Brother’s Keeper: Self-Discovery, Social Support, and Rehabilitation through In-Prison Peer Mentorship

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BROTHER’S KEEPER: SELF-DISCOVERY, SOCIAL SUPPORT, AND REHABILITATION THROUGH IN-PRISON PEER MENTORSHIP

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A Dissertation Presented to the
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Appendix H

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Rebekah Zwick, under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Department of Justice and Human Services and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Nova Southeastern University.

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SOCIAL SUPPORT AND IN-PRISON PEER MENTORSHIP

Dedication

The pursuit of my doctorate would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my father, Robert Zwick. He has been an unrelenting corner man throughout my life who deserves some respite from the challenges I have given him. It’s not likely he’ll get it, though.

Wilfredo Garcia, mi casa. His companionship is everything I could ask for.
My sons, Elijah and Asher. They make me proud to know them every day.

Acknowledgment

The inspiration for this study came the moment I walked into a prison classroom and met many of the most extraordinary men it has been my privilege to know. Their passion for personal development inspired my own, and they honored me by their inclusion. My gratitude and admiration is given unconditionally to the men of Sullivan Correctional Facility, Cohorts 2 and 3, and it is given to the participants of my research, presented here anonymously, who shared details of their lives in order to help me better understand their deeply personal journey. Lastly, this research would not have been possible without the encouragement of Jamel Bellamy and the guidance of Joseph Robinson, the navigators of this journey.
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Abstract

Correctional practices in New York State largely support a punishment paradigm, a framework in which men and women are incarcerated to suffer punition, with little consideration given to understanding the causes of criminality or means to rehabilitate the offender. The growing awareness of correctional failures have necessitated efforts to re-evaluate the justice system, with no consensus regarding which rehabilitative methods work. Correctional philosophy and practice provides few substantive opportunities for transformative rehabilitation; therapeutic peer programming to address deficiencies in pro-normative socialization and provide peer support are virtually nonexistent.

For many formerly incarcerated men who build successful lives for themselves within supportive communities, a common thread winds through their institutional experience: peer mentoring by fellow incarcerated men through informal and peer-created programming. This study examined the role that social support by incarcerated peer mentor groups within New York State prisons played in resocializing fellow inmates towards normative behavior and character development. Through interviews with formerly incarcerated violent offenders, this study explored the interpersonal mechanisms that encouraged and nurtured rehabilitation. Focusing on the specific organizations to which they belonged, a more thorough understanding was provided of both how peer mentor groups work, and also why they work independently of other socializing influences, such as family. Through transcendental phenomenological analysis, this research revealed several themes within peer-mentorship experience, and examined the value of these programs for correctional programming.

Keywords: Correctional Programs, Peer Mentorship, Social Capital, Therapeutic Communities, Phenomenology
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

We allow our fellow citizens to be restrained in cages. Illegal when performed by an individual, the practice of government agents, acting on our behalf, is common practice, and common, institutionalized practices are rarely questioned. This response to criminality is often justified by one of three philosophical arguments: it is punitive, in that the person who did bad deserves to suffer harm themselves; it is defensive, in that we protect ourselves by removing the danger; or it is reformative, in that the lawbreaker will emerge with renewed purpose. While we succeed in the first, there is questionable achievement in the second, and systemic failure in the third respect.

What happens behind those bars, for an hour, or for a lifetime, is of little concern to most of us who are complicit in putting them there. They have done a bad thing, and the years that preceded the often inevitable execution of that bad thing are of no interest to us. Ignoring outside influences on our own successes and opportunities, our own entitlements and abilities, we hew to the holographic idea that every child’s life in America holds the same possibilities for self-made success. A clear-eyed look reveals that many Americans are born into a disordered life, with few positive social supports. The social institutions that exist to nurture and support them, to observe and mediate, have failed. Education, once the great equalizer of American opportunity, is no longer. Justice can be bought, or bargained for, with a better attorney or a police window decal.

The institutions which should assist many of us have instead failed at one or twenty turns on another’s path to dysfunction. The adult they become acts outside of social norms, bearing the weight of their inability to achieve personal or material success through legitimate means. Stabilizing institutions have systematically been dismantled, from intellectually challenging
The fact of this increasing inequality calls our moral authority into question, and we respond by labeling bad behavior an ethical choice made by people who surely had options, because the illusion of choice is an important value. Mainstream society further retreats into denial of our own complicity in nurturing criminality. When we are deviant ourselves, we are quick to provide a justification. Our excuse does not right the scales of justice, but opens the door of forgiveness. Our mother or lover or God will believe us redeemable and retrainable. This research will investigate one way in which prisoners redeem and retrain themselves, when we have refused to provide the support to do so.

Background

Over 22,000 people were released from New York State prisons in 2016 (Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, 2016) having been duly immured and castigated. They return to our communities as neighbors, parents, activists, business owners and, with some frequency, as recidivists. Having given the state moral agency to confine citizens for decades, stripping them of constitutional and human rights, it is necessary to ensure their rehabilitation while incarcerated and support those components which allow for affirmative regeneration. While the corrections branch of criminal justice is responsible for correcting deviant behavior, it frequently fails to provide the means to individual reform. The support networks for positive character development often falls to the inmates themselves, and the peer groups with whom they associate. This proposed research study will hope to demonstrate that peer mentoring groups...
in prison provide an unparalleled mechanism for personal rediscovery and redirection towards enriched and pro-social living.

New York State incarcerates approximately 49,500 men and women in state prisons as of May 2018. Of those, over six thousand, roughly 12%, are imprisoned for homicide (Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, 2018; O’Brien, 2016). New York State recidivism hovers between 24% and 76%, considering type of crime and depending on the inclusion of parole violations. Across fifteen states surveyed, only 1% of men with homicide convictions committed another murder upon release (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002). Between 1985 and 2009, 2,130 individuals sentenced for homicide were released in New York, and just 47 were returned with a new conviction, none of which were murder (Murphy, 2015). Although the lowest recidivism rate for all criminals is for those convicted of homicide, they are the ones least likely to be released, often due to the stigma of the initial offense. For perspective, about 82% of property offenders are re-arrested, and of those 6,000 drug offenders granted clemency by President Obama in October of 2015, statistical probability suggests about 77% will be rearrested for dealing drugs (National Institutes of Justice, 2014).

There is a concept of “totality” in law, later extended to “totality of circumstances” in the criminal justice context (Moore, 1983). Moore notes that under this approach, the many factors of each case must be addressed individually (p 1264). From a sociological perspective, this appears to be the most desirable stage for both sentencing and parole judgments. However, while the details of the criminal act will be considered in their entirety, the totality of the defendant’s circumstances- particularly the socializing influences that contributed to criminality- are often a footnote, if considered at all. Considering the primacy of context in criminal justice decisions, social-environmental influences on criminality must be examined, especially peer influences.
One of these influences exist within the confines of prison: formal therapeutic communities (TC). These developed in prisons in the 1960’s to reduce recidivism and support comprehensive behavioral changes, specifically providing clinical intervention to substance abusers while incarcerated (Wexler, 1995; Wexler & Lipton, 1993). A handful of states currently utilize them to provide peer support for addiction issues. Notably, California has seen great success with their ‘Our House‘ program to address and eliminate addiction with an 81% post-release aftercare rate, resulting in recidivism rates of 27%, compared to 75% of other groups (Wexler, et al., 1999). These communities provide new standards of social and personal expectations that encourage participants towards positive character development. Prisoners evaluate their performance against these new standards, generating self-motivation and self-efficacy: a bulwark against anomie.

What follows is a discussion of the unique need for therapeutic communities in prison that are organized and facilitated by prison peers, and the support needs of prisoners that are met by the unique makeup of these groups. The significance of these groups in resocializing and reorienting prisoners towards pro-social character development is overlooked, if addressed at all, in most correctional studies. The purpose of the proposed research study will here be outlined.

Statement of the Problem

This study examined the self-story that former offenders created for themselves through a process of resocialization and character development found in the support networks of peer mentorship groups. Several counseling and remedial programs function within the New York State correctional system to address spiritual and emotional growth, vocational, academic training, and other targeted areas of personal need. There is no institutional support for the peer-based therapeutic communities that address self-story narratives and facilitate transformative
character reformation, independent of substance abuse or other criminogenic issues.

**Purpose of the Study**

The intent of this study is to demonstrate the powerful rehabilitative impact of in-prison peer mentorship groups on the reorienting of prisoners towards normative and pro-social behavior. The influence of these groups is discrete from other variables and provides a socializing influence that nurtures positive character. The field of psychology has long produced a substantial body of evidence to demonstrate the effect of personality traits on significant life outcomes, including social and financial success, physical health and aging (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Casp, & Goldberg, 2007). While multiple studies have recently provided evidence that character traits can continue to change and develop well into old age (Roberts, Luo, Briley, Chow, & Su, 2017), what is less researched are the techniques used to affect character change. Within the context of clinical therapeutic intervention, the topic of personality trait change has been considered. There is a lack of research, however, on the mechanisms and methodology of peer-based therapeutic intervention in a prison environment for addressing criminality, and redeveloping character towards self-efficacy and pro-social behavior. Correctional endeavors should consider all opportunities for rehabilitation.

**Rationale, Relevance, and Significance**

Bad behavior, and the attendant punishment, is a social construct that we are evidently committed to despite a failure rate, in the form of recidivism, that suggests America should reconsider the entirety of the criminal justice system. Clearly, prisons are not adequately serving as reformatories. Delaware inmates, taking hostages in January of 2017 demanded, “Education first and foremost…and a rehabilitation program that works for everybody” (Berman & Mettler, 2017). Prison programming in New York State varies between institutions, both in availability
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and quality. While there is general agreement that focused treatment should be provided for inmates to improve literacy, provide anti-violence training, address substance-abuse issues and sexual criminality, access to advanced education and is neither widely available nor institutionally supported. Additionally, therapeutic peer programming to address deficiencies in pro-normative socialization and provide peer support are virtually nonexistent.

However, for many men convicted of homicide who are released and build successful lives for themselves within supportive communities, a common thread winds through their institutional experience: peer mentoring by fellow inmates through informal and prisoner-created programming. New York State continues to incarcerate rehabilitated and community-ready violent offenders past the completion of their minimum sentence, and their often remarkable character development in prison is frequently trivialized and not substantively considered at parole hearings.

This study considered peer mentorship in prison and the way in which mentorship and the therapeutic communities of fellow prisoners counter the maladaptive socialization and anomie that led to criminal behavior. It examined the ways in which character changes result from the strengths-based treatment of peer mentorship, and how social capital is nurtured by the group while simultaneously contributing to fundamental personal change.

Lack of self-efficacy is symptomatic of anomie, and learned behavior as a result of strain contributes to criminality (Rosenfeld, Messner, & Baumer, p 300). Peer mentorship provides an opportunity for resocialization that guides future responses to social norms. As Bandura (1971) noted, it is by observing others that new patterns of behavior emerge, “and on later occasions the symbolic construction serves as a guide for action” (p 192).

These groups instill prisoners with new self-narratives, pro-social behaviors and
increased self-efficacy. The peer mentors demonstrate new roles and responses that stand as opposition and alternative to self- and socially destructive behavior. The research will demonstrate the efficacy of peer mentorship is countering the anomic conditions that gave rise to criminality.

Self-story identity narratives speak powerfully to socializing factors, and explanations for criminality. Yet these stories can be re-written in prison (Haley, 1964; Sengour, 2013; Robinson, 2007). Although much is known about how addiction-centered therapeutic communities work, little is known about why they work in prisons, and the ways in which, independent of substance-abuse issues, self-story is altered, and character rebuilt.

Mentoring can exist in varying developmental stages. Wherever there is one positive role model speaking to a struggling peer, the potential for transformation exists. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that peer-supported communities provide a model for socialization and civic re-engagement deserving of unconditional institutional support. Developing research on the explanatory mechanisms of behavioral and character development towards pro-social behavior and reduced recidivism should be, ultimately, the goal of all correctional investigations. This research will demonstrate the capacity of peer mentorship groups to fundamentally reconstruct prison members’ socialization, thus transforming not only prisoners, but prisons themselves.

Rehabilitated inmates demonstrate each day the results of their self-reconstruction, and have an established credibility for mentoring that no staff member can claim. Peer mentors exemplify critical introspection, self-efficacy, and personal empowerment that correlate directly to a transition to a fulfilling life, even behind prison bars. There is also evidence to support the theory that peer-mentoring groups directly correlate to post-release community involvement, mentoring, and altruism. It is incumbent on criminal justice stakeholders to investigate ways in
which prisoners self-rehabilitate without institutional direction or support, notably peer-mentoring.

Significantly, the correlation between those who commit crimes, and those who have been excluded from legitimate means of attaining cultural ideals, was noted prior to our nation’s founding, and continues in studies of anomie today (Beccaria, 1764; Merton, 1938; Messier, Thome, & Rosenfeld, 2008). We are either socialized into pro-social behaviors, or not. We either accept and cultivate them, or we reject them. It is this rejection of enculturated anomie, and the rebuilding of resilient and integrated men to whom mentoring communities direct their energy.

The idea of cultural malintegration as a causal factor of anti-social behavior has also been sufficiently explored, framed within social control theory (Hirschi, 1969; Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson & Laub, 1993). The nature of criminal behavior presupposes a failure of the offender’s socialization into normative and socially acceptable behaviors. While a general theory of crime posits lack of self-control as the common variable of criminality (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), the theory does not adequately consider powerful environmental influences as well as learned behavior, and the anomic conditions that arise as a result of social strain (Agnew, 1992; 2006).

We are instead presented with an individual unable to access the constellation of traditional supports and safety nets of social structures. Criminal behavior does not appear fully armored like Athena from the forehead of Zeus. Rather it is birthed in the absence of pro-social mechanisms that nurture and direct positive action. Excluding criminal behavior resultant from mental illness or other physiological issues, social offenses occur when an individual justifies their unlawful act as a legitimate response to social expectations of success, and institutional means are blocked. Effective peer rehabilitation, with pro-social civic-mindedness at its core, is necessary, then, to render such acts as unjustifiable.
American culture often values material wealth and consumption over intellect and altruism. Individuals who are socialized into the dominant cultural paradigm of material success expect that same achievement for themselves. For many, however, the opportunity for sound education and gainful employment are not available, and traditional means to financial achievement and stability are too often inaccessible. In addition, the socializing variables of family and environment, responsible for modeling behavior, are absent or dysfunctional. These individuals, in the pursuit of success and security, may find themselves engaged in criminal behavior to settle debts, protect what is theirs, and earn a living. Consequently, they are incarcerated, removed from the society whose norms they at once emulated and violated. When equal opportunities for legitimate advancement are unavailable or impossible to obtain, we have failed the very premise of our democratic nation. It is easier to ignore this reality than confront the fact that criminality is virtually unavoidable for some.

The concept of rehabilitation in prison is as old as American prisons themselves. From the first Quaker reformatories to the state penitentiaries of the 1970’s, prison superintendents were often fully committed to the amendment of character. Corporally and spiritually removed from society, the body of the prisoner becomes a body belonging to the state and wholly within governmental control, a concept otherwise antithetical to our most fundamental protections against government interference. Imprisonment is the ultimate form of social control, and exists in defiance of our political ideal. For years, corrections philosophies used rehabilitative programs as a cornerstone of incarceration; the thinking was, “We are in possession of the bodies of men, whose minds are most in need of focus, intellectual challenge, and values. Now is the opportunity to retrain them into more productive citizens.” This belief devolved over the past forty years, the final coffin nail being driven with the tough-on-crime legislation of the early
1990’s and is now, only barely, beginning to again take root in the consciousness of the populace, if not policymakers.

Opportunity is a fundamental premise of democracy: self-determination and hard-work lead to opportunity and redemption. Yet we have difficulty in defining opportunity, and, increasingly, a resistance to ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to the same foundations of self-determination. There is disparity in educational opportunities for youth, and disparity in employment opportunities for adults. We want forgiveness for ourselves: a 2010 poll indicated 64% of Americans “need more forgiveness in their personal lives” (Fetzer, 2010). Curiously, the same percentage that says they would not forgive marital infidelity (Jones, 2008).

Simultaneously, 60% also believed “forgiving someone would first depend on the offender apologizing and making changes.” In addition, 41% believe murder should never be forgiven; unsurprising considering that 91% felt we are becoming “more fearful and violent” (Fetzer, 2010). Forgiveness, it seems, is a deeply personal, and often contradictory, concept. In the absence of an institutionalized means of acknowledging redemption and providing legitimate opportunity, punishment is a much simpler alternative. Yet conditional compassion is antithetical to our cultural ideals. Democracy requires empathy; social control requires only law and its codified response.

Many prisoners are well rehabilitated and would be a vital asset to their community if they were released. Yet they are repeatedly denied parole due to the violent nature of their offense, often committed decades earlier. For a New York State inmate to be released, their re-socialization and rehabilitation must be- somehow- demonstrable. According to the New York State Parole Board Handbook provided to prisoners, the requirements for an initial parole board appearance include “parole readiness”: 
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It is important that you demonstrate good prison behavior throughout your period of incarceration. Becoming involved in prison programming offers you an opportunity to improve your education and acquire new skills. For example, there are programs provided by DOCS which include substance abuse counseling, as well as education and self-help groups. Such programs may help you learn how to cope with drug and alcohol problems upon your release. There are many opportunities in prison for you to learn more about yourself and to make important strides in self-improvement. Correction Counselors and facility Parole Officers can advise you about becoming “release ready” and using your time in prison to your best advantage (Parole Handbook, 2007).

The guide further advises inmates that the board will examine their criminal history as well as “institutional adjustment” including disciplinary record while incarcerated.

Two variables are noticeably absent from any New York State material provided either to inmates or the general public that bear directly and harshly on the possibility of parole. First, opportunities for self-improvement, vocational training or education vary widely between prisons, with many providing only the minimum requirement for drug and alcohol counseling. Often, programs ranging from religious instruction to anti-violence therapy are provided by volunteers, if at all. And whereas remedial education is available in all 58 facilities (the purpose of which to ensure that all prisoners are functioning at a 6th grade level), college courses are available in only 20 prisons (Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Education Programs, 2015). Whereas some prisons have a singular vocational training program such as Puppies Behind Bars, others have none. Importantly, the Department of Corrections website lists vocational programs that are misleading or non-existent. Sullivan Correctional, for example, lists Custodial Services and Welding as two options (Department of Corrections and Community
Supervision Program Services, 2015). Welding, offered to a limited number of inmates under the supervision of one employee, ended two years ago when that employee retired. “Custodial services” training is a position in a hallway, bucket and mop in hand. Regardless of availability or efficacy, vocational training and self-improvement remain variables in release consideration.

Board guidelines mandate that, at the time of parole review, the board consider: “the institutional record, including program goals and accomplishments, academic achievements, vocational education training or work assignments, therapy and [interpersonal relationships] interactions with staff and inmates” (New York Board of Parole, n.d.). Work, fundamental to democracy, is neither expected nor actively encouraged in prison. Yet, even a scholar of retributive justice acknowledges the primacy of labor in demonstrating a changed character: R.A. Duff (2003) pointed out that work is critical to both punishment and rehabilitation: “The offender undertake(s) these hours of burdensome work, itself communicates to the offender the community’s formal judgment...and can thus help to induce or to strengthen a repentant understanding of the crime as a wrong against her community.”

Most critically, the “nature of the crime” is always taken into consideration. This is an element of the hearing when a board member recounts the precise details of the crime and then states parole is not possible, in light of the (usually violent) nature of the crime. Yet, the prisoner was already sentenced by a judge for the crime, the nature of which was taken into full account at the time of sentencing. The crime remains an immutable fact. Richard Bartlett, a former judge and Assemblyman, observed of the state’s parole board: “It is not the function of the board to review the appropriateness of the sentence. That is for the court to decide. Their role is to determine the suitability of release based on the inmate’s behavior while imprisoned and the likelihood of their reoffending” (Murphy, 2015).
The New York State parole board is unlikely to even release prisoners who have statistically aged out of the likelihood of re-offending. Among older A1 felons who came before the board in 2014, six of the 11 who were older than 80, and 48 of the 59 who were aged 70 to 79, were denied parole. An example of the elders is that of Mohaman Koti, who the board determined was, “At risk to commit another crime, and ... create disrespect for the law” in denying him parole in 2013. At that time, Mohaman was 85 years old, with multiple medical problems and confined to a wheelchair. Sentenced to 25 years to life in 1978, he had been in prison for 35 years and had a low risk assessment and positive record (Murphy, 2015). The Board’s decision was overturned on appeal, and Mr. Koti was eventually released. He has not re-offended. Ultimately, the quandary put before parole board members is how to determine what has become of the mind of the offender, in carcere, and to judge the penitent’s readiness for public living. This quandary can be mediated by considering those methods in prison which contribute to significant personal change.

