being incarcerated was reduced to talking about the loss of time. The men spoke of prison being easy, safe, or comfortable, but they also talked about how they grieved for the time that they lost by being in prison. Although the men talked about the benefits of prison (e.g., reduced personal responsibility), there was also an emotional consequence (e.g., feeling disrespected). When the men talked about the outside environment, their responses focused on factors that inhibited or prevented their success in free society. They talked about their reactions to the release and their difficulties with replacing their old, criminal behaviors. They also talked about how quickly they had tried to get back into general society, which minimized their need to transition into freedom. When the men were
asked about release planning and the support of their parole officers, the men often spoke of feeling as though they had fallen through the cracks or been overlooked.

The minimization of personal responsibility is an interesting result of this particular study. It is possible that men who have recidivated tend to externalize the contributing factors related to their return. However, based on the overall results of this study I believe that there is a more complicated explanation. As noted, the men in this study were interviewed while in the intake facility. They often spoke of prison in a defensive, overly blasé way. Based on their reports, prison was not a negative place to be and they did not express a great deal of concern about being re-incarcerated. They also talked about how they “knew” they’d return. Within those statements, though, the men would sometimes say things that would allude to feelings of anger towards themselves or shame at being back in prison. I believe that the idea that prison is too easy or too safe was, at least in some cases, a psychological defense designed to alleviate some of their feelings of failure or shame at returning to prison. Also, the men often attributed their return to the lack of resources or support from the correctional institution. Again, this may have been a defense designed to alleviate uncomfortable emotions in the relatively fresh wound of being reincarcerated. I will discuss in a later section the idea that the results may have been different if the men had been interviewed later into their incarceration, when they were more acclimated to their situation.

Relationship to Previous Research

The Prison Experience

The notion that prison is a safe and comfortable place where inmates could spend their time focused on their own needs and where they were not subject to many of the
stressors of the outside society (e.g., financial obligations to family) runs contrary to results of Kenemore and Roldan (2005), who found that the men in their study identified prison as a negative environment in which they continued their destructive habits and lifestyles. The men in that study also reported fear of being released and a lack of confidence regarding their ability to live in an unstructured environment. The men in the current study did not express fear or insecurity about living outside, but rather discussed life inside prison with an air of bravado. By their accounts, prison, although not preferable, was not uncomfortable. The element that was described as unpleasant or disturbing was the nature of the relationships that the inmates had with the correctional staff, specifically correctional officers.

Another theme that emerged relating to the prison environment was the concept of time lost. The men often talked about changes that had occurred with their family and loved ones while they were incarcerated. They often provided as examples their growing children. The men also discussed the strain on their personal relationships brought about because of their incarceration. Kenemore and Roldan (2005) found similar ideas expressed by men in their research who grieved their loss of connections with people outside prison.

The Outside Environment

Although the men in this study did not discuss feeling apprehensive about their release or unsure of their ability to live outside of prison, they consistently talked about having moved quickly to reintegrate into society by finding jobs and entering into relationships very soon after their prior release. This particular finding was not found in Kenemore and Roldan’s (2005) study, but it is possible that this attempt to quickly return
to society occurred in reaction to fears or anxieties. Gaum et al. (2006) also found that a lack of support after release was a contributing factor to their participants’ recidivism. The men in the current study talked about a lack of prerelease support for the transition to freedom. They also discussed difficulties with overworked parole and probation officers. It is possible that, because they believed they could not or did not need to connect with their agent, they believed that they had not been supported in their transition from prison to the community.

The men interviewed in this study often discussed the difficulty they faced in changing their lifestyles while surrounded by old and familiar people and situations. Similarly, Austin and Hardyman (2004), Heide et al. (2001), and Peerson et al. (2004) posited that increased time spent with acquaintances from the time prior to incarceration was correlated with the probability of recidivating after release. The men in the current study also reported that time spent with old friends made it difficult for them to maintain a lifestyle consistent with their parole requirements.

Drugs were the single most often discussed issue in the men’s histories, criminal behaviors, and contributing factors to recidivism. Every man interviewed had some experience with drugs and most had struggled with addictions throughout their lives. Many also discussed their drug use as contributing to or exacerbating their legal problems. This result mirrors common findings in the literature. Harer (1995), Huebner et al. (2007), Messina et al. (2006), and Peerson et al. (2004) all found drug use to be a contributing or accelerating factor in recidivism in their respective populations.

In sum, findings that reflected prior research included negative perceptions of prison, time and connections lost, a lack of support for release, difficulties with social
groups, and drug use. New factors identified in the current study included prison as a safe or comfortable environment, minimization of the need to reintegrate gradually into society, and difficulties with overworked parole and probation officers.

**Strengths of the Present Study**

This study was designed to be exploratory in nature. With this in mind, a qualitative method was chosen and care was taken to avoid preconceived hypotheses. Through qualitative interviews, the participants were able to tell their own stories rather than answer questions derived from previous studies. The study yielded several results that have not been discussed in prior literature.

