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Community Bonding for Ex-Offenders: The Importance of Recreational Social Activities on the Post-Incarceration reentry Process

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Community Bonding for Ex-Offenders: The Importance of Recreational Social
Activities on the Post-Incarceration Reentry Process

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Public Policy and Administration

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

By

Mfon-Obong Edet

May 2022

Dedication

This study is dedicated to formerly incarcerated individuals who strive to improve their lives and not be defined by the stigma associated with incarceration. The following poem by A. Esmie Wright was written for this study and is dedicated to formerly incarcerated individuals:

<u>Unforgiving the Forgotten</u>

You released me from hell

and told me not to come back./

Yet you didn't teach me how to

acquire the tools to not return./

And now I am released./

Thrown into a whole new world

With only the tools that brought me into hell./

How do I navigate?/

Who do I ask for help when the stench of hell is on me

And no one wants to be around me?./

As I burn in my internal suffering, I yearn for a hand.

And yet the hand I receive is a round of applause

As I am sent back to hell.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my family, friends, and work colleagues for their on-going encouragement throughout my dissertation and graduate school journey. A special thank you to my parents, my late mother, Dr. Esther Edet whose research sparked my curiosity in this subject area; as well as my father, Dr. Silas Edet whose academic background and inquisitive nature provided creative insight into how I approach my research. A special thank you to the DPA faculty members at WCU for their professional and research guidance.

Abstract

Examining different factors that causes an individual, particularly an ex-offender, to re-engage in criminal activities (also known as recidivism) is a recurring topic when discussing the U.S. criminal justice system. Within the field of criminology, an individual's engagement in criminal activities could be due to biological, psychological, or sociological factors. For the purpose of this study, understanding the sociological factors related to criminal activity was further explored. This exploration focused on the importance of community building and how bonding with others can create a better reentry process for the ex-offender, post-incarceration. Additionally, with a better reentry process, ex-offenders' may be deterred from engaging in criminal activities. A qualitative method consisting of open-ended survey questions and semi-structured interviews was used for this study. The findings suggest that the lack of opportunities for ex-offenders to bond with their community hinders a successful reentry process post-incarceration.

Keywords: ex-offenders, returning citizens, social inclusion, recreational social activities, post-release reentry

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Each year approximately 650,000 formerly incarcerated in the United States (U.S.) are released from correctional institutions such as prisons to return to civilian life (*U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.*). With incarceration used as a method to reform or correct criminal behavior (hence the name *correctional institutions*) and create law-abiding citizens, incarcerated individuals are provided with reentry services in an effort to equip these individuals with the necessary tools to succeed post-incarceration. These services include job training, housing support, and mental health resources; the latter is more so focused on access to medication and not necessarily therapy. reentry programs and the services they provide are primarily made available by correctional institutions, both during and post-incarceration. However, programs exist within prisons, whether established by social organizations (i.e., nonprofits) or currently incarcerated individuals, that utilize recreational social activities as a source of entertainment for those individuals but also provides them with the social skills tool to rebuild their lives. The activities provided in prisons such as sports teams (Gradea & Samuel, 2018), choir groups (Cohen, 2019), and religious activities (Young, Gartner, O'Connor, Larson, & Wright 1995) are used to assist the incarcerated individual in their rehabilitation process by engaging in activities that promote prosocial behavior (Rocque, Bierie, Posick, & MacKenzie, 2013). When the individual has completed their prison sentence, the post-incarceration reentry period for the formerly incarcerated (often referred to as either ex-offenders or returning citizens) becomes heavily focused on providing those individuals with the basic resources to decrease the likelihood of recidivism. Those resources, as previously mentioned, include program services that focus on employment (i.e., job training), housing, and mental health. Although studies have