**Barriers and Issues**

In researching the individual experience within a group context, a barrier could have been in locating a significant sample size that nonetheless does not represent a homogenous cohort. For this study, it was necessary to locate and interview men who shared the experience of group mentorship, yet not all within the same communal group or correctional facility. There are several iterations of mentoring groups, and locating participants to represent a range of experience could have been challenging.

A barrier confronting the researcher was the potential unwillingness of participants to revisit a difficult period of their lives and one that many formerly incarcerated men would prefer to put behind them. The participants in this research have developed themselves as accomplished
people, and a chasm often exists between the dysfunctional person they once were and the flourishing men they are today. For this reason, the researcher anticipated the necessity of follow-up interviews or phone calls subsequent to the initial interview. It was possible that the nature of an introspective interview would prompt further personal deliberation or insight that may add to the totality of the experience which they initially described.

**Ethical Issues and Concerns**

Engaging in any study of people raises ethical concerns regarding how the data is collected and the ways in which findings are reported. While this research focused on the narratives of men who were incarcerated in New York State prisoners, the subjects are *former* prisoners, and no longer considered members of a vulnerable population. Furthermore, the subjects are currently employed and in supportive communities; this social standing reduces the imbalance of power that may arise between researcher and participant. Interviews took place in informal settings and not an academic environment, and there was no compensation for their time. The American Psychological Association Publication Manual (2001) guidelines for conducting ethical studies will be used, and all participants received a statement of confidentiality. They were additionally provided with contact information for Nova Southeastern University if they had any questions or concerns about the study or my conduct (Appendix B).

**Definition of Terms**

In this study, terms may be used whose meaning changes within the specific context of this research, or are unfamiliar to a general audience. The following terms have specific definitions:

**Anomie.** The word derives from the Greek ἀνομία, “lawlessness”. The sociologist Emile Durkheim examined the social (as opposed to personal) causes of suicide, and referenced ‘anomy’ as a failure of norms to support individual needs: “No living being can be happy or even exist
unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned to his means” (Durkheim, p 246). The term is used in sociology to describe “a state of confusion or normlessness…when the social norms and values governing daily conduct change suddenly, people are liable to feel disoriented and purposelessness until a social order is re-established” (Thorpe & Yuill, 2015). This devaluing of traditional ideals and creation of new “social orders” is fundamental to many sociological theories of crime and deviance.

**Therapeutic Communities.** Therapeutic communities have existed throughout history, wherever groups of people exist to “teach, heal, and support” (DeLeon, 2000). George DeLeon, a pioneer in the field, notes that today, TC’s exist in two forms: within, and outside of, mental hospitals where social psychiatrists use innovative approaches. Second, TC’s are community-based residential treatment programs for alcoholics and addicts (p 11). A core function of these communities is to facilitate behavioral modification. For the purposes of this research, therapeutic communities will be used interchangeably with the peer mentorship groups within prisons that exist to support and nurture its members towards positive behavior and attitudes, and a rewriting of each man’s personal narrative.

**Character Development and Self-Story Narrative.** There is an idea, fundamental to sociological training, that we each develop into the person we are predicated not only on our experiences, but on the stories we tell ourselves about the meaning of those experiences. We may value ourselves according to how we believe others see us (Cooley) and we make decisions and choices predicated on the elements of culture we have been exposed to (Bourdieu). Criminality is but one example of how we react to our environment rooted in the foundation of our character, (Merton). There is a growing body of research in which former offenders who delve deeply into the roots of their character, and conscientiously create a new self-story, not only desist from
criminality, but achieve personal success, beyond the average citizen. This narrative is one in which the former prisoner is positive, pro-social, reflective, and community oriented.

**Summary**

Men who were socialized into maladaptive and anomic environments committed crimes in response to obstacles to legitimate means of cultural success. Once incarcerated, society is presented with a unique opportunity to resocialize antisocial behavior, and rebuild damaged character. Often, proactive structural supports are absent, and in the absence of productive institutional conditioning, prisoners receive pro-social mentoring from fellow prisoners. Often, these relationships grow to form therapeutic communities. These relationships are not formally recognized by the institutions and when the communities are acknowledged, receive no institutional support. If these communities can be shown to have a positive impact on individual self-efficacy and reduced recidivism, they would be provided formal support as an important avenue for rehabilitation.

Democracy insists that we articulate the society we want, and the contributions we will demand of our members. We articulate values of redemption, education, and hard work, and compose laws to ensure equal accessibility to those opportunities. Simultaneously, we dismiss the structural and social barriers to achievement that manifest in institutional anomie and resultant criminality (Messner, Thome, & Rosenfeld, 2008). The formal social control of criminal justice comes when all other mechanisms have failed, and the body of the offender is placed behind bars. When systems arise organically to reintroduce pro-social norms, to encourage and redirect that individual towards a successful and integrated life, they must be studied, encouraged, and valued. Correctly evaluated, these mechanisms for supporting peer organizations will translate into effective policy for rehabilitation.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Investigations into correctional practices immediately confront competing perspectives: corrections as rehabilitative, corrections as punitive, or an attempt to effectively combine the two. It is difficult to consider most elements of American criminal justice without acknowledging one or the other lens as a filter through which penal institutions are administered. In reviewing literature relating to prison programming, themes arise which also mirror these theoretical orientations. Programs may be enacted to address proven contributors to criminality, such as alcohol abuse or poor self-control as manifest in patterns of violence, as a means of halting or managing those behaviors. Programs, and their attendant policy, are also put in place to discipline and punish men. Educational courses may be permitted, or they be unavailable. Vocational training may be substantive and instructive, or it may be pushing a mop for eight hours. Administration may encourage group meetings which are nurturing and supportive, or they may place obstacles to gathering privately.

There is a great deal of literature researching the benefits, as often measured in reduced recidivism rates, of correctional education, and there is a growing body of research exploring programs that don’t work such as solitary confinement and juvenile detention. There is, however, an absence of literature specifically addressing the way in which incarcerated peers influence prisoners in benevolent and transformative ways.

Throughout New York State correctional facilities, informal prisoner-led groups and communities have developed that profoundly influence the reformation of incarcerated men. Many of these men lacked positive environmental supports prior to conviction, which they then discovered in prison. Upon reentry, these men not only desist from crime, but meaningfully
contribute to their communities. It is then posited that prison-peer mentors act as a primary mechanism to rehabilitation and eventual desistance from crime, and that these groups allow the men to create a new self-story narrative in which they are healthy, productive, and engaged citizens.

In reviewing the available research, mentorship groups that referenced substance abuse or sexual abuse as their denominator were excluded. Additionally, studies exploring female or juvenile cohorts were not considered. Although this study examines violent offenders specifically, it was necessary to include work that observed non-violent offenders, as there is a lack of prior research of violent offenders in New York State who participated in the therapeutic programming of interest. This is also the explanation for the limited inclusion of European research.

This review of the literature is divided into three sections. The first section addresses lack of pro-social support, otherwise defined as positive social capital, as a causal mechanism for criminality. The second section addresses therapeutic communities, and peer-mentoring programs in prison and recidivism. The third section addresses Merton’s strain theory of criminality, developing from anomic; Maruna’s development of Cooley’s self-story and identity narratives; Cullen’s proposition of social support as an organizing principle of criminology, and Bourdieu’s analysis of power development through peer relationships. Together these ideas provide the conceptual framework for the addressing the research question of how prisoner mentors amend the prior paucity of support; if, in fact, peer mentoring programs provide an effective foundation for reintegration to pro-social norms; and lastly, what, if any, the intervening mechanisms through which social capital influences desistance from criminality.

Scholarly articles and peer-reviewed research on these topics were located using the
databases of ProQuest, EBSCO, JStor, and the National Criminal Justice Reference Service. Terms used to search these databases were: rehabilitation in prison, therapeutic communities, prison peer mentorship, peer relationships in prison, social capital, and social support. Because prisons function as total institutions, the singularly unique web of interpersonal relationships must be examined primarily through that lens. For this reason, database search terms were limited to research conducted with currently- or formerly justice system involved individuals groups only. Additionally, some work of classic and contemporary criminologists and legal scholars has been included to illuminate the development of societal attitudes and the institutional response. It is necessary to examine the roots of our prosecutorial and punitive inclinations, and the inclusion of fictional writers addresses, briefly, the social response to deviance and accountability.

Social Support

The way in which criminal behaviors are culturally transmitted is fundamental to sociological inquiry. Rooted in the Chicago School’s theories of social disorganization and social control are the first explanations for criminality (Bulmer, 1984), and have been illustrated in environments where disordered family and community controls contribute to delinquency and crime (Sullivan, 1989). Though not explicitly addressed by the leaders of that field, Cullen (1994) observed that in fact, the Chicago School writings suggest that lack of social support- not only exposure to criminal influences or a lack of control- is a critical component of criminality (p 528). This concept may be used interchangeably with social capital, defined by Colman (1990) as “the set of resources that inheres in family relations and in community social organization” (p 300). It is a public good, and a bonding agent through which people are held together though mutual trust and collective actions (Colman, 1988).
Social support is “the perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners” (Lin, 1986, p 18). It can be used for material gains, as well to receive emotional support, and “reaching an understanding on issues and problems, and affirming one’s own as well as the other’s worth and dignity” (Lin, p 20). Evidence suggests that people can, and do, change criminal behavioral patterns as they age, most often under the influence of pro-social guidance (Laub & Sampson, 2003). This peer mentor has recently come to be called a “credible messenger”.

America has higher rates of serious crimes than comparable countries because it is, in fact, a less supportive society in general (Cullen, 1994), measured, for example, by our low volunteerism rates, and our “compassion fatigue” towards the underprivileged (Wuthnow, 1991; Currie, 1985). The failure of bonding support, and lack of communal trust and action, may lead to crime. Indeed, low levels of social capital have been shown to be the strongest predictor of homicide in some communities (Putnam, 2001; Pratt & Godsey, 2003). Interested in testing a core proposition of criminological theory, the analysis of Pratt and Godsey (2003) investigated three issues:

“1. whether social support and economic inequality maintain significant independent effects on homicide rates;

2. whether controlling for the effects of whether social support or economic inequality moderate the effects for either variable; and

3. whether there is a significant interaction effect between social support and economic inequality on homicide rates in the cross-national setting” (p 613).

The authors examined the homicide rates, as the dependent variable, of 46 countries against the percent of each nation’s GDP spent on health care as the independent variable. This
indicator of social support was used according to the authors belief that “social collectives will afford social institutions that, when emphasized, may combat the criminogenic effects of certain social-structural arrangements” (p 621). Their findings demonstrated that indeed, a positive correlation exists between economic inequality, lack of health care, and the homicide rate.

Utilizing health care as an indicator of whole-society support is useful, but does not account for the interpersonal dynamics that contribute to deviant behavior or desistance from the same. There is a lack of research providing a measurable mechanism by which to gauge the efficacy of specific social variables on desistance from criminal recidivism. Regardless, the Pratt and Godsey (2003) study demonstrates the payoff when a society commits to nurturing the well-being of its members. It has been observed that health-related issues influence social development (Currie, 1998); American society hesitates to correlate this support to reduced crime.

Correlations are also found between generalized social trust and civil engagement and low homicide rates (Rosenfeld et al., 2001) and evidence that individual social ties positively influence a person’s willingness to engage in informal social control actions (Wickes et al., 2017). Cullen (1994) notes that communities with low adult surveillance inhibits the ability of both youths and adults to develop close relationships (p 535); the erosion of community social institutions inhibits their ability to provide social support. Hagan (1993) observes that in the past, these institutions and attendant relationships buffered youth from destructive institutional or social forces: “The old heads were respected older women and men…who as guides and role models, encouraged youth to invest in conventional culture” (p 329). While Elijah Anderson noted the decline of “honesty, independence, hard work and family values” (p 70), Hagan
observes that this creates a “form of cultural divestment” (p 329), when the young deride “old-school” values and lose the opportunity for mentorship and strengthened community bonds.

As these communities have fallen into disarray, so have the traditional supports (Brisson & Usher, 2005). Cullen (1994) proposes “social support as an organizing concept” for interpreting criminality, contending that whether that relationship is within government programs, families, or agents of the criminal justice system, “it reduces criminal involvement” (p 527). Support of community members, not punitive measures, is integral to reducing criminal behavior (Cullen, 1994; Clone & DeHart, 2014). The growing movement of left realism in criminology places the organization of communities in pre-empting crime solidly at the start of any solution to reducing criminality (Lea & Young, 1994).

**Therapeutic and Peer-Mentoring Programs and Recidivism**

Bandura observed that reimagining our ability to learn and self-motivate “has major implications for the mechanisms through which therapeutic procedures alter behavioral functioning” (1977, p 193). The therapeutic community (TC) method addresses the support needs of the whole person, with peers as mentoring conduits for character change (DeLeon, 2000; Bandura, 1977). Therapeutic communities currently operate in a variety of criminal justice institutions, primarily for substance abuse and other addictive behaviors. Available literature examining these communities has primarily addressed issues of addictions and other dependency behaviors. Seeking to influence “behavior modification, emotional and psychological development, intellectual and spiritual growth, vocational and educational growth, and life coping skills” (Cook, et al., 2008), peer-based interventions, where prisoners provide emotional support and advice, have reduced recidivism rates for ex-offenders with substance abuse histories (Cook, 2008; Wexler et al., 1999; Knight et al., 1999; Patel, 2010; Levenson et al.,
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2013). A 2002 study in the UK estimated that seven percent of incarcerated men provided peer mentorship to fellow inmates, in part due to their unique ability to connect with a population often resistant to professional intervention (Levenson, 2002).

Additionally, college education programs in prison, which function as an intellectually supportive community, have consistently graduated ex-offenders with dramatically reduced recidivism rates (US Department of Justice, 2016; Kim & Clark, 2013; Chappell, 2004; Davis et al., 2013). Cognitive-behavioral therapy in group-directed regimens has been found to reduce recidivism (Aos et al., 2006), and peer interventions have contributed to overall improved mental health in prison (Bagnall et al., 2015). Bandura (1971) noted that by observing others, “one forms a conception of how new behavior patterns are performed, and on later occasions the symbolic construction serves as a guide for action.” However, therapeutic and peer-mentoring programs functioning solely for the purpose of establishing pro-social normative behaviors have not been formalized or researched in New York State. There is, therefore, a lack of research examining the efficacy of in-prison peer mentoring in addressing negative coping mechanisms such as violence or propensity for criminality. The ability of American in-prison peer mentoring programs for social support have not been studied as a discrete variable in encouraging active citizenship and desistance from crime.

Conceptual Framework

This study was built on the assumption that some incarcerated men experience a character transformation while participating in prison-peer mentoring groups. Fundamental to this change are two elements: the social support found in these groups, a normative social inclusion that was lacking during their stage of criminal behavior, and the self-creation of a new personal narrative for each man.
The Importance of Support

In his 1994 presidential address to the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Francis Cullen stated his contention not only that social support is a critical element in reducing criminal involvement, but that the lack of supportive groups is criminogenic (p 534). The research by Sampson and Groves (1986; 1989), in particular, demonstrates that communities lacking strong family and peer bonds have higher rates of crime. Noting that it is “unclear why these variables are measures of control and not of support” (p 535), Cullen speaks to the lack of data specifically examining peer support and desistance from crime.

The study explored the elements of the rehabilitative process of peer mentorship using several theories for its conceptual framework. The concept of social control is different than social support, but in the absence of relevant significant social support as a variable for crime desistance, data investigating social controls were referenced. Social capital is an additional concept that can be used, imperfectly, as a placeholder for variables of social support. Social obligations are social capital, interpersonal relationships which have an ability to generate something profitable (Bourdieu, 1986). These resources form a solid network which provides “a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them” (p 247). The analysis enlightens the hidden ways in which peer relationships nurture perspective and opportunity.

Anomie

Merton’s strain theory is used to frame criminality as a way of achieving socially accepted goals when the legitimate means to do so are blocked. Juvenile delinquents as well as gang members have been observed creating new systems of subcultural norms and values of achievement not in defiance of mainstream culture, but rather because traditional and legal
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methods are unavailable to them (Sullivan, 1989; Padilla, 1992; Moore, 1991). Messner and Rosenfeld’s theory of institutional anomie focuses on structure and studies document that those illegitimate means develop when there are weakened social controls (2001; Stults & Baumer, 2008; Bjerragaard & Cochran, 2008).

The inability for many individuals to integrate into mainstream venues has been found to contribute to recidivism; the normlessness that awaits prisoners upon release is unchanged from the environment that supported their criminality (Howerton et al., 2009). Howerton et al. observed among thirty-five UK prisoners that for some, prison provided a support network that is absent in their outside communities (458). Without the social support to mentor inner development and a renewed sense of pro-social personal values, the former inmates felt recidivism was inevitable. One explained that, “I’ve not got nothing to lose anyway, really, have I? I’ve got no flat to lose, I’ve got no job to lose” (448). In her study, the repeating failures of living in a free society are a result of reentering a world where achieving outward personal success is thwarted by myriad social obstacles.

Self-Story Narratives

George Horton Cooley was the first sociologist to recognize that the self evolves in response to symbolic communication with other people, and observed that people create a picture of themselves predicated on how they believe others see them. This process, which he called the looking glass self (1902), is the most important influence in shaping an individual’s attitudes about themselves and the environment around them. We build narratives about our life, not only to align with the script of cultural expectations, but also according to how we believe other people will judge us, accept us, and love us. Indeed, the motivation to recreate self-stories involves standards by which we evaluate ourselves and our social performances (Bandura, 1977).
Visher and Travis (2003) observed that the foundation of all successful transitions from incarceration to well-adjusted citizenship is the deeply personal willingness to change themselves. “This decision sets in motion an identity transformation and a script for explaining one’s current identity and previous behavior” (p 98). Maruna (2001), in seeking out desistance stories, discovered that ex-offenders rebuilt their lives around new personal narratives and the complex process of “going straight”. One participant, at the start of this process noted that, “I’m a thief, but if there was some other way, I’d do that. I guess I’m just a thief- no more, no less” (p 75). Using data from the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS), Maruna found that “making good” was about the redemption of self through the process of self-discovery, rather than problems in his social environment. Recreating personal narratives, however, cannot exclude acknowledgement of environmental influences from the development of self and attendant personal choices.

Sampson and Laub (1993) who initially reported that structural factors had primacy over personal ones, acknowledged that personal agency was a major component in desistance and that their subjects were “active participants in constructing their lives” (p 280). Development, defined as life-history change, allows for rehabilitation and renewal of self. This path towards consciously constructing a narrative is expedited and mediated through environmental supports, which include mentorship.

Research Questions

This research examined an unexplored and overlooked element of peer mentorship in prisons. Within many institutional environments, therapeutic communities work; less understood is why and how they work, especially within the total institution that is prison. The goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate that many prisoners have overcome anomie, maladaptive
socialization and institutional obstacles to engage in transformative character education. This
renewal of self was nurtured by peer-mentoring within prison-peer created therapeutic
communities. This research demonstrates that where socio-structural mechanisms failed the
child, the youth, and the adult, peer fellowship has succeeded. The link between mentors, the
shared experiences of mentors and peer, the methodology of interpersonal dynamics, and the
outcome was established to validate and support the work of the therapeutic communities.

Research began with the knowledge that prisoners often experienced anomie in the form of
obstacles to material achievement and lack of pro-social support by family and primary peer
groups. This study is necessary in consideration of the 51,000 people currently incarcerated in
New York State prisons, many of whom are of no risk to the community and would be of better
service to society were they home. Additionally, there is an immediate need for rehabilitative
practices that are demonstrably productive. Organic and self-generated in-prison peer mentoring
communities are an-evidence based resource for character development and reduced recidivism
that has been overlooked. It is incumbent upon scholars to present criminal justice policymakers
with that evidence of programs that work to reduce criminality, prevent recidivism, and return
ex-offenders to the communities and families made more complete by their inclusion.

The central research question asks if the in- prison peer support group is the primary
mechanism for rehabilitation.

Research question one. How do prisoners experience prisoner-peer mentors as mechanisms for
rehabilitation and eventual desistance from crime?

Research question two. Are peer mentoring programs an effective foundation for reintegration
to pro-social norms?

Research question three. What are the intervening mechanisms through which social capital
contributes to desistance from crime?

The first question explored how their message is received in this transformative way.

The second research question looked at the practices of each group, and how they transmitted a message of affirmation and evolution to their members.