The method for choosing participants for this study yielded a large number of potential subjects. By randomly approaching the men to ask them if they would be willing to be interviewed, I was able to sample inmates with a wide range of demographics. I was also able to establish a semi-random sample because the participants were chosen, at random, from the total population of recidivists in the intake facility and then self-selected into participation. This selection process likely resulted in richer data and more global experiences than a more restricted sample would have.

The current study was conducted in such a way that a number of people were consulted throughout the process. Colleagues worked with me to develop the questionnaire and provided secondary theme analysis in order to establish interrater reliability. The result of this consultation was a decreased likelihood that the results were inadvertently influenced by my own biases. Although the influence of bias is a risk in all research, it is an especially salient concern in qualitative research due to the process of data analysis and the influence that the researcher can have on the data collection.
Limitations of the Present Study

A number of variables were considered when deciding how and when to approach possible participants for this study. It was decided that intake would be the most reasonable stage of incarceration at which to identify and make contact with men who had recidivated. This choice may have influenced the results because the men had not had much time to adjust back to life in prison. Many of the men were either very angry or very dejected about returning to prison. Interviewing men later in their incarceration may have led to different answers, possibly more introspective in nature.

The timing of the interviews was also decided based on institutional input and my personal availability and timeline. In future studies, different results may be found by looking at men who had returned to prison during different times of the year. Although it was not considered or known ahead of time, many of the men in this study had committed the crimes that sent them back to prison over the holiday season. Perhaps their experiences were different from men who committed their crimes in the summer or other seasons.

The men in this study had all served at least one previous incarceration in an Oregon prison. Men who had served prison terms in other states (with no prior Oregon incarcerations) were not invited to interview because their previous incarcerations did not flag them as recidivists. This detail eliminated a number of possible participants and may have unduly influenced the results in an unknown way. Future studies may benefit from relaxing that particular criterion to include all previous incarcerations.

In the present study I examined the experience of men who had recidivated. Female inmates may have a different experience, and the results found in the present
study cannot be carried over to female populations. Given that this study was designed to examine the personal experiences of 17 men in Oregon prison, the results found cannot be transferred to other groups. If possible in the future, quantitative research may aid in determining the strength or global transferability of the themes found in the present study.

Directions for Future Research

The goal of this study was to shed light on themes or contributing factors that had not been addressed yet in the literature. The men in this study did discuss several ideas that have not been studied or that are not well represented in the current body of information. The first of these is the idea that certain prison systems, such as that in Oregon, are too safe to constitute a deterrent. Similarly, the theme of being mistreated or disrespected by staff has not been found in the literature. Related to the outside environment, drugs have consistently been found by other researchers to be a factor in recidivism. This continues to be a problem among prison population and so further study is recommended to gain more insight into the issue. Very few researchers have examined the institutional support, or lack thereof, discussed by the participants in this study. Specifically, the issue of high caseloads and overworked parole agents was found to be a major theme in this study and has not been discussed elsewhere.

Many of the men discussed issues in their childhood that may indicate areas for future research. Of the 17 men in the study, 6 reported having been raised by someone other than their biological parents. Another 6 men talked about the impact that their parents’ drug and alcohol use had on their childhoods. It is possible that these commonalities may lead to further insight into the experience of men who continue to return to prison. Further qualitative analysis, focusing on the upbringing of male inmates
who have recidivated, would address this finding while still allowing the men the freedom to convey their personal experiences.

Several issues came up that may be explored further in future research. Specifically, certain aspects of childhood, including caretakers and guardian’s drug use, and the belief that prison is too safe were oft repeated in the current study. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods could be used to explore these new dimensions of recidivism.

Conclusion

The aim of this project was to allow the participants to describe their experience in their own words. The men in this study reinforced some conclusions drawn from previous studies, but the results also added to the existing body of knowledge. Suggestions have been made for future research that will ideally use this information to develop theories and programs to further reduce the rate of recidivism among male inmates. By exploring recidivism using qualitative methods, I was able to discover areas that may lead to a deeper understanding of the unique characteristics, needs, and challenges of men who experience multiple incarcerations.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you give me a general idea of what your childhood was like?

2. What’s been your experience with drugs and/or alcohol?
   If they’ve used, How old were you the first time that you used?
   What have been your drugs of choice?

3. What was your most recent (last) experience of prison like?

   Probes
   • Were you involved in any programs?
   • What was the DOC staff like?
   • What was your experience with the other inmates?
   • What jobs did you hold while in prison?
   • What facility were you held in? What part of that facility were you housed in?
   • Were you involved with any release planning

4. What was your most recent experience like when you were released into the community?

   Probes
   • What was your support like?
   • Were you involved in any programs?
   • What was your housing situation?
   • What was your job situation?
   • Did you have a probation/parole officer?
   • What was your financial situation like?
   • (if applicable) Were you involved with any drug and alcohol treatment?

5. What’s it like to be back in prison?

6. What do you think caused you to return to prison? Or, Do you have any theories about why you came back to prison?

7. How is your current experience the same or different from your last time in prison?

8. Is there anything you’d like to tell me about your experience that we didn’t talk about?
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Information

Age:

Ethnicity:

Marital Status: Married/Domestic partnership  Separated/Divorced  Single

Number of children:

How old were you at the time of your first arrest?