shown the benefit of providing those programs, recidivism rates in various states in the U.S. continues to remain high (over 35%) (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). The high occurrence of recidivism poses the questions of, if correctional institutions exist to reform individuals that engage in criminal behavior, then why are individuals continuing to engage in criminal activities. Do those correctional institutions actually work? And if correctional institutions work for some individuals and not all, what changes can be made to move away from the blanket-approach of punishing delinquent, criminal behavior through incarceration? Although those questions are beyond the scope of this study, they are part of the current on-going conversation surrounding criminal justice reform within the U.S. The presence of those conversations, highlights how the criminal justice system is constantly being studied by different fields in order to understand how it can better serve society as a whole. For this study, the researcher primarily incorporated a criminology perspective throughout the paper but through the lens of public administration. The researcher wanted to understand why individuals engaged in criminal activity if crime is assumed to be a social problem and therefore a response to social conditions (Haines, 1999). Therefore, the researcher focused this study on what social factors can deter criminal activity. The social factors that the researcher chose to focus on were activities that encouraged or created a space for community building.

For this study, a qualitative research method was used to further understand how social inclusion impacts formerly incarcerated individuals. This paper begins by discussing issues that formerly incarcerated individuals experience as they adjust to civilian society, post-incarceration. Through the literature review the researcher was then able to identify a common narrative around social reintegration for a formerly incarcerated individual which consisted of services

(previously discussed) offered to assist with reintegration. This narrative brought to light how community bonding opportunities through social activities for formerly incarcerated individuals are almost non-existent; and the few opportunities that do exist are scattered throughout the U.S.

The usage of social activities to assist with integrating an individual into a new environment is not a new concept. To further explore this concept, the social bond theory, a criminology theory that discusses how social bonds impact an individual's engagement in criminal activities, was used as the theoretical framework. To understand their social bonds, the research design of this study explored how social activities impact formerly incarcerated individuals.

As previously stated, it is common for formerly incarcerated individuals to be referred to as ex-offenders or returning citizens. Today, the term returning citizen is quite common however it is a fairly new term. The origin of the term is unknown however the researcher, through cross-reference research of seeing how far back the term was used, believes the term stems from the co-authored book, *Forensic Social Work: Psychosocial & Legal Issues in Diverse Settings* (2009). In Patricia O'Brien's chapter entitled, "reentry in the Twenty-First Century", the author discussed different aspects of the reentry process in the 21st century. Within the chapter, O'Brien mentions how an individual felt like a "citizen" again because they could obtain an id and overall had access to opportunities they were once denied while incarcerated (O'Brien, 2009, p. 278). Since this book was published in 2009, the researcher concluded that the term has been used since that year. Over the years, the term "returning citizen" has grown to being a common term used to describe formerly incarcerated individuals. Although this term is commonly used, currently it still receives push back from formerly incarcerated individuals who feel the

conditions/experiences of the reentry process post-incarceration feel as if they are still imprisoned due to strict parole conditions and constant judgment by society. Overall, the term returning citizen highlights a new phase in a formerly incarcerated individual's life. However, this term did not align with the messaging that the researcher wanted to express in this study which is inclusivity and community bonding; the researcher felt the connotation of those words were negative because they perpetuate the idea of "otherness" (Staszak, 2008). Hence why the term "returning community member" or RCM, created for this study, is used throughout this paper. One could argue that creating a new term that uses a label to designate a marginalized community reiterates the concept of otherness that the previous labels portray. However, the researcher felt that if a term is going to be used to highlight the unique challenges that this particular group experiences then a term should be used to also encourage community building. Since the overarching focus of this study centers around social inclusion and ultimately how ex-offenders can build positive relationships within their communities, throughout the study ex-offenders are referred to as a returning community member or RCM. RCM is a term created by the researcher and is felt to have a more positive connotation which can be beneficial in modifying how society perceives ex-offenders but ultimately how ex-offenders view themselves as they adjust to their new life post-incarceration.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were created by the researcher for the purpose of this study.

Returning Community Member (RCM)

Returning community member or RCM is a term used to identify a formerly incarcerated individual. The plural form of this word is returning community members or RCMs.