The third question asked what other variables are present in an individual’s life that may encourage positive peer mentor influence. Possibilities of social capital in this respect include family, in whichever way the subject interprets that construct, and religious orientation. In addition, the pursuit of educational and vocational advancement as a transformative vehicle was considered as a variable.

The fabric of our lives is woven with influential threads which either nurture and complement positive social values, or suppress and discourage successful conventional integration. Of these socializing factors, peer group influence often replaces or obscures the primary early influences, such as family (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). Each of us, as the product of formative experience, are channeled towards paths of varying opportunities and environmentally influenced choices. That some incarcerated men are provided a vehicle by which they may dramatically change course is an imperative investigation.

**Summary**

Theories of social capital and social support have been used to demonstrate the power of interpersonal connections in obtaining material goods, economic positions, and other constructs of “success” in American society. The ability of these interpersonal connections to guide and nurture pro-social and normative behavior, or encourage deviant attitudes towards self and community, is a critical component of socialization. In general, the absence of positive social support has been addressed as a causal factor in criminal behavior only as a variable for other
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explanations; juvenile delinquency, for example.

In 1994, Francis Cullen outlined a paradigm for the first time in which the lack of social support was considered a primary cause of criminality. There is, therefore, a significant gap in research which considers the lack of social support at the time precipitating the criminal event, and then examines the introduction of social capital, post-incarceration, as a rehabilitative mechanism for pro-social and normative behavior. Social support by peers in prison as a mechanism for resocialization has not been researched in America.

Peer-mentoring programs and therapeutic communities have been shown to be effective in prison settings when used to treat substance abuse issues, and reduce recidivism of both the abuse and other criminal behavior. Higher-education programs in prison have also been shown to reduce recidivism. While peer-mentoring groups that act as social supports exist in New York prisons, exclusive of substance abuse issues, there is no research documenting their methodology or efficacy.

Conceptually, strain theory and anomie provide the foundation for exposing the importance of social support in navigating opportunities and avoiding criminality. Self-story and identity narratives demonstrate that, with reflective mentoring, personality can be changed over time. Lastly, self-efficacy can be developed through peer relationships which accurately address the life experiences of the individual, and provide a supportive community in which to renew.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Approach

The purpose of this study was to interview participants in New York State prison-peer mentor social support groups, post-release, to determine the pro-social and rehabilitative effect of those groups. While many areas of prison programming can be quantitatively analyzed, the experience of prisoners who have benefitted from those groups is best examined on a personal level. Inarguably, the purpose of all prison programming is to reduce recidivism. Researching the role of prison peer mentor groups, the central premise is that these therapeutic communities provided primary social support in re-socializing and rehabilitating violent offenders, and assisting incarcerated men in character development and the rediscovery of their pro-social normative self. This research study was specifically interested in whether these groups functioned as the primary social support mechanism for re-building their normative lives, or if it required an intervening variable, i.e. family.

Data Collection Process

This study was predicated on three foundational research questions, and three subquestions. These questions, and the subsequent inquiry, were used to explore the transformational impact of social support through peer mentorship in prisons. While teaching criminology in a New York State prison, several students shared their positive experiences with peer mentorship in prison. One of those men provided the researcher with the contact information of a formerly incarcerated man who had been active in these groups, designing research and implementing programs for rehabilitation and community involvement. That individual was then contacted, and he agreed to assist in this research. Once research was approved, this individual was interviewed and then recommended another individual who would
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be willing to be interviewed. From this point, a snowball method of locating participants was utilized.

Participants

Once two initial participants were identified, they were asked if they knew of others who either participated in their same peer group or in another mentorship-based group. After each interview, the researcher asked if the interviewee knew of another individual, in another group, who would be interested in participating. Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) observe that the purposeful contacts made through a snowball approach allow the researcher admittance to the experiences of individuals with “low social visibility” (p 152). While formerly incarcerated violent offenders generally maintain a lower social visibility than most people, there does seem to be a network of support and brotherhood that maintains connections and strengthens ties many years post-release.

The difference in qualitative and statistical validity is important, and phenomenological research can be unparalleled in its descriptive ability. Lester (1999) observed that if there is a general principle involved in phenomenological interviewing, “it is that of minimum structure and maximum depth” (p 2). On this foundation of comprehensive elucidation, significant themes developed from a relatively small sample. The snowball approach then continued until a sample size of 10 men were located and interviewed. Interviews were conducted by voluntary participation only. It was expected that the population sample for this study would be ten to fifteen participants. Thirteen were eventually located, and ten interviewed. It was the intention of the researcher to interview members of at least three separate peer-mentor prison groups, and to ensure that the groups do not represent only religious or educational mentorship.

The subjects of this research are men who were formerly incarcerated violent offenders,
and who participated in various peer-mentoring programs while in New York State prisons. Peer mentoring programs are those that are administered, and often created, by fellow prisoners. Some programs have philosophical or religious origins outside of the correctional milieu. Others evolved from the specific needs of the incarcerated. These programs include religion-oriented groups, civic-duty initiative groups, and those that provide anti-violence and therapeutic support. The groups were not identified by name prior to undertaking the study. In addition, the study did not address former prisoners who did not participate in this groups, and yet have not re-offended. Focusing on only one variable of rehabilitation—participation in in-prison peer therapeutic community—this study did not examine or explore the many other variables that contribute to an individual’s decision not to re-commit a crime.

Members of substance-abuse support groups or those focusing on sexual issues as a primary concern were not included. Ex-offenders whose mental illness contributed to criminality were also not considered. Lastly, inmates who graduated from higher-education programs while incarcerated were not interviewed based on their inclusion in those programs alone; the range of coursework in the college curriculum is too broad to be considered a peer-mentor group. The direct influence of college classes on character development and pro-social behaviors is deserving of a separate and focused study.

The participants could have been of any ethnicity, race, or religion, though each man interviewed is African-American. As violent offenders, they had served at least 15 years in prison—the New York State minimum-prior to release, and have been free at least one year. The minimum age of each participant was be 34 years old, and former offenders, on probation at the time of their interview, were not excluded.
While incarcerated, the participating demographic was a unique population; while they are intellectually-able adults, they were considered vulnerable wards of New York State. The methods by which New York State determines how and when to protect this population is a subject deserving of inquiry elsewhere. For the purposes of this research, however, it is enough to know that the state government via legislation, and the Department of Corrections via policy, has determined that prisoners constitute a protected population, able to provide consent for social science research only after academic Institutional Review Board approval, and their own departmental decision to allow said research. The reputation of the Department of Corrections for denying research is one reason that the author had chosen to interview only formerly incarcerated people. A second reason is that while there is much rich information to be gained from interviewing participants in situ, desistance from crime is evident only post-release.

In the event that the researcher was unable to locate ten subjects from three separate types of mentorship groups through a snowball approach, a second method of locating participants would have been used. The researcher has access to a database of approximately five hundred men who fit the subject demographic, yet were all matriculated students in a prison college program. An introductory email would have been sent to this cohort requesting possible subjects who, in addition to their educational programming, participated in peer-mentorship programs. Potential subjects who responded would have been screened to ensure that they met the qualifications stated previously, and a group of fifteen would have been randomly drawn from the remainder.

**Instruments**

Interviews were conducted in person, with a semi-structured format. Interviews were open-ended as a way of encouraging subjects to share their experience fully, and to reconstruct
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their experience in a narrative which is their own, without influence or opinion by the researcher. According to Giorgi (2009), the central endeavor is: “What one seeks from a research interview in phenomenological research is as complete a description as possible of the experience that a participant has lived through” (p 122).

The interview questionnaire was formulated relating to the central research question and interviews were guided to prompt response and encourage discussion. Participants were informed that there were no correct or incorrect answers and they should not feel pressured to answer in any specific manner. Researcher questions, and follow-up questions, were developed in the pilot interview and in response to developing themes.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Once motifs developed, they were organized by theme and coded. Follow-up interviews would have been conducted for elaboration or clarification, as needed. The instrument used to acquire the data was a self-reporting measure, as well as content coded from researcher-subject interviews.

**Interview Questions**

**Research Questions.**

The question script is found in Appendix A. The following questions guided this study:

The central research question asks if the in-prison peer support group is the primary mechanism for rehabilitation.

RQ 1 How do prisoner mentors positively contribute to rehabilitation and eventual desistance from crime?

RQ 2 Are peer mentoring programs an effective foundation for reintegration to pro-social norms?

RQ 3 What are the intervening mechanisms through which social capital contributes to
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desistance from crime?

Subquestions:

1. What are additional or intervening variables of social capital which contribute to pro-
social, normative behavior?

2. Are other variables (i.e., family) of greater influence?

3. What was the methodology of the support group as evidenced in patterns and practices?

Each question was asked as a means of prompting further excavation of the participant’s
experience, with the participant defining concepts and terms that were meaningful to them.

Interpretive Framework

A phenomenological analysis within a qualitative design framework was selected for this
research. This analysis was conducted via intensive interviewing. According to Welman and
Kruger (1999) “the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and
psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved” (p 189). This approach
derives from Edmund Husserl, who “sought to develop a new philosophical method which would
lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization” (Eagleton, 1983, p 54). Put simply, he
believed that only personal accounts of experience and consciousness could be credible.

As a research design, phenomenology allows for the experiences of many individuals to
be described by the participants themselves. The subjects then relate that experience specifically
to the phenomena- transformation through peer mentoring- being studied (Creswell, 2007). A
post-modern perspective is also here employed. The operating premise of post-modernism is that
claims to knowledge are placed in the context of today, and “in the multiple perspectives of
class, race, gender, and other group affiliations” (Creswell, 2007, p 27). This acknowledgement
of race and class variables within a framework of institutionalized power is an important element
in understanding social support within prisons. In this way, qualitative research enables the researcher to “determine the meaning people give to their lives and actions” (Bachman & Schutt, 2014, p 237).

Phenomenological research can be used not only to describe the essence of each experience but also in constructing a mosaic of those meanings. By drawing those interpretations together, the efficacy of the shared group context can be evaluated. This evaluation can be used to inform or challenge institutional policies.

**Role of the Researcher**

In deciding to undertake this study, it was a matter of considering what group of people within the criminal justice system could be better served if their lives were better understood. Life’s experiences nurture one’s intellectual pursuits, and the researcher has a background of observing paths which led to deviant choices. This naturally generated curiosity about the ways in which men choose to redeem themselves and the mechanisms available to support them; a curiosity which necessitates the bracketing of phenomenological inquiry. This researcher, then, began from a theoretical orientation in which criminal behavior is not a “choice” as popularly understood. Rather, it is the inevitable result of disorder and chaos within fundamental socializing experiences.

C. Wright Mills (2000) believed that the most admirable thinkers in sociology do not disassociate their work from their personal lives, and that “the intellectual workman forms his own self as he works towards the perfection of his craft” (p 196). He noted that this demands self-reflection, however, and that researcher bias must be articulated, clarified, and acknowledged. Creswell (2014) suggests that self-reflection “creates an open and honest narrative” (p 202). For this reason, a pattern of reflective analysis has been developed to ensure
that the presentation of prompts does not reproduce subjective conclusions. The researcher in this study brought personal and academic interest in social concepts of forgiveness, redemption, justice, inequality and hypocrisy to bear on any intellectual engagement. It was therefore necessary that the researcher continually evaluated their own participation as an interviewer, and reviewed transcripts to ensure no leading questions were asked.

Englander (2012) observes that keeping descriptive criterion in mind throughout the process is demanding, as it requires the interviewer to shift between “subject-subject and subject-phenomenon relation” (p. 34). However, through “critical, phenomenological reflection upon one’s previous interviews, a researcher can become a more present interviewer” (p. 34).

Data Collection

Interviews were face-to-face and conducted in neutral settings within the New York City boroughs of New York. Each was expected to take an hour and a half to two hours and all fell within that parameter. Follow up interviews would have been conducted in person or face-to-face via Skype as needed; they were not. Field notes were taken, and all interviews were recorded on the researcher’s mobile phone using the recording program, QuickVoice Pro. The researcher has extensive experience in transcribing interviews verbatim, and did so. The transcribed quotes were presented anonymously in the final report, identified as “P1” or “P2”, though subjects are known to the researcher.

Interview protocol ensured that the communication remains focused on the central research question. The underlying philosophical premise of phenomenology guided additional questions as they naturally arose.

The American Psychological Association Publication Manual (2001) guidelines for conducting ethical studies were used, and all participants received a statement of confidentiality.
They were additionally provided with contact information for Nova Southeastern University if they had any questions or concerns about the study or my conduct (Appendix B).

A pilot study with one potential participant was conducted prior to subject interviews to test for time involved, whether the questions were clear, and to identify obvious gaps in information post-interview. The pilot study participant was asked to review each question for clarity post-interview, and asked to make suggestions for methods to ascertain specific or deeper responses. Additionally, and with the pilot-participant’s written permission, a colleague with thirty-five years of investigative questioning was asked to review the pilot participant’s responses, presented anonymously, and note conversational stops where additional prompting would have been helpful. While follow-up interviews would have been acceptable and likely, it is preferable to engage in active listening to improve the quality of the initial interview. In this way, key phrases and words will be easily identifiable and allow for an immediate request for elaboration or clarification.

Researcher bias was considered, and measures were taken to eliminate subjective views that could influence either the direction of interviews or the interpretation of data. Listing possible biases through a process of self-reflection is a method suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2004), which also includes consistent reflexive analysis (p 250).

**Data Analysis**

A transcendental phenomenological analysis within a qualitative design framework was selected for this research. This approach required the researcher to set aside prejudices and use a systematic methodology of data analysis. This setting of bias in transcendental phenomenology is called “epoche,” the concept in Greek for refraining from judgment. This
method is “transcendental” as the researcher sees the phenomenon “freshly, as for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p 34).

This analysis was conducted via intensive interviewing. According to Welman and Kruger (1999) “the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved” (p 189). This approach derives from Edmund Husserl, who “sought to develop a new philosophical method which would lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization” (Eagleton, 1983, p 54). Put simply, he believed that only personal accounts of experience and consciousness could be credible.

As a research design, phenomenology allows for the experiences of many individuals to be described by the participants themselves. The subjects then relate that experience specifically to the phenomena- transformation through peer mentoring- being studied (Creswell, 2007). A post-modern perspective is also here employed. The operating premise of post-modernism is that claims to knowledge are placed in the context of today, and “in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations” (Creswell, 2007, p 27). This acknowledgement of race and class variables within a framework of institutionalized power is an important element in understanding social support within prisons. In this way, qualitative research enables the researcher to “determine the meaning people give to their lives and actions” (Bachman & Schutt, 2014, p 237).

The researcher began the process of phenomenological analysis through epoche, or a bracketing of their own biases and experiences. This was done so that the researcher’s judgements of the phenomena being studied can be set aside and focus given only to the experience as described by the subject. At this point, I reflected on my own experiences with character development and change, as well as the influence of peer mentorship either
individually or in groups. Phenomenological reduction furthers the process of removing perception, and leaves only the essence that is required to analyze the lived experience. Imaginative variation pushes the consciousness further, asking that only those elements most essential be brought to bear on the analysis.

Examining a subject’s perception of the phenomena requires an acknowledgement that consciousness in intentional, as opposed to a product of an experience or caused by an event. It is introspection for the sake of self-awareness only. To access the subject’s perceptions means that the researcher must remain vigilant at holding sidebar experiences and judgements at bay, while still allowing the interviewee to expand on their experience by deepening their own articulation of events.

The analysis and description of the articulated consciousness can be challenging to the researcher as it is at this point when phenomenology requires the experience be described, rather than explained. This type of qualitative material generates a great deal of data, and the report and synthesis requires organization and coding by themes and issues. It is critical that the resulting analysis provide a credible and objective assessment of the participant’s experience.

The researcher then engaged a reflexive process of interpretation and analysis by transcribing each interview and reading carefully through each, taking note of any ways in which the interviewer directed or stunted the subject’s descriptions. It is at this point that each experience as described was reviewed using eidetic reduction to cull the essential phenomena from the lived experience of the phenomena. As Husserl has noted, phenomenology does not investigate the “structure of consciousness, but rather the structures of specific acts of consciousness” (Kaufer & Chemero, p 32). These responses were then operationalized into themes for identifying dominant issues.
Leedy and Ormrod (2002) observe that, “The researcher begins with a large body of information and must, through inductive reasoning, sort and categorize it, and gradually boil it down to a small set of abstract, underlying themes” (p 150).

Themes were organized and coded into five primary categories: Self-story pre-incarceration, with two subcategories of strain and anomie; social support pre-incarceration; therapeutic community peer mentorship memberships in prison; self-story narratives post-peer mentorship group; and post-incarceration support and social capital, with subcategories of those social variables coded elsewhere. In coding, focused areas of inquiry were stated and common themes in individual experience, as they developed, were categorized under the framework of each division. Figure 2 illustrates the themes and the self-reflection requested of each participant. At the same time, the process of horizontalization, one of phenomenological reduction, was considered by the researcher. Mousatkas (1994) points out that regardless how many times an experience is considered or evaluated, “the possibility for discovery is unlimited” (p 96). Therefore, in assigning leitmotifs to individual reflection, it was incumbent on the researcher to remain open to all possible interpretations by the subject and to ensure the authenticity of the resultant themes.

Figure 1 (Edmonds & Kennedy, p 140) demonstrates the transcendental process, and Figure 2 demonstrates the coding design:
Phenomenological Inquiry

Direction for phenomenological research is frequently conceptual; the nature of this methodology is such that wide latitude is provided for the researcher to explore meaning and subjective interpretation of experience according to the process as described by each subject. There are, however, three tools required in the approach of the subject and the subsequent
analysis: epoche, or bracketing; phenomenological reduction; and imaginative variation. The process of eidetic reduction and the imaginative variations will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

Epoche is required to force the researcher to reflect, acknowledge, and set aside their opinions, biases, and personal experiences to listen and evaluate subject testimony as objectively as possible. This step is also referred to as ‘bracketing’- referencing mathematical usage- in order to focus on one element of an equation, other parts of the study are bracketed. This leaves them present, but not examined (Sanders, 1982).

In asking the participants to share their interpretation of their youthful socialization, their current self, their criminality, their incarceration, and the experience of intellectual and emotional growth, it was necessary for the researcher to first engage in a reflective consideration of my own biases and theoretical orientation, and to consider those through the lens of my own development and experiences. Moustakas (1994) observed that, “All things become clear and evident through an intuitive-reflective process, through a transformation of what is seen.” He further noted that by doing so, “we are engaging in a process of functioning intentionality; we uncover the meanings of phenomena” (p.32).

As an adolescent, the researcher was a juvenile delinquent, with personal experience as a defendant in the juvenile justice system and briefly made a ward of the state. She was acutely aware that she was able to redirect her energies to a normative and pro-social life largely due to the cultural and economic resources of her immediate family. Her early experiences with delinquent behavior were cut short by their focused intervention by the time she had reached the legal age of majority. She retained an interest, however, in the social constructs of crime, and the use of authority as an agent of control in America life. She is now a sociologist and a college
instructor who has spent three decades focused on criminology and specifically, issues of policing and community engagement with the justice system. Underlying this interest has been a bracketing of the person she could have become, and the path easily imagined yet not taken, were it not for the social class to which she belonged.

As a sociologist, the researcher is drawn to the myriad social constructs that create opportunities and obstacles for individuals. Fundamental to sociology is the understanding that we are born into a culture, and the attendant social variables of economics, environment, race, gender, and parental education determine many of our options. The practicing sociologist will attempt to understand not only what those options are, but why those constructs influence direction. While the repercussions of negative peer group influence toward criminality have been established, this research examines why positive prison peer group influence toward pro-social behavior is so effective. In significant ways, these peer groups bring traditional indicators of successful social class opportunities to the institutional environment: education, self-reflection, encouragement, social capital, and mentorship.

When the researcher began teaching sociology and criminology in a New York State maximum security prison, she experienced a paradigm shift. Confronted with evidence of systemic social class exclusion and institutional racism, she bore direct witness to the outcome of insufficient educational opportunities, family disarray, and community dysfunction. While this was not in itself surprising, what she was unprepared for was the soaring intellect of almost all the incarcerated students. These were men who are artists and entrepreneurs, eager to learn and apply those abilities to improving the lives of their friends, families and communities. It was not just talk. They took action in every conceivable way possible given the extraordinary limitations placed on them by living in a carceral state. Furthermore, they forced the researcher to consider
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Her own beliefs of justice, punishment, and forgiveness. It was therefore necessary to set aside this experience, and not project her own academic predilections or philosophies of redemption into this research. It is here that the researcher “disqualify all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience” (Moustakas, 85).