What were the charges?

How many times have you been incarcerated? Please also list the charges that were associated with each incarceration.

What are your current charges?

What programs did you participate in during your last incarceration?

During other incarcerations?
APPENDIX C

PACIFIC UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT TO ACT AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

The Qualitative Experience of Inmates Who Recidivate

Investigator Contact Information

Principal Investigator:
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Principal Investigator:
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Pacific University, School of Professional Psychology
503-352-2900

Faculty Advisor:
Genevieve Arnaut, Psy.D., Ph.D.
Pacific University, School of Professional Psychology
503-352-2900

1. Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to be in a research study of inmates. You are being invited to participate because you are an inmate in an Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) facility. In addition, you have returned to prison within three years of being released and you have spent at least three months in the community before returning. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

This study is being conducted by Corey Montoya, Jennifer Carey, and Genevieve Arnaut. The purpose of this study is to better understand why inmates return to prison after being released and to help reduce the occurrence of inmates returning to prison.
2. **Study Location and Dates**

The study is expected to begin July 2007 and to be completed by August 2008. The location of the study will be in the ODOC prison facilities.

3. **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to participate in a one- to 2-hour long interview about your experience in prison, your experience before prison, your experience in the community upon being released from prison, and your experience of returning to prison. We will also have access to your file in order to obtain demographic information, such as your age and sentence length. By having access to this information in the file, we will also have access to your health information. However, health information will not be used in this study. We will not access your file if you indicate that you do not wish us to do so.

**Participants and Exclusion**

Only participants who meet the following conditions will be included in the study: inmates 18 years or older, fluent in English, and who have previously served a prison sentence, were released from prison and in the community for at least three months, and returned to prison within three years time. Participants who do not meet the above criteria will be excluded from the study.

4. **Risks and Benefits**

There are no serious risks or benefits to participating in this research. Potential minor risks include possible distress due to emotional content of the questions. If you are uncomfortable answering a question, you may decline. You are also free to end your participation at any time without penalty.

Possible benefits include an opportunity to share your experience in prison and providing information that may influence future changes.

5. **Alternatives Advantageous to Participants**

Not Applicable.

6. **Participant Payment**

You will not receive payment or compensation for your participation.

7. **Promise of Privacy**
The records of this study will be kept confidential. Your answers will be recorded and kept by the principal investigators in a locked, secured location. Once the recordings have been typed into the primary investigators’ password-protected computer, the recordings will be erased. Your name will not be included in your interview responses. No specific information with identifying information will be used in the write-up. Your name and the names that you mention in your interview will be reduced to one or two initials. Your interview in its entirety will not be used in the final research paper and will not be available to anyone except the researchers and faculty advisors. This informed consent form will be kept separately from any data we collect. At the time of interview you will be assigned an ID number. Only the primary researchers will have access to both your name and ID number. If the results of this study are to be presented or published, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as an individual. All data will be securely stored in a locked cabinet for a minimum of five years following collection. Any potential future use of data will exclude any identifying information.

The researchers must follow Oregon Department of Correction Counseling and Treatment Services reporting regulations. Reportable information includes danger to self or others, abuse of identifiable children, disabled or elderly persons, staff abuse of inmates, escape plans or attempts, and sexual assault.

8. Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Pacific University or the Oregon Department of Corrections. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. If a participant withdraws, the investigators will own the data collected following your initial consent and prior to your withdraw from the study unless you specify to us that you wish for none of your information to be used. Upon completion of the study, all interview materials from study completers and drop-outs will be owned by the investigators at Pacific University and will be securely stored in a locked cabinet for potential future use. Information will be kept for a minimum period of five years following the collection of the data.

9. Compensation and Medical Care

During your participation in this project you are not a Pacific University patient or client, nor will you be receiving psychotherapy as a result of your participation in this study. You will not receive payment or compensation for your participation.

10. Contacts and Questions
The researchers will be happy to answer any questions you may have at any time during the course of the study. If you have further questions, the researchers can be reached at 503-352-2900 or prisonstudy2007@yahoo.com. If you are not satisfied with the answers you receive, please call Pacific University’s Institutional Review Board, at (503) 352 – 2215 to discuss your questions or concerns further. All concerns and questions will be kept in confidence.

12. Statement of Consent

I have read and understand the above. All my questions have been answered. I am 18 years of age or over, fluent in English, and agree to participate in the study. I have been given a copy of this form to keep for my records.

________________________________________
Participant’s Signature
Date

I give my permission for the principal investigator of this study to have access to my file.

_____ Yes          _____ No

________________________________________
Participant’s Signature
Date
Participant contact information:

Street address:  ______________________  
______________________  
______________________

Telephone:  ______________________

Email:   ______________________

This contact information is required in case any issues arise with the study and participants need to be notified and/or to provide participants with the results of the study if they wish.

Would you like to have a summary of the results after the study is completed?  
___Yes _____No

_____________________________________________________________________________

Investigator’s Signature
Date