Recreational Social Activity

Recreational social activity is a term used to describe social activities that an individual engages in recreationally for entertainment purposes. These activities are meant to reflect the individual's preference of "fun" and usually takes place in a casual setting/ environment.

Obligatory Social Support System

Obligatory social support is a term used to describe social ties in which an individual must (obligated to) engage in relationships with individuals within these designated groups.

Discretionary Social System

Discretionary social support is a term used to describe social ties in which an individual can voluntarily engage in relationships with individuals within these groups.

RCM Social Network Pillars

RCM Social Network Pillars is a theory that suggest that an obligatory social support system in conjunction with a discretionary support system creates a well-rounded (ultimately meaningful) social network for the RCM which can lead towards a path of resistance from criminal activity.

Statement of Problem

According to the *Prison Policy Initiative* (2017), the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world and spends $182B on mass incarceration annually. Although maintaining correctional institutions is expensive, one of the biggest challenges that all levels of government have to address is how to provide the necessary resources for the influx of RCMs that are being released annually. One of the biggest issues that RCMs have to navigate through is how to balance social relationships without violating their parole (also known as community supervision). It is becoming more common for re-offending to occur due to RCMs violating

community supervision restrictions (Harding et al., 2017). For example, an article published in *The Guardian* by a woman who served nearly two decades in prison discussed how her re-arrest occurred due to violating parole (Toon, 2020). The author further states that she was only allowed to go to locations approved by her parole officer and that ultimately her ability to socialize was limited to "essential daily living needs only" (Toon, 2020). As can be seen in this example, the post-release reentry phase is highly focused on providing RCMs with the basic resources to deter their involvement in criminal activity. However, this example also highlights how the RCMs' ability to reconnect with the community is very confined, making their social reintegration post-release a difficult process.

Purpose of Study

Previous research has shown the importance of informal community support in the form of familial relationships in the post-release reentry process for RCMs (Martinez & Christian, 2009). However, very limited research exists that focuses on the impact of informal community support in the form of friendships. Although this study will not fully analyze the friendship component of relationship building for RCMs, what will be explored is how building personal relationships with individuals can impact an RCM's post-release reintegration experience. Overall, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the social needs of RCMs and the importance of social activities during the post-release reentry process for this population. The study began with one exploratory question but evolved into two questions in order to truly capture the social needs of RCMs post-release,

(Q1) How do RCMs that participate in recreational social activities describe their

post-incarceration reentry process?

(Q2) Socially, what do RCMs need in order to feel connected to their community?

Additionally, the researcher wanted to understand how individuals are able to build sustainable relationships. In particular, how those perceived as outsiders such as RCMs are able to build relationships post-incarceration and what communities are doing to foster those relationships. Ultimately, the desire to understand social bonds helped frame the focus of this study.

Scope of Research

The scope of this research focused on understanding how social factors such as community building through recreational social activities can impact the post release reentry process. Social factors were examined because of its potential to impact an RCM's engagement in criminal activity. Within the study of criminology an individual's engagement in criminal activity are categorized into three areas: biological, sociological, and psychological. For this study, the theory related to sociological factors, the social bond theory, was used to frame the epistemology. The assumption within the social bond theory is that the lack of attachment to one's community is what causes individuals to engage in criminal activity. To better understand what those communities lacked in order to strengthen those relationships, it was necessary to interact with those directly impacted by the reentry process such as RCMs. Based on their opinion, understanding RCMs' social needs would allow for communities to provide the necessary resources to create a successful reentry process post-incarceration.

Due to the vulnerability of this population, interacting with groups such as professionals that work directly with this population, was helpful for this study as well. By including this group, the researcher was able to further examine the social network of RCMs. The location of

where survey and interview participants resided provided an opportunity to study social bonding

and interactions in a supposedly diverse area. Therefore the geographic area of this study took

place in the greater Washington, D.C. area which is also known as the DMV since it includes

parts of Maryland and Virginia. The DMV is a unique area within the U.S. because of its

transient nature. As the nation's capital, the city of Washington which is located in the District of

Columbia, is very diverse because of its political environment in which various groups and

cultures interact with each other. This diversity is present within the city but also around its

borders, in neighboring states such as Maryland and Virginia. These two states create the

boundaries of Washington, D.C. and by doing so are able to experience the same diversity and

challenges that diverse cities and/or areas experience.