Coding and Themes

The development of coding and themes was organized to synthesize the structural and textural foundations of each participant’s experience. Each transcription was initially read in its entirety, and then read a second time to note observations of experience that directly addressed the focus of this research. Finally, each transcription was read a third time to identify and highlight patterns which illuminated a particular path from one variable of social support to another; for example, the transition from volunteering in the law library to associating with other men seeking to educate themselves. From these readings, themes of fellowship and peer-supported direction developed, coruscating the influence and effect of mentorship.

There is a limited role in phenomenology for the application of traditional quantitative measurements to objectively analyze data. This does not mean, however, that the methodology is subjective. It is a critical analysis, and it is objective. Sanders (1982) and Crotty (1998) observed that rather, a function of phenomenology is to isolate and then compare the participant’s subjective experiences and locate the universals amongst them. They further note that phenomenology is critical in that “it problematizes those that are taken for granted and reveals the inherent structures that constitute and shape human experience” (Lin, 471).

Eidetic Reduction

It is during this process of locating essences, or eidos, that the structure of experience (i.e., criminal behavior, incarceration) is separated from the textural experience (i.e., response to
family problems, establishment of status, feelings of shame or loneliness). Kaufer and Chemero (2015) state that phenomenology is an eidetic science because the “object is experienced against the background of its surroundings” (35). It is this reflective reduction that paves the way for shifting focus to the essence of the experience.

**Imaginative Variation**

Eidetic reduction is complemented by imaginative variation. In this process, possibilities of meaning are considered, and the experience is approached through differing roles and perspectives. Moustakas (1994) explains that variation is “targeted toward meanings and depends on intuition as a way of integrating structures into essences” (98). This integration was organized by recording the development of themes within sections of structure, which are illustrated in Chapter 4.

**Limitations**

History and maturation effects have the ability to skew some data either positively (i.e., group influence has grown progressively over time) or negatively (i.e., group influence diminished as other supports are discovered). This is, however, often the nature of remembering. Outlying data may appear as a result of specific personal experiences.

Selection bias threats have the potential to reduce the findings to a narrow demographic; this study excludes analysis of prisoners who have 1) chosen not to participate in these groups, and 2) prisoners who participated in this group, were released, and later returned to prison for a new offense.

A limitation to this study was the lack of data produced by currently incarcerated peer mentorship groups. This may affect the internal validity of the study as the researcher is utilizing, in part, self-reporting questionnaires designed by a third-party. A second limitation was in
interviewing people post-experience, when memory and impact have been colored by time. The retrospective nature of post-event questions may lead to a recall bias.

Limitations are further discussed in Chapter 5.

**Expected Findings**

The intent of the research study findings was to provide both formative and summative analysis and to add to the growing body of research investigating correctional practices and philosophies of punishment and rehabilitation. Qualitative research is singularly relevant for this sort of inquiry, as the experiences within prison, and the effect of those phenomena on re-entry life, determine the success or failure of our carcereal endeavor.

Additionally, minimal research has been conducted exploring the “reinvesting in others” as a result of a mentoring experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p 22) and there are anecdotal stories that participants in peer mentorship programs enter either paid vocational career or volunteer their services in social work and community assistance programs at higher rate than other cohorts of former offenders. This idea of “giving back” to communities is an American value, yet one practiced sporadically at best by the general population. This is worthy of further exploration.

This study hopes to offer corrections administrators evidence of the rehabilitative and reformative success of peer mentorship programs, as well as providing program facilitators feedback for program modifications. In reviewing the total-institution social support by peers, this research demonstrated the success possible from having the imagination, compassion, and courage to provide redemption.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The first section of this chapter describes the participants contributing to this research, and well as the interview process utilized. For this study, the phenomenological emphasis on the “understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation” (Moustakas, 14) guided the interpretation. The second section presents the findings and explores the research questions as initially presented and subsequently developed organically through the interview process.

Demographics

The population sample for this study was anticipated to be between ten and fifteen participants. Thirteen names were acquired throughout the interview process, and contacted. Ten men ultimately agreed to be interviewed. The men were all African-American, and over thirty-four years of age. Each had served at least the New York State minimum of fifteen years in prison for a violent felony offense, and none were sentenced for sex-related offenses. Each man, with one exception, was on probation, and in some cases would possibly remain on probation for the duration of their life. The one participant exception had been granted full release from probation the day before our interview and was, as one would expect, jubilant. Lastly, each participant had been released from incarceration at least a year prior to our meeting, and had established a self-supporting life for themselves.

Prior to recording audio of each interview, as part of our introductory conversation and to ensure they met research requirements, each participant was asked their age at time of sentencing; offense for which they were incarcerated; and length of time served. Each subject, as a requirement of this research, had been convicted of a violent offense, and in each case it was
murder in the first or second degree. Two participants were convicted of three counts of murder in the second degree, meaning there were three victims. Each was then asked four questions to further illuminate their background: if they had graduated high school prior to incarceration: attaining a GED was considered, though to do so indicates an inability to matriculate from a traditional educational institution and the social support therein. Attaining a GED in prison was not considered, again, as that disqualified their experience from a traditional academic support environment.

The second question asked if they resided in the same borough that they lived prior to incarceration. At the time of interview, all subjects were currently living in one of three boroughs, out of five, that encompass New York City. These boroughs: Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, exist as separate cities in many ways. Growing up in one or the other etches the mind and habits of the individual with a sense of neighborhood which differs from the other boroughs. It may be important for a man, desisting from crime and looking to contribute socially, to return to his specific community to live and work, as is the case with P5. Other men were not given much of a choice; they left prison in need of housing, and housing was provided in whatever borough placement could be made. This was the case with P6, P9, and P10. P1, who married while incarcerated, returned to his wife’s home in a borough different than where he was raised.

The question about high school references data correlating the absence of high school matriculation and increased criminality, as well as research exploring the role of high school as a positive and structure-providing socializing influence, especially in the absence of other normative agencies (Wiatrowski, Griswold & Roberts, 1981; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Arum & Beattie, 1999). These questions were asked prior as they were factual, demanding attention
different than that encouraged in a transcendental phenomenological inquiry. Additionally, throughout the course of the interview, the vocational choice of the participants was an interesting, if not entirely unexpected variable. The researcher had noted anecdotally, while teaching in a prison, that many of the incarcerated students expressed an interest in ‘giving back’ to their communities on their return. Frequently expressed was a sense of obligation to remedy damage that they had previously inflicted. This last item of interest was not explicitly asked of interview subjects. Rather, many participants offered information about their current paid position or volunteer commitments, several of which were social-service oriented. This is a not insignificant fact, and while not further explored in this research, suggests a desistance pattern more altruistic than commonly considered.

These demographic attributes are found in Table 1. ‘Age at time of sentence’ reflects the age of each participant at the time of sentencing for the last offense for which they were incarcerated. This term in prison was not necessarily their first offense nor their first period of incarceration. ‘Primary Offense type’ for each participant is coded as M= murder in the first degree or M2= murder in the second degree, as defined by New York State Penal Law § 125.25 and §125.27 (New York State Criminal Law Reference, 2017). The parenthetical number three (3) attached to offense for P5 and P10 indicate that their charges were for three (3) counts of murder in the second degree, meaning that there were three victims at the time of offense.
The Interview Process

A set of pre-developed questions were designed and presented to each participant in an informal manner, allowing for the open-ended presentation of query and answers that may be direct or exploratory. Questions were presented in order during the pilot interview, and then followed the natural course of inquiry in subsequent interviews. In most cases, the prepared questions were answered within the subject’s description of events and experience. The methodology for phenomenological inquiry lent itself to allowing participants to express their experience in their own way, with limited direction.

Each subject was met at a public location of their choosing, such as a quiet café or library, and four subjects were interviewed in the semi-private confines of an office conference room. After an initial introduction and brief chat about general interests to ensure a relaxed and casual environment, researcher and subject sat across from one another. The consent form,
previously emailed to each subject, was presented and time allowed as needed for the subject to review. The participant then signed and dated the consent form, as did the interviewer. I then asked a few general demographic questions, include current age, if they resided in the same neighborhood as lived prior to sentencing, and if they had graduated high school at the time of incarceration. A recording device was introduced, and permission asked to record. Once permission was given, the recorder was placed near the participant, and darkened. Brief notes were taken throughout, and only to allow notation of points which warranted further elaboration.

**Interview Questions**

The three primary research questions upon which the protocol is based were as follows:

**Research question one.** How do prisoner mentors contribute to rehabilitation and eventual desistance from crime?

**Research question two.** Are peer mentoring programs in prison an effective foundation for re-entry and reintegration to pro-social norms?

**Research question three.** What are the intervening mechanisms through which social capital contributes to desistance from crime?

The subject was told of the three primary research questions to provide a base from which they could understand the direction of questions. Each participant was then asked additional questions drawn from the predeveloped list as presented in Appendix A, either presented in order or out of sequence to return the subject’s narrative back to the primary research focus.

The interview questionnaire was designed to elicit expansive responses that would allow texture to the description of the participant’s experience. Comprised of open-ended, broadly presented questions, the first question established that the subject fit the demographic
requirements of offense type, sentence, and length of incarceration. Once data had been collected, and interviews transcribed, it became clear that certain questions merely introduced the topic, or prompted reflection, while other questions elicited a rich response.

**Findings**

This research engaged an idiographic approach to exploring participant experience through successive events, and as mediated by varying forms of social support. Three question areas: self-story pre-incarceration; peer-program involvement in prison; and self-story post-incarceration and mentorship engagement, were organized into sequential divisions post-interview. An additional section of questioning investigated intervening variables of support and influence in subcategories of subject experience of external support, and family support relative to peer group influence.

The findings of this research were organized into structural themes, and the textural descriptions which provide depth to the variables within the themes. Together they demonstrate, through personal narratives, a sense of self and experience prior to incarceration that was colored by strain. Whether the subject believed themselves to be alienated from lawful means to achieving mainstream goals through explicit racism, implicit class bias, or other factors, the strain was felt and responded to in an anti-normative fashion. Each subject experienced a similar lack of normative social support prior to incarceration, and a lack of positive and pro-social behavior modeled by males, in example, although there existed qualitative differences in the meaning of experience: one father may have simply been absent, while another failed to nurture adherence to prosocial values. An unexpected finding in this regard was the inability of most participant’s mothers to counter this variable, regardless of the affection felt towards her by the subject.
The narratives referenced in this research describe varying paths, once incarcerated, that each subject took to engagement in peer mentoring programming. The findings show that most subjects determined soon after sentencing to engage in positive activities, and seek positive companions. Their introduction to peer support was through either institutionally supported religious groups, academic courses, or anti-violence meetings, or peer-led black history classes. Once introduced to the peer dynamic, however, each soon found himself experiencing the transformative support of peer engagement and mentorship.

Lastly, research findings demonstrate that each subject articulated a description of themselves as men who left prison as intellectual, evolved, sensitive, and family and community oriented as a direct result of their membership in peer mentor groups while incarcerated. Each expressed a sense of structural support which cemented any other existing support variables (such as family), and is interwoven with threads of self-empowerment, fraternity, and communal obligation. Rehabilitation was indeed achieved through the social support provided by the prisoner-peer groups.

Themes

Structural themes developed during each interview, as participants described experiences of behavior and social support, prior to sentencing, during incarceration, and post-incarceration once they left prison. In their choice of words or emphasis on specific events, subjects expressed an integral experience that was occasionally unique to them, but in totality, more frequently aligned with the expressions of socialization and discovery shared by the other men. These shared variables were organized into themes of experience, such as “absence of normatively supportive family members” or “volunteered in the community” according to specific periods of time in the subject’s life: pre-incarceration; incarceration; and post-incarceration. Findings
showed little variability in previous maladaptivity, the socio-political dimensional introduction to peer support, and a dynamic embrace of that support, and a contrast of past and present experience.

The distinct themes which emerged from the interviews, drawn from narratives shared by each participant, are explained in each of the three following sections.

**Pre-incarceration themes.**

In response to question prompts (Appendix A), each participant provided a description of variables and events in their life prior to incarceration. In some cases, their self-story focused on only a few specific incidents or influences. For other men, the narrative of their youth and entry to criminal behaviors encompassed a broader arc of experience. In discussing this period of time before sentencing, several themes emerged during participant interviews. Examples of each experience are provided in an attendant statement by one of the subjects. The themes are as follows: lack of normative family support (LNFS); self-story with positive engagement of criminality (SSPEC); justification of criminal behavior (JCB); environmental awareness (EA); disruption of family support (DFS); and the absence of pro-normative male (APNM).

**LNFS — Lack of Normative Family Support.** The absence of socially normative supportive family members at home whose presence and direct involvement in the subject’s life discouraged criminal behavior. This theme is coded as “lack of normative supportive family members.” Only P4 indicated the presence of normative family members, in the form of two parents and siblings. His parents were active in discouraging delinquent behaviors: “I had a good family upbringing. There was nothing I did not have…I bow down to those two people. But there’s two influences we deal with: the household with our parents and our siblings, but then we deal with the influence of our peers outside.” The remaining participants noted the lack of
positive family support. A more typical response was that of P1: “My father was unavailable; I
started smoking marijuana with my uncles.”

SSPEC — Self-story with Positive Engagement of Criminality. This theme developed
from descriptions of self which often included cultural archetypes of positive criminality such as
entrepreneur or outlaw. Resultant from cultural ideals or personal images, the subjects saw
themselves as a distinct character in the tableau of American archetypes: “The only thing I’m
worried about is being cool” (P8). P4 recalled, “In the street, you’re a different beast, the alpha
now, and I dealt with a core group of guys who were all macho men.” P5 noted: “So it seemed
like I was getting more respect and my self-esteem looked like it was rising the more and more I
fought.”

JCB — Justification of Criminal Behavior. Criminality was justified, often as the only
perceived means to acquire material necessities. As a result of strain, and an inability to chart a
path of normative ways to legitimate means, the subjects were able to excuse their criminality.
P9 said, “You talk about entrepreneurship, I’m working in a restaurant putting steaks, lobsters (in
the employee’s cars) by the time I got my paycheck, I could cash my own paycheck.” P8: “Okay,
I knew that selling marijuana wasn’t legal, but therein lies the profit…as a young black boy
growing up in this country, we understand profit…”

EA — Environmental Awareness. A recurring issue that arose throughout interviews was
the awareness that subjects had regarding the trouble they brought to their communities by
engaging in criminal activity. This awareness of impact was especially painful post-
incarceration, but ignored or sublimated prior to sentencing. The negative effects of criminality
on the community environment was understood and deemed acceptable: “I bought in to this idea
that I could get ahead by subscribing to the same philosophy that these (criminals) did; I saw
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them driving nice cars. I saw them with flashy jewelry. I saw them as men that were attractive, women were attracted to them. All these things were appealing to a kid growing up in the South Bronx.” (P2)

DFS — Disruption of Family Support. Whereas the family unit may previously have been functioning with some pro-social support, a disruption caused by geographical movement or parental issues then occurred. P7 observed that, “(My mother) fell victim to alcoholism, by the time I was 18 she had practically like incorporated right before my eyes.” P3 recalled: “My mother died when I Was seven years old. My father wasn’t too much good after my mother passed away.” P8 noted that: “My mother separating from my father was very, very traumatic…we got put out a lot.”

APNM — Absence of Pro-Normative Male. There was no normative male role model present to encourage legal pursuit of socially acceptable goals. “I’m looking to adults for, like, examples, and guidance and like, what should I do, but nobody it seemed like will just say, ‘Well, here, listen, this is what you do, this is how you do it.’ I want to do the right thing and do good, but I had no wind.” (P7)

When we ask ourselves what contributes to rehabilitation, there must first be a clarification of what, and whom, we are rehabilitating. Corrections policies do not acknowledge the positive characteristics of an incarcerated individual on entry to a facility; rather, each sentenced man is administratively managed as defined by his criminal act. The interviews conducted for this research explore a small area of each subject’s life: the lack of positive social support which contributed to their criminality. Limitations of inquiry do not provide a window into the richness of their character. Rather, these interviews examined an isolated area that was in need of reformation. That examination revealed shared themes of participant’s lives pre-
incarceration, and several contributors to criminality including, notably, the lack of normative peer supports. The justification of criminality and acceptance of role in community disorder speaks to a personal narrative that begins to change once incarcerated.

**Incarceration themes.**

After sentencing, participants began their term of incarceration. Adaptive behaviors vary across research subjects. However, in describing their experiences on admittance to a correctional facility, several themes emerged in participant interviews. Examples of each experience are provided in an attendant statement by one of the subjects. The themes are as follows: involvement in a traditional education component (TEC); redefining maleness (RDM); providing support for others (PSO); support for normative behavior (SNB); environmental/community awareness (EA); and self-reflection (SR).

**TEC — Traditional Education Component.** Enrollment in college classes, regardless of graduation from that program (the limited opportunity or availability of college programming in correctional facilities often makes it difficult or prohibitive for incarcerated people to complete requirements for academic matriculation). P2 stated: “I started college almost immediately upon going to Sing-Sing…to reach out for social support. College was like a thriving, bubbling community there in the facility.”; “I had made up my mind that I am not coming out of this prison the same way I went in, with no skills, no education…I’m hungry for some opportunity even if it’s just a piece of information.” (P7)

**RDM — Re-Defining Maleness.** Inasmuch as each subject described a sense of self prior to incarceration that lacked normative male fraternity, once incarcerated, their narratives regarding definitions of masculinity began to change. Expressions of re-evaluating constructs of socialized ‘maleness’, which often included expectations of aggression, dominance or violence
were articulated: “We start having that discussion and now I’m defending when violence isn’t appropriate. I’m starting to buy in to it and now I’m telling people it isn’t appropriate…so now I’m internalizing it.” (P5). P10 observed that, “See, in prison, I had a problem in the beginning with these individuals that are homosexuals. But then, if you’re trying to help somebody, you can’t be the judge.”

PSO — Providing Support for Others. The subject described an evolution of self in which, during their time of incarceration, they allowed themselves to be available and supportive for other men in need of emotional scaffolding and intellectual guidance: “We were there for each other…we’re standing on their shoulders.” (P1). P10 recalled, “Prior to being incarcerated, I was never in a group where I had to interact with a lot of guys and try to do peer counseling—that type of stuff. Nothing to help another guy. No, I’d never done that in the street.”

SNB — Support for Normative Behavior. Support in endeavoring to achieve legally legitimatized goals and pro-social norms was provided and experienced: “You don’t want to put yourself in the negative life in front of your peers…they want to show you how smart you are…picking up the next brother helping him up.” (P4)

EA — Environmental Awareness. Participants acquired knowledge of systemic and historical factors which contributed to dysfunctional socialization processes in their homes and their neighborhoods. In addition, participants developed awareness of the ways in which their criminality negatively impacted communities: “I saw the world in a way I never had seen it before. And it was pretty enlightening. I didn’t know education brings about a change in you, too, and that’s what it did.” (P3). P2 recalled that the peer groups, “(Teach) you about the differences in certain communities…and how these individuals get arrested, and there’s a cycle
of incarceration and it has to do with the culture and it has to do with the limited resources that are in these particular communities.”

SR — Self-Reflection. Subjects described a deep and ongoing process of excavating and knowing the self. This process of self-reflection was often guided and mediated by their mentors: “That was probably the first time I was in a group of men that asked me what I thought. One of the things we learned was about going back to unravel some of the things for former events in your life. That’s where I learned the first lesson… I have to reassess my life.” (P8)

Each of the subjects interviewed for this research noted that the changes in their attitudes and behaviors were resultant from deeply individualized reasoning and reflection. While incarceration, ideally, functions in removing the individual from criminal engagements, the penal institution itself rarely succeeds in providing templates for meaningful rehabilitation, as evidenced by recidivism rates. Shared experiences of transformation in prison, and the themes that developed, all spoke to the personal decision to ‘do something’ about their situation, and the patterns and habits that had brought them behind bars.