To understand the answers to the exploratory questions previously mentioned, this study

utilized a qualitative research method composed of open-ended survey questions and

semi-structured interviews for the data collection process. Participants for the survey were

limited to adult RCMs, released from incarceration between 2008-2019, that resided in the DMV.

Participants for the interview included two professional groups that serve RCMs in the DMV.

The two groups consisted of program managers (or those with similar titles) that worked for

social organizations (or nonprofits) and community supervision officers (parole officers) and /or

community supervision supervisors that worked for government agencies.

The following chapters include the literature review, theoretical framework,

methodology, data analysis, and conclusion. The literature review (chapter two) involved

reviewing literature that examined the need for community support, the negative effects of

isolation, and the benefits of engaging in fun, recreational social activities. Those areas were

focused on to provide a foundation for why recreational social activities are necessary during the post-release reentry process. In chapter three, the theoretical framework is discussed with a focus on the social bond theory, a theory rooted in criminology. This theory is further expanded upon by the researcher with the introduction of the working theory which the researcher created for this study. In chapter four, the methodology used to explore the working theory further involved creating a data-collection method that placed RCMs and their insight about the reentry process at the center of attention. Placing RCMs at the center of the data-collection was imperative since they are directly impacted by the reentry process. Understanding that RCMs are part of a vulnerable population, additional data collection involved reaching out to nonprofits that work directly with RCMs in an effort to respect the privacy of the RCM. In chapter five, the data collected was further analyzed to understand the social needs of RCMs. In the final chapter (chapter six), the researcher summarized the research process and overall findings as well as provided suggestions on next steps.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study primarily analyzed the social network of RCMs to better understand how their ability to socialize with others, post-incarceration, impacted their overall reintegration into society. To understand an RCM's social network, the researcher reviewed literature that discussed different types of socializing as well as some of the challenges associated when trying to create or expand one's social network. The literature was grouped into three main categories: informal community support post-incarceration, social isolation, and participation in social activities.

To further understand how those categories related to RCMs experiences, the literature reviewed therefore aimed to explore how recreational social activities, especially during the post-incarceration reentry process, influenced community bonding for RCMs. However, the challenge was that a very limited amount of literature existed that explored RCMs' participation in recreational social activities during the post-incarceration reentry process. The literature that was available however, primarily discussed the importance of post-incarceration reentry programs that provided services focused on job training, housing, and mental health. The commonality found within this group of literature highlighted the lack of opportunities for RCMs to actually connect with their community in a meaningful way and how the stress from being ostracized could influence one's behavior to engage in criminal activities. Due to the limited literature available in regards to social activities and RCMs, the researcher decided to explore literature that highlighted various factors that social activities address such as community support, social isolation, and community bonding. For this study, the literature reviewed focused

on (1) how community support impacts RCMs, (2) how social isolation impacts RCMs, and (3) how RCMs are able to bond with their community through recreational social activities.

<div align="center">

Community Support Post-Incarceration

</div>

For RCMs, life post-incarceration often includes working through the stigma from incarceration while also working to stay out of trouble. In the 2012 documentary, "The Long Shadow of Incarceration's Stigma", the film discussed the challenges RCMs face as they work to maintain a crime-free life yet are constantly faced with hurdles due to discrimination from their community (Long Shadow Film, 2017). In the study by Skinner-Osei and Stepteau-Watson (2017), the authors discussed the difficulty that African-American fathers struggled with post-incarceration. The authors went on to discuss how social factors are ignored and/or mismanaged such as childhood traumas and the stress of being an RCM, making their reentry process very difficult (Skinner-Osei and Stepteau-Watson, 2017). Additional studies by Skinner-Osei (2016) that focused on African-American fathers' experience with rebuilding their lives post-incarceration as well as Murray et al. (2017) study on social factors, provided supportive research on the challenges that RCMs experience. Those studies also discussed how incarceration forces separation which disrupts family bonds and community relationships.