Addressing incarcerated readers, Robinson (2007) observes, “You keep complaining about how bad you’ve got it and how rough your upbringing was, as if complaining will make things better. As if it will make your problems go away. It won’t. Trust me when I tell you. Without the courage to act, to do something about your situation, nothing will change” (p 23). This courage to act is not to be underestimated. Once imprisoned, the participants chose to engage in the self-referential deconstruction of fundamental beliefs regarding male fellowship and masculinity, vulnerability, normative behavior and community responsibility. They chose to shift the paradigm on which their previous life had been built, an act not only of courage, but compassion.
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND IN-PRISON PEER MENTORSHIP

**Post-incarceration themes.**

At the conclusion of their minimum time sentenced and served, the participants in this study were either granted parole the first time they appeared before the New York State Parole Board, or at a subsequent hearing (at two-year intervals post-minimum time served, as per New York State law). Once released from prison on parole, the men returned to outside communities and began constructing a life for themselves. In discussing this transition, and the role played by the prison peer mentorship groups, four specific themes emerged during each participant interview: community engagement (CE); peer support (PS); employment in legal occupations (ELO); and a sense of satisfaction with self (SSS). The themes are as follows:

**CE — Community Engagement.** The subject is currently employed in or regularly volunteers with a community or social welfare advocacy agency. This is notable in consideration of the emphasis that peer mentor groups place on communal responsibility. Self-efficacy is translated to communal efficacy, and the subjects are committed to sharing the strength they gained in prison. P10 noted, “I help with the kids in the neighborhood, tell them what I learned. I go to Mujahid’s meetings to do what I can for the older people.” P5 felt that the peer programs were “more transformative than what was offered by the institution” and continues to influence him in his volunteer work attending early morning parole calls at his neighborhood parole office: “We got like 30 guys waiting to see their parole officer…so we come in and talk about our Returning Citizen Peer Support Group. We tell them: You are a returning citizen, you’re not a convict, you’re not an inmate, you’re not a felon. In this program, we know how difficult it is to reintegrate back into society. We share our worries and we talk about it.”

**PS — Peer Support.** Participants described ongoing peer support and engagement: “We constantly have these interconnecting organizations and guys. And you’re constantly kind of
under them and mentoring you. We are mentoring each other.” (P9). P2 observed that: “All these relationships matter, when you allow for these relationships and encourage them, and realize that these relationships have an impact on the community, then that means you are seeing the value in these individuals.”

ELO — Employed in Legal Occupations. Participants are gainfully employed in normative and legal vocations. Regarding the specific variable of employment, the subject noted the type of vocation they were engaged in, without necessarily providing a significant or textured response to that question. They observed whether that vocation was for a non-profit organization, and if they were assisted by re-entry organizations in locating that job. Regardless, all participants were engaged in lawful employment, and using that employment as a cornerstone of continuing lawful economic pursuits. P4 observed that, “Right now, I think about paying my bills. It’s a new struggle, but it’s a straight struggle. But I make the struggle look good. Because I’m not trying to hurt my family anymore. I’m not trying to hurt me anymore.”

SSS — Sense of Satisfaction with Self. The subject expressed a sense of satisfaction and ongoing positive development of character and self: “I’m much more aware, much more conscious in terms like socially, politically conscious. I think more about legacy. I’m much more humble…the peer groups really changed my life. I’m very mindful how I live in the world every day.” (P1)

Malcolm X (1964) stated, “It is only after slavery and prison that the sweetest appreciation of freedom can come” (p 386). Indeed, post-incarceration, research participants expressed the return home as a liberation experience not only of the physical sense, but emotionally. P1, describing the impact of mentorship groups on life post-prisonEExper, stated, “We were about raising people’s consciousness. We don’t want to send people back home the
same way they came in. That was on us, we had to do it while we were in there.” As demonstrated in areas of community volunteership, congoing peer support, family engagement, and vocational choices, the subjects emerged from their confinement rehabilitated and grateful for the opportunity to begin a new chapter life, replete with ethical choices and responsibility.

**Summary tables of thematic experience.**

Experience of each thematic variable was documented and organized into the following tables. Pre-incarceration themes are found in Table 2; incarceration themes are found in Table 3; and Post-incarceration themes are found in Table 4. By coding the most meaningful reduction of each experience, according to the subjects, it became clear that both isolated variables as well as patterns of socialization contributed to criminality, and the most significant was the absence of pro-social peer support. The following table indicates each participant, and the percentage of participants, whose expressed experience was ordered within each theme:

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-incarceration</th>
<th>Meaningfully experienced by subject</th>
<th>% of subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LNFS</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSPCE</td>
<td>P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCB</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EA</td>
<td>P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFS</td>
<td>P1, P2, P7, P9, P10</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APNM</td>
<td>P1, P2, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incarceration</th>
<th>Meaningfully experienced by subject</th>
<th>% of subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEC</td>
<td>P1, P2, P4, P6</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDM</td>
<td>P1, P2, P5, P7, P9, P10</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND IN-PRISON PEER MENTORSHIP

| PSO | P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10 | 100% |
| SNB | P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10 | 80% |
| SR  | P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10 | 100% |
| EA  | P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10 | 100% |

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-incarceration</th>
<th>Meaningfully experienced by subject</th>
<th>% of subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELO</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSS</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These themes are variables of experience, and provide the scaffolding in which each participant’s experience with self-story and social support was developed. Additionally, within the timeline orientation of this thematic framework, textural descriptions illuminating several fundamental areas emerged. These areas were self-story pre-incarceration; construct of personal values, environmental awareness; social support pre-incarceration; disruption of family or social support; presence or absence of pro-normative mentor; peer program involvement; decision to join peer group; facilitating and leadership of peer groups; expressions of self, post-mentor group; experience of character change; peer group significance in addressing character change; external support; and family support relative to peer group influence.

These descriptions provided depth and nuance to the narratives of rehabilitation shared by each subject. In each interview, statements were made by the participant and isolated by the researcher. The reflective nature of these statements demonstrates significant insight into individual circumstance prior to incarceration, and subsequent rehabilitative variables.
Textural Descriptions

Self-Story Pre-Incarceration

Using the pre-designed questionnaire found in Appendix A, the participant was asked to describe himself prior to incarceration, using the widest possible range of interpretation and response parameters, according to their own experience. It provided an opportunity for each subject to describe “the sort of person” they believed they were many decades ago, and to address social support mechanisms available in their life at the time of offense. Questions which followed were designed to elicit specific details regarding social support if efforts were necessary to narrow the focus of self-description.

Describing oneself in the past- for those who have experienced significant personal transformation- is a form of self-story, a narrative used to explain, justify or reminisce about a person who is now only a small part of their character. In this process of description, oftentimes a consciousness of the former self is awakened. As Mills (1959) notes:

Correctly or incorrectly, they often come to feel that they can now provide themselves with adequate summation, cohesive summations, comprehensive orientations. Older decisions that once appeared sound now seem to them products of a mind unaccountable dense. Their capacity for astonishment is made lively again. They acquire a new way of thinking, they experience a transvaluation of values (p 8).

This experience is evident in the telling by several participants. P9 felt that, “There was nothing really going on in my life that I could say other than this American culture, tradition, of a black family and poverty and an underserved community.”
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND IN-PRISON PEER MENTORSHIP

**Significant reflective statements.**

Data analysis of subject responses provided examples related to the concept of this study, noting the absence of sufficient social support to maintain mainstream normative lives. Participant responses contained expressions ranging from shame and horror to sympathy and bemusement towards the young men these older men once were. Observations frequently alluded to the ineffectiveness of positive mentors, if any were present, and the magnetic pull of an alternative criminal lifestyle for purposes both legitimate, i.e., the need to pay rent, and superficial, i.e., to purchase trendy clothing. Examples of statements reflective of self-story, the construct of personal values, and environmental and community awareness are found in Table 5.

**Table 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>Reflective statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-story pre-incarceration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>I was impulsive. I was searching for myself. I didn’t know who I was. I was a good person at heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>I was kind of rebellious; I dropped out of high school in 9th grade; I was not focused on my future; I basically lived day-to-day hanging out with my friends; There was also a good side to me; I’m a very emotional person; I was considered someone…who had a good head. Like I wasn't making stupid decisions just to make them; I was looked at as kind of a leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>I was in foster care…I had a lot of friends. I used to be very athletic so I was pretty popular; I was really smoked out on crack and wasn’t thinking about nobody but myself then; I had delusions of grandeur and thinking I’m invincible and just didn’t care; I was too embarrassed to let (my family) know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>I was a mama’s boy, I embrace that honestly. But yeah, I was being sneaky; I’m becoming somebody in the street- they called me Batman. When you were a child, you do childish things, and when I was a child, I thought I was a man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>When I was young, I was bullied and picked on so I just lashed out, not with words-with both my hands. I got a nickname, Cowboy, and I tried to live out that nickname; I had low self-esteem and low sense of self-worth based on how (my father) was treating me, so it seemed I was getting more respect and my self-esteem was rising the more that I fought; I put myself straight to the penitentiary right because I went from fighting with my fists, to fighting with a knife, with a gun, with a shotgun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>I was part of the Five Percenters; I was running, and you run up thinking you putting these things together and stuff; I was a giving person, always a sharing person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>I wouldn’t say aimless, but I didn’t have a plan or a life goal; I kind of had this, like, ‘me against the world’ attitude, being angry and bitter… I was traumatized because this was the end result of all this stuff I was seeing develop as I grew up; I wanted to be my own person and that wasn’t working out so good; I was in survival mode; I would always share; Everything was a mess and I was just left hanging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>I didn’t want to go to school because I felt poor; I felt a lack of self-esteem when I went to school; I didn’t understand the value of education; I was a father, a husband…a college student; (My younger self)…he’s too immature, too risky; I think I got those (positive) messages at home but just there wasn’t nobody to regulate me; I was having a problem with risky behavior; I rebelled against everything that was supposed to be traditional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>I was cool, just like I am now; Easy-going; Never really was the person to stir up anything; I enjoyed going to school; I couldn’t see a future in doing this; I’d always be checking on my mother to make sure she had whatever she needed; It wasn’t a whole lot of mentors I was looking at.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>I got all my education in prison; I used to box professionally; How well you can take care of yourself…I thought it was important…if somebody do something to you, you just take care of business, you don’t worry about the consequences; I’ve never had a job before in my life. That’s certainly nothing to brag about, but…in order to support myself, I had to have the wit and wherewithal to get around; I was caught up in the street.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Construct of personal values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P1</th>
<th>I peddled narcotics, so that didn’t make me a good person. Obviously, I was clear about that; (While on the lam) I had a lot of time to reflect and so I was less impulsive. I was remorseful… I was remorseful long before I got to prison; I did right by people: Drugs were out of necessity to take care of my son and his mother…it became an occupation and a lifestyle…making like thousands of dollars a day; I didn’t have a college degree and minimum wage was like three or four bucks. It was a no-brainer for me.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>My value system was kind of warped; Just as people get up to go to work, I got up to engage in that particular lifestyle and it just became like a part of who I was; I empathize with people but that gets suppressed when you're living a certain lifestyle; I bought into this idea that I could get ahead by subscribing to the same philosophy that these guys did…I saw them driving nice cars. I saw them with flashy jewelry. I saw them as men that were attractive, women were attracted to them. All these things were appealing to a kid growing up in the South Bronx.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>I had been laid off…and had depleted all my savings, and I was just down and out. I was more like that guy who’s letting money go to my head. I didn’t start using crack until I hit a financial downfall.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### P4
There’s two influences that we deal with: we deal with the influence of our household with our parents and our siblings, and we deal with the influence of our peers outside. Once I close the door I’m a different person; I tried to be the Alpha; I was one of them stupid guys thinking nonsense like because I carry guns…that’s part of trying to be the Alpha male; You see by wielding the gun…the false power it gives you, an inflated sense of yourself.

### P5
(My father) and my mother used to say when I was young, ‘If somebody say some people might hit you, get him first. Don’t let nobody do this to you.’ I would just lash out, and my father should say, ‘Yeah, son, that other boy got his.’ I told you earlier about this mindset and not addressing the causes, and even this need to be accepted.

### P6
With the Five Percenters, I had these teachers in my head saying the white man was the devil and all that; A lot of hate would develop in me.

### P7
I’m looking to adults for, like, examples, and guidance and like, what I should do, but nobody it seemed like will just say, ‘Well, here, listen, this is what you do, this is how you do it.’; I want to do the right thing and do good…but I had no wind.

### P8
My criminal mindset running away with me, I had developed deformative, well, not deformative, but in the early teen adolescent years of my life; Okay, I knew that selling marijuana wasn’t legal, but therein lies the profit, and I think as a young black boy growing up in this country, we understand profit, we understand entrepreneurship; I understood the value of money at a very young age; I would venture over to cross the line in risky behavior to get it; To a young male, a young adolescent child, somebody need to show me how to do (good).

### P9
My father, he was a very hard discipline; My father would take my money—‘Alright, bring it here, put it on the table.’; Whatever it is, I did it to survive; I said I was nice, I was easy, but I was treacherous, also. Because of the types of things I was involved in, you had to be.

### P10
I wasn’t really all that objective; I had a problem…with homosexuals; When you get a little money, you think that’s the most important thing; I wanted to get a job and do the right thing, but I just couldn’t stay in the same place because…I had to constantly be moving. I was just caught up in the things that I was doing.

### Environmental awareness
I grew up in East New York, Brooklyn…I didn’t think of it like we were a community…we’d say, ‘It’s my project.’ We say ‘my’ because ether is a clannish attitude that a lot of people have. So it’s like, ‘It’s my project’, but I didn’t see it as my community; One thing (we) knew, was that (we) wanted to get out of the city, because it was crazy back then. We wanted out of the projects, and we wanted out of the city; My world was small; I think a lot of people in my generation who went to prison did not think beyond their little neighborhood.
| P2  | The things we think as culturally accepted would be the job…religious organizations, the civic groups…they didn’t really have the influence in the area where I grew up, at least for the males; Drug dealing was right outside my door. It was all-around me in my particular neighborhood; The precinct I grew up had the most homicides; I’ve witnessed all these things; You can’t grow up as a kid an not be very perceptive to the things that are happening there; My value system was warped because I embraced the *neighborhood* culture. |
| P3  | I was with the crowd that was the partying type. I was mainly hanging out with other people that was getting high off of crack. |
| P4  | Street life is a real chaotic thing, and truthfully doesn’t make any sense at all; Where I’m from, we’ve got Sumner Projects, Tompkins Housing, and the Marcy Projects; My particular crew, we had issues with other crews who wanted to prove their toughness and things like that, so it was a back-and-forth situation. |
| P5  | I knew a lot of Bronx guys, and Brooklyn guys…we always had this beef in the alley about who is the toughest; I wanted all this praise and stuff I get from the community…so I beat him up. |
| P6  | Somebody dropped the ball with our youth. |
| P7  | (My teacher) asked me, ‘What do you want to do?’ I remember saying something like a doctor, and I’ll be damned if he didn’t tell me that I could not do that because I was black; I didn’t get, ‘Okay, gentleman, this is your game plan, this is what you’re going to do with your life.’ I didn’t get that; I did have a couple of friends…I could speak to them…but I didn’t have the education, or like the favors, that could recommend me for a job or something like that. |
| P8  | My family’s from the South, so I’m a country boy and that’s the base of our culture; (My father) didn’t provide that service (of feeding me)...so I started running around in the streets of Brooklyn; I just knew where the soda bottles were at, in the garbage can, like they do now. You’re missing out taking them to the store. |
| P9  | It’s a hectic situation…the love that a family supposed to have somewhat was missing; All this time instead of being nurtured, we were being ravaged, really, being ravaged in terms of—you talk about culture— that type word never came up; I didn’t know until I got older that I was being programmed to fail. |
| P10 | I was never in a group where I had to interact with a lot of guys…nothing to help another guy. No, I’d never done that in the street; …Get around individuals who are trying to rob me or kill me. You had to know how to get around it, and you had to know how to manipulate people. |
Social Support Prior to Incarceration

Social support was as a dominant theme, and participants shared meaningful observations about this socializing variable. Direct questions about social support were presented as open-ended prompts, designed to elicit the experience of support felt by the participant, in whatever form they believed that support manifested itself. Participants described normative social support as either absent or present, compelling or dysfunctional. Support experienced as parental “love” brought to bear the concept of love, and the social construction of that love as “supportive” regardless of the fact that often, the parent did not take measures to ensure the child was removed from degrading influences. This variable, of parental love as described by participants, often exists as a idealization, without objectively observable and demonstrative action. Additionally, for the most part, subject relationships to their community were expressed as moving socially through their neighborhoods with like-minded peers. Subjects recalled little, if any, environmental awareness. Neither the historical underpinnings of family or neighborhood dysfunction were understood or considered, and the impact of their criminal actions on their communities were, at the time, invisible to the subjects.

Significant reflective statements.

Data analysis of these questions indicated a range of support experienced by participants prior to incarceration. This support, however, defies normative categorization, which is not unexpected in a phenomenological enquiry. The men who described their families and friends either believed that they were loved, or nurtured, or supported, or not. Whether that support was in pursuing legally legitimate goals existed as a margin note for the younger self of some, whereas other subjects were aware of the delinquent influence from others. In one example, P4 recalled that when he was 13 years old, “My brother got his first gun, and let me put that gun in
my hand. And once I put it in my hand, that was it. I wanted my own.” In most of the cases, it is only now, with the benefit of decades of introspection, that they may apply a critical lens to those familial relationships. In the case of P10, he was visited only periodically by one of his four brothers, who once brought his sister: P10 was behind bars for 45 years. Support for anti-social behaviors such as fighting were encouraged in P5, who at an early age was encouraged to “beat” other boys. He observed that, “I went from fighting with my fists to fighting with a knife, with a gun, right, with a shotgun.” This participant repeatedly noted the importance of proving himself to his father and to the larger community as someone who would “just fight hard and go crazy”. He reflected that, “I had the low self-esteem and low sense of self-worth based on how they was treating me. So it seemed like I was getting more respect and my self-esteem looked like it was rising the more and more I fought.” Cultural norms of the participants pre-incarceration was also considered. P2 observed, “That in my neighborhood, there’s a lot of inconsistencies about what was being said with respect to what we were able to do. Like, ‘If you do X, you’d be able to get ahead’. And it was, we didn’t think, a reality that a lot of people around us were able to achieve.” Examples of reflective statements describing social support prior to incarceration are noted in the following table.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>Reflective statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Social support, back then, I certainly didn’t think of it in terms of my community. In the projects…there is this kind of clannish attitude…but I didn’t see it as my community; Until I was fifteen, my mom and four siblings and I were close knit…my mom doted on me, and so we felt close; My world was small; I didn’t feel connected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>We have an extended family…and we all grew up together…and my three male cousins all were getting into trouble, every single one of them; All my friends…were involved in selling drugs; They validate us and we validate them and we engage in behaviors that are consistent with what we admire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>My mother died when I was 7 years old, and my father wasn’t too much good after my mother passed away. I was in foster care, but I was still with my brothers and sisters; The foster family was just, “Go to school, bring home good grades.”, but I never heard them say, “Oh, you’re going to be a doctor.”; I didn’t get too much encouragement to go to college or anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>I got a close-knit family, two parent household; My mom did not spare the rod, but it was a lot of discipline and ‘I love you’; My mom and dad told me all I had to do was listen, to follow they rules…I broke my mom’s heart a lot of times; I was a mama’s boy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>My father would hear about I’d beat this guy, he’d be like, ‘Yeah, son, you got that other boy (applauding).’ That ‘attaboy’ type of thing. So that’s why I learned that; My wife…we’ve been together forty years; I try to live out the name ‘Cowboy’, because it seems like they respecting me, but I learned later on it wasn’t respect, it was a little fear…so what I would do to keep that respect…I used to turn up and just fight hard; I had the whole projects like this big rep on me, saying, ‘Get him!’; If I don’t whip his ass, this dude, that would drop self-respect. I wanted all this praise and stuff I get for the community, so I beat him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>I was the last of six; I never saw my Pops; I was in a group home; I got exposed at the age of 13 to the Five-Percenters…you run up thinking you putting these things together, you hang around people who will wreck you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>I didn’t get, like, okay, this is your game plan…like I’m supposed to miraculously come up with something like okay, well, this is what I wanted to do or just who I want to be; I said grandma, you handicapped me…she dismissed me…everything just left me hanging; I’m being loved for not talking; I was just kind of like somewhere between a nobody and an everyday person; I thought the reason I couldn’t do what they do (succeed), was because my family was unstable whereas theirs was solid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>If you had food and clothes on your back, that was a blessing; My family had less than involvement; I was married to one woman going in, and I was married to a different woman coming out.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>I had no social support, really; I knew my mother knew I couldn’t have been making that much money…whatever it is, I did it to survive; I knew (my mother) loved me from the way she treated me…but the first time I heard her tell me she loved me, I was in one of those prisons upstate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>When I got locked up, I didn’t have that many people in my corner. I saw hate in the world. I said I’m going to kill every last one of them when I get out. That’s how I felt and that’s what I really meant.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Disruption of family or social support</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>P1</strong></td>
<td>When I turned fifteen in 1985, my mom succumbed to a crack cocaine addiction. As a result, the family imploded; During the critical time when I was coming of age…she was not available. That was a really hard time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P2</strong></td>
<td>My mother had me when she was 16, and my father was on Rikers when I was born…so it’s hard for a young single parent to raise a child and then another child in that type of environment; I embraced the neighborhood culture rather than listening to my mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P3</strong></td>
<td>When my mother passed away, my (older) brothers and sisters kind of like went off on their own. I mean, they tried to take care of us for a little while after my mother died, but it didn’t work out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P7</strong></td>
<td>My parents split up when I was 2 or 3, and I was raised primarily by my mother; My mother…fell victim to alcoholism, so by the time I was 18, she had practically evaporated right before my eyes. By the time I was 18, she’d died; My first thought when I went to the wake was, ‘Ok, kid, you’re on your own now.’; Family-wise, I would say I was kind of estranged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P8</strong></td>
<td>My mother separating from my father was very, very traumatic…it happened when I was five years old…because my father wasn't paying the bills; We got put out a lot.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>P9</strong></td>
<td>I went to Florida State Prison in 1962 for armed robbery, when I came out, my father had left; Bills to be paid, I made sure they got paid.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>P10</strong></td>
<td>My sister seen things I didn’t know about (at home), as a young woman she probably shouldn’t have saw; My sister was talking about my mother…just before I got locked up…I wouldn’t speak to her, no mail, no visit, no nothing from her for fifteen years; Periodically my brother would come.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Presence or absence of pro-normative mentor</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>P1</strong></td>
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<td><strong>P2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>I had a lot of friends…but 90%…all went jail. All were involved in drugs, selling drugs; I cannot think of but maybe one or two of us out of 30 to 40 of us that didn’t get arrested and then go to jail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3</td>
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<tr>
<td>P4</td>
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<td>P5</td>
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<td>P6</td>
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<td>P9</td>
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<tr>
<td>P10</td>
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SOCIAL SUPPORT AND IN-PRISON PEER MENTORSHIP

Peer Program Involvement

Using the pre-designed questionnaire (Appendix A), specific questions were asked that allowed the participants to provide detail about the group membership, and the personal reasons that contributed to their decision to join the groups. One question prompted each interviewee to describe leadership positions that they may also have held. Several participants expressed an almost immediate compulsion to change previous patterns of behavior on entry into prison, while others underwent a lengthier process of reevaluation and consideration of social group membership.

One participant began looking for positive mentorship within days of incarceration, while another did not seek involvement for fifteen years. P3 was wholly committed to fighting his criminal case: “I just wanted to know what was going on with my case, and learn what I could to defend myself and whether or not the lawyer was doing the right thing by me… When I first got up there, I ain’t joining no group or nothing, I just stayed in the law library.” Later, however, “It was one of the guys in the law library that got me to come to the Black Studies class.”

The reasons for joining peer groups, however, largely focused on a personal desire to change patterns that had now become unfulfilling and self-sabotaging, and a belief that that positive support would not come from institutional programming. P2 enrolled in a college course, and thought, “You know what, this is something I can do while I’m here…I should at least be doing something productive with my life.”

Interview subjects were often compelled to participate in socio-behavioral groups designed by DOCCS themselves. Depending on the type of offense, and the subject’s background, participation may have been mandatory and required for inclusion in their eventual parole board evaluation. P1 noted that, “A lot of the institutional groups…some of them were
mandatory so you had to do it or there was a penalty. Two, you didn’t feel like they cared. It was perfunctory.”

These institutionally sponsored groups include those which address substance abuse such as drugs and alcohol, and anti-violence programming. Most of the interviewed subjects participated in the Anti-Violence Program (AVP), and/or Aggression Replacement Training (ART). AVP and ART groups were facilitated by outside volunteers, and subjects generally reported that these curriculums were helpful in aiding them to understand any propensity towards violence, and to seek alternatives to physical force.

There was a sense of fraternity felt amongst these groups and with like-minded men and this knowledge was expressed consistently through their interviews. Enough so that if a prisoner was transferred from one institution to another, he knew that upon locating other group members, he would have allies and kindred spirits, of sorts. P1 recalled that, “When I go from one prison to the next, people already knew me…It was like a fraternity and we changed the culture of that prison.” Also noteworthy was the discernment of participants that “informal peer mentoring” could and would also take place only among two men, or three, and a formal setting or curriculum was not necessary for therapeutic or transformative experience to take place. These small groups were often the door to larger group involvement, or existed as friendships independent from facilitated teaching.

**Significant reflective statements.**

Statements made describing peer group entry varied; the impetus for seeking out membership in peer mentoring groups began with a reflective awareness unique to each participant. Often, it was the shock of initial incarceration. P2 recalled:
So when I was in Sing-Sing, in introspect, I was in that jail with tears in my eyes asking myself the question, how did I get here? How did I get here? And so the reflection was mandatory. I was able to do some thinking that I had not done while I was in the society living the fast life. You know, the fast life doesn’t really give you the time…You’ve got to have some self-control and not be willing to do just do things that are patently stupid inside of there. We already made some devastatingly poor choices to get here, many of us.

That ability to reflect caught the eye of other inmates looking to create normative community. He also remembered. “Guys who had been there five years, ten years, twenty years, they had a sense of whether or not someone who came there was someone we wanted to kind of bring in.” For P5, involvement began with a friend pointing out that he “was just giving all (my) power away to other people…for negativity.”

Some peer support groups were available in only one prison, while others were available throughout the system. Subject reporting indicates that group membership could be robust in one facility and dormant in another, encouraged in some, while the structural environment in others dissuaded positive mentoring. P4 did not get involved with peer groups until he was transferred to a downstate facility, Sullivan Correctional, after several years in upstate prisons, known for being more difficult institutions to live in. He noted:

In Comstock, those CO’s are hardcore, so what do you think it makes the prisoners? It makes them hardcore, too, because you’re constantly being challenged by them and being disrespected by them constantly…Totally different attitude to upstate…I was going into Sullivan…the atmosphere is not as intense as the penitentiaries like Comstock, Attica. So
you’re able to flourish a little bit in there. And of course they had the programs, and the layout of the prison, it made you relax a little bit.

All participants indicated involvement in two groups at a minimum: The National Trust for the Development of African-American Men, and the Resurrection Study Group. Several stated that their initial involvement in peer mentoring came with their inclusion in an African-American history class - a “Black Studies Group”, or other peer-led introduction to their specific ethnic history. This education in racial and ethnic history is a significant foundation for self-awareness, and a cornerstone of understanding one’s specific place in history. Necessary for sociological inquiry is the knowledge that each of us is the product of our personal experience as well as the historical context in which we live; it is unsurprising that a “black studies” class would provide a key to transformational character development. The National Trust for the Development of African-American Men is a group founded by Dr. Garry Mendez, Jr. approximately forty years ago. The website for the organization states that it is committed to “addressing the issues confronting African-American families and communities using culture and value-based leadership” (“Management”, 2018). The Resurrection Study Group operates within prisons and was founded and led by Eddie Ellis. Mr. Ellis, who died in 2014, founded the Center for NuLeadership, a community advocacy organization and in his later years, focused his energy on providing opportunities for formerly incarcerated people. His commitment to those peer groups never wavered (“About”, 2018).

Participants spoke of the movement between prison facilities that takes place, and their immediate efforts upon arrival to locate members of the same umbrella organizations, knowing not only that these members would ease the transition, but that they could be engaged in meaningful activity. Significant reflections pertaining to group membership are found in Table 7.
### Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>Reflective statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer program involvement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>The Caribbean African Unity (CAU)…they are in several prisons, people start them in new prisons; Black Study groups; Resurrection Study Group; Larry White and the non-traditional approach to social and criminal justice; the National Trust for the Development of the African-American Male…all of these things really shaped me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>College courses…I got there right at the right time; Prisoners for AIDS Counseling Education (PACE); Aggression Replacement Training (ART); Community-Minded Organization (CMO); National Trust for African-American Men…that was the organization that had the most impact on me; Resurrection Study Group; Partnership for a Calculated Transition; I was involved in nothing but positive programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Law library; Black Studies; Resurrection Study Group; Jaycees; NAACP; Reality House; mentoring groups for men with children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>College programming; Reconciliation Outreach; Resurrection Study Group; National Trust for the Development of African-American Men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>AVP; ART; Youth Assistance Program (YAP); Resurrection Study Group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>NuLeadership; Resurrection Study group; Christian religion groups; Black history classes; college courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>The National Trust for the Development of African-American Men; Resurrection Study Group; NAACP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Resurrection Study Group; college courses; Rising Hope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>College courses; Quaker religious groups; Resurrection Study Group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>College courses; Muslim religious groups; Literacy Volunteers; NAACP, Jaycees.</td>
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| **Decision to join** | |
| P1 | I learned in Elmira, or it may have been Auburn, somebody would say, oh, this organization is showing a film, and I saw it was like, oh! This is interesting!; Then…a guy said to me, “Man, you need to go to Green Haven, you need to go to Resurrection Study Group…you have the potential, I see something in you”; I was remorseful long before I got to prison. |
| P2 | I’m like, I don’t want to continue to getting in more trouble. |
# Social Support and In-Prison Peer Mentorship

| P3 | I wanted to fight my case; I had some good people (helping me to) learn the law, and how to act in prison; The encouragement (to help myself) actually came from our peers; It was a Black Studies class...it was really enlightening...that really sparked my interest. |
| P4 | Two guys, (peer mentors), was really instrumental in my cultural development in prison...are two of the smartest men I know; Mike was always in my head, (said) ‘I’m signing you up for class’. |
| P5 | Dudes that mentored me...Eddie Ellis, Herman Bell, Daruba Moore, Larry White...these were big guys in the system; In the street...I was a mentor, but it was for negativity. And in the prison system...I said I’ll help them because I put them on the wrong track on the wrong road. |
| P6 | I wanted to learn. So the first thing was Black history class; I get to Green Haven, this guy says, ‘My name is Eddie Ellis,’ and he told us he created a study group, and ‘first, you all got to get educated.’...and I needed something like that because I’m a single father...I never had a father figure in my life...that is part of what attracted me. |
| P7 | I had made up my mind that I am not coming out of this prison the same way I went in: with no skills, no education, without the wherewithal to live my life responsibly on my own terms; I’m hungry for some opportunity even if its just a piece of information. |
| P8 | All my time was focused in the law library...I had to get a reversal...then a friend, Larry White, said: ‘Let us come to terms with life. Our life is a human struggle’...that just resonated with me, it hit home...that’s where I learned the first lesson of the study group these older men had already organized. |
| P9 | One...guy told me, “Hook up with that guy there- that old dude, he's pretty smart.”; This lady asked me, ‘how come you’re not in school?’ So I said, ‘I’ll be there in September’. |
| P10 | I was always in peer groups. I used to box professionally, and so...there’s a lot of guys in prison, they look up to me. Other brothers, they’re trying to help me, I said, “I’m not ready for that.”; This brother over there, he said, “Listen man, come anyway.” |

**Facilitating and leadership of peer groups**

| P1 | We were there for each other; We created ...a civic-duty initiative and it was focused on giving back, no hidden agendas or anything; We’re standing on their shoulders, and so we created Second Look Think Tank, which is a policy group dealing with correctional and parole issues. |
| P2 | I ended up facilitating PACE...ended up becoming a director; In the Resurrection Study Group, I learned how to be a facilitator. |
I went on to facilitate AVP; We also had a mentoring program, men helping men, and we would bring the younger guys in and teach them certain things, especially those with children.

I became…part of the facilitator crew; I am coming from my way of thinking and dealing with several different men who are intelligent brothers; You don’t want to put yourself in the negative life in front of your peers…they want you to show how smart you are…picking up the next brother helping him up.

I created a computer literacy program, I created some economic awareness workshops. I created a program called Challenge to Change; I’m internalizing (the group message) and so I started to want to do programs and do facilitated workshops; I start doing that as I do more and more, I start helping people in the prison become a mentor.

Being a leader inside of a prison was a key thing; Being an effective leader with instructions when I mentor…being able to reach a person before they get to a certain point of no return.

I was like a secretary/ problem-solver.

You become an advocate for those that’s incarcerated; You see the growth and development in yourself and the participants; I still facilitate- I’m a counselor.

I facilitated and drove the curriculum for the Family Relationship course.

I’ve had a lot of good experiences helping guys in the law library.

**Self-Story Post-Mentorship**

Questions about self-story post-mentorship were designed to elicit a description of lived experience that addressed personal transformation, as influenced by the peer group, and as retained post-incarceration. These questions allowed for each participant to evaluate the metamorphic influence of their prison experience as well as the peer mentor group with whom they engaged: the ‘who, what, how’ of the rebuilding of self was experienced. Notably, one question was formulated to prompt an evaluative experience in which the former and the current self were contrasted. That juxtaposition was not offered directly by any of the men, however. Rather, typical of phenomenological expression, subjects spoke about their younger selves as a person distinct from the man they had become, and a comparison contradistinctive. The ways in
which an individual experiences character change is dependent on their experience of self-reflection, and their evaluation of the paradigms which framed their decisions and opportunities. P5 described the transition from resistance to acceptance of behavioral change:

The group discussion was, ‘when is violence appropriate?’ And some people, they say violence is never appropriate. I’m like, what? With my street knowledge, anytime somebody flash a gun on me, or do something, or say something, it’s appropriate. I’m gonna punch him in the fucking face. And (redacted) was like, no, bro. And he was a mentor to me in prison, and to look at him to say, ‘it’s not appropriate’, I’m like, what? So I’m thinking about it. I’m still not admitting to their truth that they’re right. But different people in the group are talking. I’m hearing it. I’m still defending my position but I’m listening. I go back to my cell…do what we call ‘ceiling time’…laying down…looking up at the ceiling, thinking stuff…so now we move forward and we start having that discussion and now I’m defending when violence isn’t appropriate. I’m starting to buy into it and now I’m telling people it isn’t appropriate and I’m defending it. So now I’m internalizing it.

Participants often expressed participating in peer mentorship as transformative, not only in broad terms of discovery, but with regards to learning new languages of emotional development. P1 observed, “Part of the program…deals with, besides addressing the issue of remorse, about taking on responsibility.” There was an element of proactive growth, and the considerable sense of being nurtured, facilitated by men who cared for you as, P1 felt, “…family. We were family.” P6 expressed a sense of responsibility in mentoring: “Somebody dropped the ball with our youth. And the new cadre of leaders that the regular study group was creating was designed to do that- it’s about saving the souls of our youth that’s up and coming. And that’s
where someone must be committed. Someone must be dedicated to do that.” Responsibility to each other, community and future generations is one of several messages that are presented and reinforced in many of the peer mentoring groups.

**Significant reflective statements.**

Questions regarding each participant’s self-story after release from prison were answered with uniform positivity. The development of the authentic self while incarcerated was a theme which each participant described as a direct result of both personal motivation, and peer mentor group influence. P4 observed that, “My parents did not encourage me to be out here fighting every day. My parents encouraged me to be smart, to have education and do the right thing. At some point in life, you have to start thinking about that. So that first five years (in prison) shaped a lot of my thinking.” In the case of P10, it was an older mentor “badgering” him to respond politely to an abrasive corrections officer, instead of responding with further aggression. After months of resisting, and continued pressure from his mentor, P10 began speaking politely, and then, “One day, (the CO) said, ‘Mr. Davis, your cell is open.’ I almost fell down the steps, I could not believe it. And from that day on, that’s when I really started changing and changed how I conducted myself.” P4 remarked on the influence of the group to succeed: “You don’t want to put yourself in a negative light in front of your peers…you want to shine. And yet what they’re demanding of you, it sounds like it’s not, ‘Oh, that you have a gun, or you have an ability to run on the streets’. They want you to show how smart you are. Also, picking up the next brother, helping him.”

For many of the subjects, a transformational moment occurred when the group discussed personal values, and the cultural history behind behavioral patterns. P2 stated that in a National Trust meeting, they were taught the “Cultural equation. And it says that history plus culture
equals values, and that your values lead to your lifestyle, and your lifestyle leads to the behavior. So in order to alter a person’s behavior, you have to deal with the value system.” He further observed that, “I was always someone who was pretty shy about speaking in public and always was nervous about communicating ideas, but the Resurrection Study Group changed that. If you are nervous, then you are just going to have to get over it.” P1 recalled the first occasion his mentorship group work drew the attention of outside influencers. He described the sense of pride on seeing his peers recognized as capable and valued members of the larger society: “That was something to see my peers able to influence and bring in the decision makers in the community.”

P3 said, “The Black Studies group, I just keep coming back to that. Because, I don’t know, that’s what instilled that community involvement ethics in me to get involved.”

Significant examples of statements regarding the ways and means by which the peer mentorship influenced lasting change are found in Table 8.

*Table 8*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>Reflective statement</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Expressions of self, post-mentor group</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>I’m much more aware, much more conscious in terms like socially, politically conscious. I think more about legacy. I’m much more humble; I’ve written a book and co-founded a foundation with my wife; The (peer groups) really changed my life; We’re teachers, we’re educators; I am very mindful how I live in the world every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>We learned that we were responsible and accountable for our decisions; You know, if a person is motivated, he can change his life; The more I became awakened...conscious to...the realities of our communities. And once you become conscious, you then have responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>(The groups) made me realize that I was part of a family, and my family was part of the community; I’m still trying to give back what those groups gave to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Financially, I’m still struggling, but I make that struggle look good; A lot of us have false egos, think that we’re supposed to be this macho type and all that you see. Hell, no. How about the brain aspect? Come on, man, let’s be for real about this.</td>
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</table>
Let’s be who our parents wanted us to be; I grew a lot, I grew *a lot*. I see myself definitely different from how I was.

**P5** I’ve helped, like, twenty people get out of jail based on my letters of support. And I got, like, sixty people jobs since I’ve been home. So, you know, doing good work, working with people; When I came home, I made sure… I wouldn’t give away my power to others: I reach back and help fulling forward. I’ve been doing that since I’ve been home.

**P6** When you become empowered, you take control of your life; He or she should come back to the community more so as an asset, not a liability.

**P7** I’m like Ferdinand (the bull). He just wanted to relax and just chill. Especially now, I’m super chill. No problems.

**P8** I’m more composed now. I’m focused now; So now the work that we actually do in here (social service agency) is an extension of the work we did inside.

**P9** I correspond with thousands of guys, trying to help them out.

**P10** I was able to learn more, and listen. I became a little bit more objective; I got more reflective; It took me a long time to change.

**Experience of character change**

**P1** I had two years in, there was an organization, and I got involved with them…then I got introduced to some aspects of social and criminal justice…and so that was the beginning of my politicization, my kind of developing an ideological framework for my life, for understanding the connection between me and my community; I really worked on myself; We were there for each other; I was one of the younger ones who felt like I had something to offer, it just showed itself.

**P2** Once…I had exposure to college, there was a yearning inside of me; Instead of me gravitating to a large extent toward the negativity- which I had done when I was growing up- I gravitated towards the positivity while I was inside.

**P3** I saw (the world) in a way I never had seen it before. And it was pretty enlightening. I didn’t know education brings about a change in *you*, too, and that’s what it did.

**P4** When I first came upstate, I made a promise to myself anything happened to me and I’m going all out to defend myself and establish myself. But my main thing, too, was to…show my mind like, I’m going to get my GED; The atmosphere…at Sullivan…it made you relax a little bit; I was intimidated…so I went. I went and I enjoyed it…because it was about the world, it was about what we live and who we are; I was so proud of myself; Prison cultivates some of the smartest men, honestly.
### SOCIAL SUPPORT AND IN-PRISON PEER MENTORSHIP

| P5   | So I’m thinking about (what I’m learning in the groups), I know I’m stupid, I know I’m wrong; Some of the techniques from AVP...redirect the energy, transforming energy, so you have all different kinds of help; So I was able to make that transition; It becomes a matter of respect for who you are as a person. |
| P6   | My study group…it triggers something in you to crank the motor so you can do your own studying. Once you get that spark, the you got to focus on it just like you come to a fork in the road of life...once your crank starts up, it motivates you. |
| P7   | The thing that stood out for me was not just learning, just information for information sake, but...how it impacts not only your community but me as an individual. |
| P8   | I had to examine how my incarceration affected everybody and just try to use whatever power I could to maintain conversation, the linkage, and know that we are human beings, that we do feel things, we do need love, we do love each other, and that we do need social support. And that will sustain us at our worst moment; It was very inspirational...to develop curriculums. |
| P9   | That’s kind of where the process I think started, from those who know. And they’re able to bring---pass it down---so we could all learn. |
| P10  | Prior to being incarcerated, I was never in a group where I had to interact with a lot of guys and try to do peer counseling- that type of stuff. Nothing to help another guy. No, I’d never done that in the street. |

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**Peer-group significance in addressing character change**

| P1   | It started off as a program, but then we became a family. We were a family; Several things I got from them, but one of them was that I had a civic duty to give back. That I was a stakeholder in my community; All of these things really shaped me. |
| P2   | I had friends who were in those groups, and these were the ones in the facility...who were smart...who were doing positive things; We have like a pact; We got to be really sharp facilitators because we had knowledge about the subject, and then we’re among our peers so it was very deliberate that we became really great facilitators. |
| P3   | It’s funny, being in that atmosphere, that’s where you meet a lot of positive people; These groups really do transform people; Those groups have a lot in turning guys around; That same support group is still right there for me today; Those groups really do transform people. |
| P4   | We got to pull each other up; It provided not just education and not just peer support, but it provided an opportunity to shake that old negative stereotype that you brought along in prison. |
| P5   | Just by association...that we’re with these mentoring groups, they are trying to achieve something; They gave me these guiding principles...we came in with this mindset- leave out with a better mindset. |
The mentorship, putting it together and putting our minds together and creating that whole different model; This guy, he said read this read that. And my life started opening up; It was about empowerment.

No matter what group it was, they would follow you through a process.

That was probably the first time that I was in a group of men that asked me what I thought; One of the things we learned was about going back to unravel some of the things for former events in your life; That’s where I learned the first lesson…I have to reassess my life and construct a prison life.

We constantly have these interconnecting organizations and guys. And you’re constantly kind of under them and mentoring you. We are mentoring each other; It always amazed me, some of the insight that they have.

The longer you stay in prison…who becomes your family is the guys that are still around. The guys in prison with you…I’ve known a lot of supportive guys; Many who I had a good relationship with believed I helped them in some way, and our relationship is still strong. Good men who helped me, and I helped them.

Intervening Variables of Support and Influence

The questionnaire (Appendix A) was designed to ensure that other possible variables of support were addressed; in particular to determine the meaning and effect that each participant ascribed to family influence while incarcerated. Specifically, this researcher was interesting in learning if family members were a significant intervening variable in the positive personal transformation of the subject. Family, as a socializing variable, is often discussed in correctional literature and policy as an important element in individual rehabilitation.

Significant reflective statements.

Statements made by several participants indicate a perceived or desired closeness with family members, especially mothers. Furthermore, several participants said that they believed their family members were helpful, often ‘greatly influential’, even when communication was infrequent or limited in topic. This interesting element of described experience speaks to the oft-noted human need for parental love and approval, even when the reciprocated action does not
provide specific direction. Regardless of the participant’s level of character excavation and objective analysis of personal socialization, a belief was often articulated that they were ‘supported’, simply by the parent remaining available in their life. The researcher did not anticipate the cultural and psychological effects that would influence the participant’s description of family support. However, there was also an acknowledgement of how special the peer mentorship groups were in influencing introspection. P2 stated that, “We were having conversations that we know didn’t take place outside of that setting.” P5 observed that the peer groups were more influential than his supportive family, “Because we connected better…and as I got further into my progress, (family) began to support me more on that level, as well.” P2 believed that, “All these relationships matter…I don’t think I’d be doing what I’m doing right now if it wasn’t for those individuals, even though my mother was a positive force in my life.”

Significant statements, found in Table 9, demonstrate a perceived belief of high family influence, often because the experience of having family simply remain in contact was meaningful.

Table 9

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<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>Reflective statement</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Experience of external support</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>I went half through my bid without having that (external support); (With wife), it went from black and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>white to technicolor; I didn’t lean on her for everything; she would lean on me for stuff. That’s how</td>
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<td></td>
<td>we roll. We are a Union of Doers.</td>
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<td>P2</td>
<td>The organizations, we often have people that were coming into the facilities. There was a conversation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>that would happen between religious groups and us; When I was in college, you had the professors coming</td>
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<td></td>
<td>in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Family was encouraging to go school…they just seemed so amazed when I would tell them I was taking this</td>
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<td></td>
<td>class. And I said, ‘Oh, yes, okay, let me keep on and try impressing you then’…they saw me in a different</td>
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<td></td>
<td>light then, very encouraging and supportive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>My social support from the outside, from my family, was top notch; My mom went above and beyond; Damn,</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>it was rough and I caused all that roughness.</td>
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My family came to see me all the time; While I was in college, I needed this book, they send me a book through the mail…they started supporting me in my growth of my development. If I needed anything for the programming…they began to help the change process.

My mother would visit me, and my sister and brother. When my mom died, they stopped coming. My older sister, she would send me packages once in a while.

By the time I was 18, my mom had died; the remaining family was upset with me.

It wasn’t much; I think (my family) didn’t encourage--- they see the transformation

Not necessarily (support) because a lot of the things, I didn’t talk about it because I didn’t feel they were ready to accept this kind of change. But I know they noticed something different about me; But for support, I don’t think it was really there.

Only my brother came. Periodically he would come. One day he brought my sister without me knowing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family support relative to peer group influence, including 1-5 scale</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>P1</strong></td>
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<td><strong>P2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>P8</strong></td>
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<td><strong>P9</strong></td>
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I had closed myself off everybody...Then my grandmother passed away, my mother passed away, my father, and then I really didn't have anybody...everybody needs somebody, everybody. That was what took me a long time to realize. To give in to that: This is where the groups come in, the peers. We look out for each other, we help each other. We get each other thinking right.

Lastly, subjects were asked to consider and describe intervening variables of support or reformation outside of family. While family is considered a primary socializing factor, peers, media, education, and religion are other influences that can contribute to the development or transformation of self. Participants were asked to reflect on other groups they attended, or books they had read, and consider if they believed those had an important impact on their life in prison.

Additional materials and activities that contribute to rehabilitation are important to consider for two primary reasons. First, to blend this additional variable into the experience directed by peer mentorship groups. Subjects spoke about book discussions in these groups, for example; it behooves the researcher to understand how that book may have influenced or added to the lessons taken from that particular group meeting. Second, while the heart of this study is the reformatory power of peer mentorship, each formerly incarcerated participant made their own discrete choices in the process of rehabilitation. For stakeholders in the criminal justice system interested in reaching real and lasting reform, evaluating all influential tools of character transformation is imperative. No participant placed another variable as providing more transformative encouragement than that of the peer mentorship group, though several felt the continued support and love from family members was equally important. Nonetheless, a few subjects noted an experience or influence that was significant. P10 described teaching a fellow inmate how to read, and that sense of accomplishment “was a different accomplishment than any one I’d had before...bigger than one of the biggest accomplishments when I was in the street.
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But the accomplishments after, the ones helping the other men, they were much more exhilarating than it was when I had boxing or doing anything like that.”

**Significant reflective statements.**

Several participants referenced the importance of a prisoner-led black history class in which they enrolled. They expressed experiencing a new and profound awareness of cultural identity that had not existed previously. P7 observed, “…My study group and my black history class, it triggers something in you to crank the motor so you can do your own studying.” In addition, several participants expressed the shock of discovering the ways in which institutionalized systems had contributed to their exclusion from normative and competitive paths in mainstream society. Learning, to P8, was about, “How history and politics intersect and how it impacts not only your community but me as an individual.” P3 believed the influence of “books and educational opportunities” that “really changed me, that’s when I really got to know myself and the damage I was doing to myself and in my community.” P4: “It was all about the metamorphosis…even when I started boxing. Because you get in trouble, you got a boxing match coming up, you get locked up in keeplock.”

Anti-violence programs were also referenced as a resource for discovering alternative means of anger and frustration outside of violence or vengeance. Lastly, the law library, required by law in each prison, acts as a literal doorway to education for many incarcerated people. Whether the prisoner feels they were unjustly incarcerated, or disproportionately sentenced, a compelling need to advocate for themselves brings them to the law library. For some men, it is the first time they’ve opened a book in many years, and yet each piece of new knowledge inspired them to continue general legal research, and provided a springboard for the interdisciplinary study of their own socialization.

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Summary

This chapter presented the data collection process, the interview process by which the phenomenon of resocialization and rehabilitation with peer support in prison was described, and the findings resultant from the synthesis of data. This information was organized into sequential experiences from which similar, if not identical, themes and significant expressions of experience were examined, including examples of anomie and strain. While qualitative distinctions were found in each participant’s interpretation of experience, most nonetheless developed within similar lines of modality. Phenomenological reliance on the participant’s expression of personal agency and interpersonal behavior requires acknowledgement that, as a thing unto itself, that expression is qualitatively distinct, and each variable more or less impactful, more or less rich in texture and meaning according to the subject only; all moments of parental neglect cannot be captured by organizing the recollection as ‘child abuse’, all friendships with non-normative teens cannot be interpreted as a theme of ‘delinquency’.

In consideration of the primary research questions, data was organized under four themes of inquiry in which the integration of past and present self was considered as points on a continuum: self-story pre-incarceration; social support pre-incarceration; peer program involvement in prison, and the attendant mentoring support provided; and self-story post incarceration. The introduction of social support, in the specific form of in-prison peer mentors was marked on that continuum as a variable through which the subject changed course. These structural and textural responses were further coded under frames of common social and environmental experiential variables. The research findings, resultant from these processes, indicated a rich tableau of memory, self-story, transformation, and renewed sense of self and purpose. The conclusions demonstrated by the data are discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research evolved from a distinctly sociological interest in the social constructs of criminality, and the methods by which correctional institutions may remedy the causes of deviant behavior. The foundation for these constructs lie in our personal socialization: parental influence, religion, education, media and, as this paper demonstrates, the presence or absence of peer mentorship. On that framework rests cultural ideas of success and accomplishment, and the social expectations of normative behavior in achieving them. Criminality is often a direct response to the strain experienced by failing to achieve mainstream goals through legitimate means. In addition, the uniquely American history of balancing both ideals of equality of opportunity with systemic exclusion from those paths by race and social class contributes to a lack of coherent policy in addressing the rehabilitation of incarcerated people.

The American public has generally acknowledged that the criminal justice system is in need of significant improvement (Blizzard, 2018), yet there remains little consensus about which elements to prioritize or how to synthesize our various concepts of punishment and justice, rehabilitation and redemption. The history of correctional institutions in America is written against a backdrop of morality and altruism, hypocrisy and racism: it is a complicated story. This story is rendered all the more dynamic today in no small part to the manipulations of media outlets in portraying violence and the disproportionate levels of fear expressed by the population (Pew, 2016). It is conceivable that some states have moved as far from the pious intention of reformatories as possible (Gottschalk, 2016) and conditions periodically necessitate legal reviews to ensure the application of the eighth amendment (Dolovich, 2009).
The fifty-four correctional facilities in New York State provide limited opportunities for holistic rehabilitation, and environments conducive to character transformation vary considerably. While the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision provides a website listing of vocational and educational choices, anecdotal evidence suggests the information is inaccurate (New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, 2015). Private organizations are increasingly taking the reins of providing college courses and degree-granting programs in prisons, and special interest groups have lobbied effectively for significant changes in arrest, bail, and sentencing procedures. This has contributed to a 32% reduction of incarcerated individuals in New York state over the past twenty years (Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, 2018).

There is a lack of credible data, however, regarding what opportunities for successful rehabilitation are available to individuals within prison, and how those people can approach and access meaningful transformative experiences. Substance abuse programs serve their purpose, and higher education is increasingly recognized as a rehabilitative imperative. These programs exclude, however, incarcerated people without substance abuse issues as well as people who either already have a college background or who are not academically inclined. Inasmuch as there is little consensus on which reform measures to prioritize, there is not a significant focus on specific and demonstrably effective programming that may provide moral and practical guidance to citizens who are imprisoned in New York. The onus for transformative experience and self-discovery has then fallen, as this research demonstrates, to the incarcerated men themselves and the positive social support they provide to one another. In small mentoring partnerships or in large facilitated groups, male support is nurtured and shared, and the scaffolding of rehabilitation is built.
Having collected and interpreted the results of my data, an analysis within the framework of literature by which I referenced and developed this study follows. This chapter presents the interpretation of the findings, the implications of the findings as a catalyst for institutional and social change, and recommendations for further research.

**Limitations**

Possible limitations of primary concern to this study included the nature of self-selecting subjects for qualitative research, and that the study was conducted at least one-year post-experience.

**Rigor and Trustworthiness**

It was imperative that the research approach was rigorously documented. Yin (2009) suggests that researchers document as many steps of each procedure as possible, and create a detailed protocol that other investigators can follow. This included ensuring that theme coding remained consistent by cross-checking and hewing to original definitions, unless a natural and necessary redefinition of those themes became evident by the participants themselves. Phenomenological inquiry will naturally produce varying interpretations of experience, and this can be both welcomed and reliably analyzed.

**History and Maturation Effects**

Fundamental to this research is the premise that an individual may change character over time as a result of positive social influence and support. The interviews for this research began, at a minimum, one year post-release, and asked subjects to reflect upon the impact of their peer mentorship group as a variable distinct from intervening support mechanisms. Separating the effect of the peer groups from other impactful sources may be a matter of personal discernment. For some subjects, the passage of time may blur the weight given to certain experiences. For
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others, the influence of new relationships may diminish those support networks which preceded release.

While these history and maturation-related threats cannot be eliminated entirely, they were managed by interview questions, prompts and direction which guided the subject back to the frame of mind prior to sentencing and while incarcerated.

Selection Biases

The nature of a snowball approach to participant selection meant that only former offenders who successfully completed in-prison peer programs, and continue to integrate those hard-won lessons, were included. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) noted that, “Qualitative researchers are intentionally nonrandom in their selection of data sources. Instead, their sampling is purposeful. They select those individuals or objects that will yield the most information about the topic under investigation” (p 145). This does not diminish the value of this research, but suggests that generalizations cannot be adequately made. Further research of these special groups, possibly longitudinal studies, would be of benefit to the corrections field. Additionally, the inability to observe therapeutic communities in action, as well as conduct in-person interviews inside of the institutions where peer-mentorship is taking place in real time means that the rehabilitative process is not examined as it occurs.

Experimenter bias and subject effects.

In the interview format utilized by this research, (Campbell, 1963), the subjects were asked to reflect upon the person they once were, and frames of mind they have largely discarded. In creating a new life narrative in which one is positive and pro-social, revisiting an unhealthier self can be uncomfortable and alienating. It was reasonable to anticipate that subjects may have an inclination to be less forthcoming than desired. When participants know they are being
studied, they may act “aggressively/defensively, cooperatively/uncooperatively, or in some other way that affects their score on the dependent variable. Participants may behave differently in order to mirror the behavior that they think the researcher wants to see, or they may do it for their own reasons” (Campbell, 1963).

These subject effects, part and parcel with experimenter bias, bring subjectivity into play. For this reason, the researcher engaged the interviewing training referenced earlier and remained vigilant of potential verbal or physical communication signals that indicate any of these effects.

**Limitations Review**

Qualitative data is susceptible to inaccurately generalizing the narrow interpretation of individual experience to broader social facts. While this research focused on interviewing a specific demographic regarding a narrow experience, it nonetheless identified themes that can be applied to larger arenas of social discourse. The importance of social support, normlessness, the strain felt when ambitions are thwarted, the effort undertaken to break old habits and create new patterns of response and acceptance are all experiences lived by a larger segment of the population outside of formerly incarcerated violent offenders. It is possible to generalize these variables to any social group for whom introspection and positive growth is of value. However, this study is intended to present a scholarly investigation of rehabilitation as experienced by a specific population to determine if a multi-state study is warranted, or one that encompasses a broader range of criminal offenses.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Demographics**

The participants in this study were African-American men, and over thirty-four years of age. Each had served at least the New York State minimum of fifteen years in prison for a
violent felony offense, and none were sentenced for sex-related offenses. Each man, with one exception, was on probation. Each participant had been released from incarceration at least a year prior to our meeting, and had established a self-supporting life for themselves.

**Theoretical Approach**

The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those every practices, thus constitutively altering their character. We should be clear about the nature of this phenomenon. All forms of social life are partly constituted by actor’s knowledge of them (Giddens, 1988, p.38).

The fundamental processes that comprise the core of transcendental phenomenology: epoche, reduction, and imaginative variation, were used to prepare a reflective and objective approach to the interviews and the subsequent data. These methods lay a foundation for which to receive the expressed efficacy of the participants in describing the positive arc of their life.

The interpretation of findings are affixed to this researcher’s axiological framework. As is required by phenomenological inquiry, a process of self-reflection was performed to address that framework. Judgement suspended, the researcher then examined the essence of mentorship experience as understood by each participant.

**Self-story prior to incarceration.**

Narratives of self are maps to the socialization of an individual. Participants descriptions of their lives and character, prior to incarceration, introduced young men largely unmoored from traditional vocations, and socialized into the subcultures of poverty. They did not, for the most part, think of themselves as unkind or hard, but rather as young men attempting to achieve
mainstream goals when the legitimate means to do so were blocked. “(I) was involved in low-level crime. And it was so lucrative, how could I not?” recalled P8.

Strain theory, first labeled by Robert Merton in 1938, describes the disjuncture between mainstream and subculturally sanctioned means and goals as the root of criminality. This adaptive problem-solving behavior is painted across the biography of each research subject. P9 had grown up in Florida, with an abusive father, poor and poorly educated. Referencing mainstream culture, he recalled that, “These things to me, didn’t exist. It was all about what I can get for me. I started robbing banks like it wasn’t no tomorrow.” P1 recalled the choice between making minimum wage to support his young son and his son’s mother, or earning thousands of dollars a day selling drugs: “I just couldn’t see it…it was a no-brainer for me.”

It is important to spotlight the nuanced view that each subject provided of their younger self with regards to general sense of character. Each subject articulated a variation of their belief in their inherent goodness, and that despite the criminal behavior, they were “a good person at heart” (P1), a “loving husband and father” (P8), “generous” (P9) and kind to others, in an objective fashion.

**Relationship to prior research.**

Strain theory posits that criminality is a learned behavior resultant from an inability to attain cultural ideals. Prior research on the correlation between those alienated or disenfranchised members of society and their propensity towards criminal behavior has been documented for over two hundred years (Beccaria, 1764; Merton, 1938; Messier, Thome & Rosenfeld, 2008). This study adds to the body of research documenting the results of an inability to succeed normatively, and the rationale of individuals in innovating alternative means.
Social support.

Only one of the ten subjects recalled the presence of family support prior to incarceration, and eight subjects noted the absence of a pro-normative male in their life. Social support began, for most of the participants, on entry into educational programs or mentoring relationships. P2 observed that:

Interacting with (volunteer) instructors was phenomenal. They were always very caring people. They wanted to see individuals come home and do well…The civilian who came in, he’s the one who helped me get a job. He’s still one of my mentors until this day. I’m talking about like a very close relationship…I’m someone who learned in prison about the power of networking. One of the guys who’s still close with me to this day kind of imparted that. He said, “We got to break out of these cliques that we’re in, and we got to associate with people who are doing things that we want to do,” particularly with the civilians that are coming in because we have strong relationships with them and bonds. That is something we should try to be better at: allowing for those civilians to be able to establish relationships with individuals and not thinking that it’s always going to end up sideways.

This researcher can attest to the efforts taken by institutional personnel to discourage mentoring or friendships by outside volunteers: as an instructor, the singular criticism of my pedagogy was that I was “took too much of an interest.” There was an emphasis, in particular, on regularly reminding female instructors not to get “too close” to students, as though these academic professionals were at risk of catching criminality. In fact, as illustrated by the above quote, civilian volunteers and others can provide normative and healthy social direction and intellectual challenges in an environment otherwise lacking that external influence.
Participants described familial support in open-ended terms. From a phenomenological perspective, the essence of external support existed primarily in the knowing that there was a connection outside of the prison walls. The ability to speak with someone who represented the “outside” provided feelings of normative inclusion.

**Relationship to prior research.**

The function of positive social support in nurturing engaged, confident, civic-minded and capable young adults cannot be overstated, and has been noted in numerous studies addressing both the individual and societal problems that arise from a lack of consistent and attentive support (Cullen, 1994; Pratt & Godsey, 2003; Brisson & Usher, 2005). Negative mentoring and social influence, however, has been shown to be reversed by the inclusion of an individual and exposure of the individual in positive environments and to emotionally healthy supportive people (Senghour, 2013; Lagemann, 2016). We are redeemable, and we are capable of rehabilitation. It is reasonable to expect, given the cultural abundance of self-help books and framed affirmations as home decor, that personal growth and normative success are possible for an isolated individual. But not likely. We are social creatures after all, and seek legitimacy through the eyes of others, the looking-glass self as reflected in the validation of those we admire (Cooley, 1902, 183).

Many autobiographical authors have provided a first-person description of incarceration. For some, the impetus for positive personal development began with the support offered by a peer mentor (X, 1964; Williams, 2004; Senghour, 2013).

Consistent with prior research on social support, this study found that the absence of positive support contributed to their early life choices. Subsequently, the peer support received
by research participants was often their first experience of pro-social male influence and fraternity: “We were holding each other accountable” (P2).

**Therapeutic communities and peer program involvement.**

Most therapeutic communities in prisons exist to mediate specific antisocial behaviors such as a violent or aggressive temperament, or the abuse of alcohol or drugs. Institutionally sponsored, these programs address the common variables of criminal behavior, and that deviance we believe can be ‘fixed’. The criminality, however, does not exist in a vacuum, and is the result of failed socialization processes and the introduction of dysfunctional emotional crutches. Drug addiction and violence often arise as a response to a personal condition resultant from a destructive social environment. Only by exploring the subjective meaning of those responses, and striving to determine the essence of individual action, can society hope to mediate harmful activity.

In the peer mentorship groups considered in this study, the men engaged in a disembedding of constructs of behavior and fellowship, participating in a range of activities inconceivable prior to entering the carceral environment: “You don’t know how many guys be getting into knitting and crocheting and stuff. It just gives them a sense of involvement” (P3). This demanded a “lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restricting across indefinite spans of time-space” (Giddens, 1988, 21). P2 recalled of the group members: “They are the ones who kept me balanced, who brought me to the point where I saw something in myself that I had not seen previously. They are the ones who got me there. My mother couldn’t get me there. But once I was there, I was able to take it the rest of the way and to help transfer that to some other individuals who at the time were more like me, not really into
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND IN-PRISON PEER MENTORSHIP

recognizing their own power and how they were in charge, as I was, of the decisions that I make.”

Giddens (1988) further noted that these mechanisms depend upon trust (26). P9 shared that, “It was fulfilling just to participate in that group, the camaraderie we had. It was like, it was really like a family. You know, really like a family.” P8 experienced this support by “having a group of people who will listen to you without stomping on your feelings…we back it down to the healing process.” The expressions of support and experience of peer mentorship were profoundly transformative. P8 also revealed that:

The first lesson of the study group that these older men had already organized…was to construct a life and stop worrying about that life outside…construct a prison life so that you can grow, and that you can be a better person with more skills once you’re released. We have to work on your crime, your degenerative attitude, your sense of community and your criminative attitude…and your personal power. Why did you do what you did? It’s not to give a testament of it. It’s just to understand why you did what you did. So you can kind of rectify that in your character, in your soul, in your heart. Understand the damage you did so you can go heal, you can repair that first within yourself. Then you have to use that type of empowerment to help repair relationships with other people who are affected by your incarceration.

P4 testified: “I swear that there’s possibilities, even in that particular environment. And those groups allowed me to think that way, whereas other groups are very constrained; It’s like-You’re never going to be more than you already are.” Therapeutic communities provide a foundation to reconstruct the positive self, and peer mentorship programs provide the map and a destination.
**Social Support and in-Prison Peer Mentorship**

*Relationship to prior research.*

Therapeutic communities operate in prisons throughout New York, and nationwide. This term is used to refer specifically to these groups which provide therapeutic support for substance abuse and other addictive behaviors. DeLeon (2000) observed that, “residents change because they are involved with the community and in the change process” (350). These communities provide support precisely because they utilize group dynamics; the therapeutic effects are not realized in solitude.

Prior research primarily examined therapeutic communities for substance abuse (Wexler, et al., 1999) or social capital and peer support outside of the prison environment. Ansari (2013) discusses these relationships as a tool for social control, whereas others examined the efficacy of positive peer mentoring on youth (Brown, 2004; Quigley, 2007). And while a significant study investigating social support, including external means, for incarcerated women (Clone & DeHart, 2014) noted the importance of that support for rehabilitation, there is no previous research specifically examining the peer-led mentorship programs in New York State.

The findings of this study are shared most closely by research conducted in the United Kingdom and Israel (Chen, 2006; Woodall, et al., 2015), though those did not follow the same parameters, and were largely concerned with the general way that peer interventions may affect overall health and well-being. This includes studies of “Listener Schemes”, opportunities for Samaritan-trained prisoners in the UK to provide “confidential and sympathetic listening” to their peers (Levenson & Farrant, 2002, 197)

*Self-story post-mentorship.*

Referencing his novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, Thomas Wolfe (1936) wrote of the characters, “Each moment of their lives was conditioned not only by what they experienced in
the moment, but by all that they experienced up to that moment” (51). Yet this process of developing the character of our personhood is not finite, and we retain the ability to change the patterns of our identity, if the desire to do so, is present. This personal agency is fundamental to character development as well as the desistance process; Laub and Sampson (2003) call this engagement “transformative action” (146).

Maturity is a predictor of desistance, the known variable of simply ‘aging out of crime’ (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983). With maturity often comes introspection. The participants in this study shared experiences of critical reflection as illuminated by the guidance of mentors who introduced them to their ethnic cultural awareness, a doorway to self-understanding. Self-story, to these men, now included personal ancestry and centuries of structural impositions of foreign culture and power. With the maturity needed to engage in group mentorship, came knowledge of a story larger than themselves, and an understanding of how their young lives were guided by forces beyond their ability to navigate.

As mature men, the subjects of this research evaluated their choices, took responsibility, and returned to their peers and communities as leaders. P8 believes that he is now a man that other men will come to for advice, and that he is, “A man who’ll go to other men…I always sit at the footsteps of the elders…I always seek their counsel.” Personal agency was important to these men, and they remain acutely aware of the ability to direct their lives and relationships.

*Relationship to prior research.*

This research provided examples of self-story narratives developed over time and nurtured specifically within the group setting provided by peer mentorship. Shadd Maruna (2001), in interviews with formerly incarcerated subjects, observed that they “displayed an exaggerated sense of control over the future and an inflated, almost missionary, sense of purpose
in life.” He noted that they “recast their criminal pasts not as the shameful failings that they are but instead as the necessary prelude to some newfound calling” (p 9). This sentiment was not evident in the data collected for this research. Rather, participants expressed a deep sense of shame for their criminality and did not recast those actions as any sort of required prerequisite to the normative men they are today.

The men interviewed did express a sense of control over their futures, as well as a sense of purpose. P1 observed that he is “much more aware, much more conscious in terms of socially, politically conscious. I think more about legacy. I’m much more humble…I am very mindful of how I live in the world every day.” This sense of efficacy enhances accomplishment and motivates individuals to meet challenges and exceed expectations (Bandura, 1994). To suggest that expressed experience and outlook is inflated or exaggerated places their story as a comparison to some other social group. In fact, there is no demographic cohort whose essence of experience can be drawn from a similar well. Maruna’s study of narratives is an important element of desistance research, albeit not focused on peer mentorship influence, and therefore, this analysis of the personal reflections of participants warrants further evaluation.

**Intervening Variables of Support and Influence**

This research showed that many of the participants experienced a sense of external support in the form of parents, siblings or spouse. One subject felt that he was already engaged in critical introspection and personal development at the time he met his wife, but that with her in his life, “it went from black and white to technicolor” (P1). One subject entered the correctional system married to one woman and left divorced to another. And one participant remained married to the same woman through two terms, and they remain married today. The participants
who expressed a sense of familial support described that connection in terms of awareness of connection and love, if not necessarily material support.

Most subjects found comfort in the basic communication maintained with family members, mothers in particular. P5 recalled the willingness of his family to send books or other intellectual material as needed. This provided encouragement for education and transformation: “If you don’t make anybody else proud, you should make your mother proud. Because I feel really good about being able to do that for my mom” (P2).

Most participants referenced college course opportunities as a door to intellectual challenge and inspiration. Several subjects participated in a Black History Studies class, either as an introduction to peer group meetings or in addition to the mentorship relationships. This class, peer created and led, was experienced as a gateway to understanding the structural and historical variables of their lives. Often, these classes were the first introduction to cultural and environmental awareness that the participants experienced. Malcolm X (1964) said that, “It is only after slavery and prison that the sweetest appreciation of freedom can come” (p.386). The Black Studies class introduced the students to the connection between these states, and their obligation to ensure their communities experience freedom without government interference. P2 believes that, “All these relationships matter. When you allow for these positive relationships and actually encourage them, and realize that the relationships have an impact in the community, then that means you are seeing the value in what these individuals are doing. I think that society doesn’t know enough about it, and the administration doesn’t value it enough in order to place emphasis on it.”

Placing their circumstances in a historical context led research subjects to the awareness that the essence of their experience was put into motion by forces greater than they could have
anticipated as young men. This situation of self in time and place is a critical component of self-awareness and development.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This study focused on a significant yet frequently overlooked segment of the American prison population: violent offenders. This group, comprising 63% of New York state prison population as of April 2018 (Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, 2018), receives less media attention and policy interest than drug offenders, despite having lower recidivism rates and therefore, a greater potential for rehabilitation. Yet the myth of the violent offender prevails; we view those who dealt drugs as entrepreneurial and redeemable, and those who engaged in violence as deserving of unrelenting punishment.

Psychologist Laura Hayes (2018) observed that, “The individual who has anger dysfunction and is violence-prone, unlike almost any other physical or emotional dysfunction, is uniquely, powerfully unappealing. This emotional disorder evokes no empathy in the rest of us”. The criminal justice system, however, committed to rule of law, must be objective and opportunities for rehabilitation must be provided to all types of incarcerated people. Confronting the reality of competing visions of punishment is uncomfortable. While we wrestle with the parameters of democratic principles, citizens spend day after day, year after year, decade after decades behind bars.

Additional research, therefore, must be undertaken in three areas:

1. The study of normative social capital in at-risk communities. The application of strain theory is of particular relevance in understanding ways and means of counteracting delinquent influences.
2. Observing and documenting peer mentorship as a character developing agent in prison. It is critical to consider peer guidance not only as therapeutic response, but as a substantive agent of personal growth and maturity.

3. Research to observe and document the development of self-story narratives of incarcerated people as they are considered, evaluated, and reoriented toward positive futures.

Data in these areas will document and contribute to additional redemptive and rehabilitative opportunities still not considered. In example, peer support post-incarceration emerged as a theme not considered prior to conducting the research. P3 shared at our interview that he had just spoken “with a guy today telling him what to do, he just came home. Because he didn’t know quite how to go about finding a job…It’s a lot of them out there that helps us on re-entry to find a job.” Ongoing peer support post-incarceration is a variable of desistance transition deserving of additional research. Crafting effective reforms will only be possible in cooperation with incarcerated people, utilizing data drawn from their perspective.

**Conclusion**

This research has demonstrated a clear course from the lack of pro-social support and subsequent criminality and incarceration, to the direction and guidance provided by peer mentorship groups, and finally, to the ongoing narrative of positive and productive self-story and community engagement. The overarching theme portrayed within self-story is one experienced by the participants as men of status and power. While the status may be acquired through illegitimate means, and the power is primarily through force and violence, upholding that reputation ensured continued criminality. P4 recalled, “Yes, they all got a reputation. Fuck that reputation.” P9 remembered, “Whereas, at a time when you need to be focused on decisions for
your adult life, the only thing I’m worried about is being cool.” The strain of being unable to achieve mainstream goals through legitimate means, and the absence of proactive positive social support led to patterns of behavior that precluded environmental and self-awareness.

The study participants engaged in extraordinary and often painful introspection, through a self- and peer-led process. This healing process is the crux of the peer mentorship groups and the support they provide: healing wounds of racism, disenfranchisement, family chaos, substandard educations, strain in achieving normative goals, and most importantly, healing the wounds of the pain they caused to victims and to communities. The sense of brotherhood through interpersonal mentoring was real, it was significant, and it was transformative. P1 observed that, “Even when I got to Sullivan Correctional Facility, (redacted) was there, and so he said, ‘I’m glad you’re here.’ Because even though he’s older than me, he knew I was someone of like mind. He knew we could do this, we have the same philosophy. It was like a fraternity and we changed the culture of that prison.”

Variations of peer-support models are growing in prisons, including “healing circles” in several California institutions. Formerly incarcerated, a creator of the California “Self-Awareness and Recovery” program, commented on re-entry post incarceration: “You can get a person a job, get them into school, but if they’re not at peace, they’re not going to succeed” (Bernstein, 2018, SR2). Peer mentorship groups challenge the assumptions and habits of incarcerated members, and for the subjects interviewed for this research, meeting those challenges brought them peace and a commitment to rewriting their personal narratives.

The insights from this research are applicable to criminal justice practitioners, including prosecutors, and corrections administrators. The findings provide empirical evidence to support peer-led prison programming and the development of mentorship opportunities. Though an
important and demonstrably effective rehabilitative variable, higher education in prison remains inaccessible for people who are not academically inclined. However, established groups, such as the Resurrection Study Group, deliver peer driven rehabilitative scaffolding that is unparalleled elsewhere in the New York State corrections system.

This idea of introspection as a pathway to rehabilitation is foreign to some criminal justice practitioners, and creates an obstacle when generating policy that presupposes a belief in redeemability. The way in which stakeholders conceptualize rehabilitation informs opportunity and policy. P3 remembered: “The peer groups…I don’t know, they are looked upon as something negative by the Department of Corrections when actually it should be the other way around. They should be actively supporting these groups because they don’t know the benefit that these groups pose for them.” Unfortunately, if a stakeholder is incapable of placing their role and decisions in a historical context, and lacks the ability to self-reflect themselves, it is difficult to conceive of the benefit to be gained by others.

The collective social good requires collective efficacy, which requires positive social support. This may be found in normative cultural environments, or in prisons. In correctional institutions, social support is created and nurtured, and rehabilitation is offered and sustained by peers. The most relevant application for corrections department leadership, may, in fact, be to simply get out of the way.

Each and every one of us has been born into a given historical reality, ruled by particular norms and values, and managed by a unique economic and political system. We take this reality for granted, thinking it is natural, inevitable and immutable. We forget that our world was created by an accidental chain of events, and that history shaped not only our technology, politics and society, but also our thoughts, fears and dreams. The cold hand
of the past emerges from the grave of our ancestors, grips us by the neck and directs our
gaze towards a single future. We have felt that grip from the moment we are born, so we
assume that it is a natural and inescapable part of who we are. Therefore, we seldom try
to shake ourselves free, and envision alternative futures (Harari, 2017, p.60).

This chain of events determines the pattern and process for many lives, but not the path
of intention the research participants have chosen. The telling of their history was not immutable
autobiography; they envisioned an alternative future, and their brothers led them to freedom.
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APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONAIRRE

Research Questions upon which the Interview Protocol is Based:

**Research question one.** How do prisoner mentors contribute to rehabilitation and eventual desistance from crime?

**Research question two.** Are peer mentoring programs in prison an effective foundation for re-entry and reintegration to pro-social norms?

**Research question three.** What are the intervening mechanisms through which social capital contributes to desistance from crime?

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

**Background**

Q. Please tell me the offense for which you were incarcerated, the length of your sentence, and how long you were in prison.

Q. Please describe to me the sort of person you were at the time of offense, and at the time of entry into prison.

Q. How did you experience social support prior to your incarceration?

Q. Prior to your last sentencing, how did you see yourself in relation to your family, your community, and the larger society?

Q. Prior to your last sentencing, did you believe that you had social support in pursuing culturally accepted goals?

Q. How would you describe the support networks, or individual people, in your life prior to your arrest? This includes family, friends, neighbors, peers, teachers, etc.

**Programs in Prison**

Q. How did you experience social support on entry into prison?
Q. What programs were you involved with in prison, and what groups were specifically organized and led by peers who were also incarcerated?

Q. How did you learn about the group, and what contributed to your decision to join?

Q. Do you believe that involvement in the group was supported by prison staff and supervision? Please describe.

Q. Please describe how often you met in those groups, how many people were present, what materials were used or referenced, how the group was managed, and what policies and procedures were in place regarding commitments and expectations (for example).

Q. After participating in a peer mentorship group, did you ever go on to facilitate classes/groups? If so, which ones and why? Describe your experience as a facilitator.

Program Substance

Q. What was discussed in these groups?

Q. What were the challenges presented to you?

Q. What was different about the peer groups than other opportunities in prison?

Q. How did the group address re-entry issues?

Q. How did the group address reintegration into pro-social normative behaviors?

Q. On a scale of one to five, how would you rate the influence of the peer mentorship group in helping you to change, or rediscover yourself? One is “only somewhat” influential, and five is “greatly” influential.

Q. Regarding the other members of this group, do you believe you established a support network that assisted you upon reentry?

Character Development

Q. How would you describe yourself today, both personally and socially, in comparison to
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who were prior to prison?

Q. Can you describe a moment or an experience that you feel was a turning point for you personally in these groups?

Q. How did you experience a sense of character change?

Q. In what ways did the peer mentorship group address character and behavior?

Q. After release, do you utilize or reference lessons or experiences from the peer mentorship? If so, please describe them.

Other

Q. How did you experience external support during your participation in the program?

Q. On a scale of one to five, how would you rate the influence of family members in helping you to change, or rediscover yourself? One is “only somewhat” influential, and five is “greatly” influential.

Q. Would you say that family was more important or less important than the peer mentorship group in changing your outlook and behavior?

Q. What other influences do you feel contributed to your changing your outlook and behavior? For example, books you read; educational opportunities in prison; other prison groups like anti-violence or substance abuse groups; outside friends, etc.

Q. On a scale for one to five, how would you rate the influence of this other source in helping you to change or rediscover yourself? One is “only somewhat” influential, and five is “greatly” influential.

Q. Would you say that this source was more important or less important or about equal to the peer mentorship group in changing your outlook and behavior?

Q. Is there anything you would like to tell me about your socialization, your experiences, the
group, or your re-entry that I haven’t asked?
APPENDIX B: GENERAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

General Informed Consent Form
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled
Self-discovery, Social Support, and Rehabilitation Through In-Prison Peer Mentorship

Who is doing this research study?
College: Criminal Justice at the College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences Department of Justice & Human Services.
Principal Investigator: Rebekah Gwynne Zwick, M.A.
Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Ron Wallace, PhD.
Funding: Unfunded.

What is this study about?
This is a research study, designed to test and create new ideas that other people can use. The purpose of this research study is to examine the ways that peer mentorship groups in prison provide social support to members. This research will investigate how and why these therapeutic communities assist men in rehabilitation and creation of new, normative self-story narratives. By better understanding the role these groups play, more opportunities can be provided for their functioning, and facilitators may receive increased institutional support.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?
You are being asked to be in this research study because you participated in a peer mentorship group in prison, and are now living a stable and productive life.

This study will include about fifteen people.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?
While you are taking part in this research study, I will interview you at least once in person. It is possible that I will need to conduct a follow-up interview for clarification.

Research Study Procedures - as a participant, this is what you will be doing:
You will be asked several questions to determine your eligibility in the research, including type of sentencing, time served, mentorship group memberships, and activities post-release.

It is anticipated that our initial interview will take about an hour and a half. During this interview, I will take field notes and the conversation will be recorded. Subsequent interviews will range from a half-hour to an hour, and may be conducted via Skype.
Could I be removed from the study early by the research team? There are several reasons why the researchers may need to remove you from the study early. The primary reason would be if you no longer meet inclusion criteria.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

You may find some questions I ask you (or some things I ask you to do) to be upsetting or stressful. You can stop participating at any time if you choose. Additionally, I can refer you to someone who may be able to help you with these feelings.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You have the right to leave this research study at any time, or not be in it. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get. If you choose to stop being in the study, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study but you may request that it not be used.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigators. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits from being in this research study. We hope the information learned from this study will inform not only correctional policy with regard to programming, but contribute to the body of research demonstrating the ability to self-rehabilitate with support from peers in prison.

Will I be paid or given compensation for being in the study?

You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study.

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study.
Ask the researchers if you have any questions about what it will cost you to take part in this research study (for example bills, fees, or other costs related to the research).

**How will you keep my information private?**

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. Your interview, while in a public space, will be held out of hearing of any one else. Data and material from your interview and any other subsequent communication will be kept confidential and presented anonymously in the final report. Participants will be identified as “Participant A” or “Participant B” only. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If I publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, I will not identify you. All confidential data will be kept securely in a locked file within the researcher’s home. All data will be kept for 36 months and destroyed after that time by incineration.

**Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?**

This research study involves audio recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution. The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above.

**Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?**

If you have questions now, feel free to ask me. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Primary contact:
Rebekah Zwick, M.A., can be reached at (917) 204-9401.

If primary is not available, contact:
Marcelo Castro, PhD, can be reached at (954) 262-7001.

**Research Participants Rights**

For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

All space below was intentionally left blank.
Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:
• You have read the above information.
• Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

Adult Signature Section

I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant: __________________________ Signature of Participant: __________________________ Date: __________

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent and Authorization: __________________________ Signature of Person Obtaining Consent & Authorization: __________________________ Date: __________