The study by Gill & Wilson (2017) which focused on the re-design of post-release reentry services to fit the need of the RCMs, also discussed the challenges of reintegration for RCMs. One of those challenges involved re-establishing social bonds with family and social institutions (Gill & Wilson, 2017). The significance of this study is the importance it placed on customizing reentry services for RCMs that provide those individuals with the opportunity to build better relationships with their community. For the most part, reentry services aim to address

the basic needs of RCMs; those basic needs as previously mentioned in the introduction section of this paper include employment, housing, and mental health services. Therefore, assessing the needs of RCMs is primarily limited to understanding how to best provide those basic needs for the individual. Therefore the researcher concluded that by focusing on those basic needs, there is currently a lack of consideration placed on trying to understand the RCM as a whole person; no focus is being put on understanding RCMs hobbies and personalities. Additionally, the study by Gill & Wilson (2017) is very significant to this research because it discussed the importance of social bonds. Re-establishing social bonds especially with family members is an important component of the reentry process, both during and post-incarceration.

Another study regarding the importance of social bond examined the relationship between recidivism and community support. The study by Edet (2007) discussed the role of community in the form of unemployment, mental health, and family support in the post-release reentry process. The author examined the relationship between those variables (unemployment, mental health, and family support) and its impact on the recidivism rates of RCMs in the state of Georgia. The author's focus on the role of familial support during incarceration and maintaining those close family ties once released, highlighted how those relationships positively impacted the RCM's post-incarceration reentry process especially in regards to social reintegration; "if family ties are broken, most likely the inmates will return to prison within a year or two after being released for various reasons, such as lack of housing, lack of financial support, and emotional stability" (Edet, 2007, p. 31). The significance of this study is that it discussed the continuation of community support in the reentry process, both during incarceration and post-incarceration.

Impact of Social Isolation

The need to understand the importance as well as variations of community support (or social network) for RCMs also highlighted the impact (and occurrence) of social isolation for this vulnerable group. Although this study focused on adults who were formerly incarcerated, the study by Newman, Holden, & Delville (2005) discussed social isolation and how the stress of being bullied could cause victimization and therefore influence problematic behavior within juveniles. An argument could be made that being an RCM can create an experience in which the individual views themselves as a victim due to the social isolation that they experience from their community. Based on the literature reviewed in the previous section, oftentimes the life cycle of an RCM would involve some aspect of isolation such as social restrictions imposed by the parole board. Other societal forms of bullying could consist of experiences that other marginalized communities have had to endure for decades (even centuries) especially in the U.S, due to biological and cultural reasons such as racism and ethnocide. Those types of bullying include housing discrimination, predatory lending, job discrimination, and community discrimination from local businesses and law enforcement.

Regardless of whether a child or adult, social relationships play a major role in one's personal development. In the study, Cacioppo and Cacioppo (2014) the authors discussed how perceived social isolation or loneliness is detrimental to a person's well-being. The study examined how loneliness affects morbidity and mortality rates in lonely older adults. Within this quantitative study, the findings indicated that as social organisms, perceived social isolation negatively impacts how an individual functions within society. Instead of being more in-tuned with people in social situations and ultimately concerned about the collective well-being of others, the presence of loneliness could cause a person to only be focused on protecting themself.

Although their research did not discuss incarceration, its relevance to this study is due to the authors' emphasis on the importance of social relationships and the impact it has on how an individual functions within society. What is inferred from Cacioppo and Cacioppos' study is that for RCMs, loneliness is increased because of the difficulty to connect with individuals in a meaningful way, both during and post-incarceration (2014). Without that connection, RCMs may be more prone to engage in criminal activity since their main priority would be to protect themselves over the welfare of their community.

When comparing U.S. prisons to those in Europe such as Norway which utilizes a more restorative justice approach, correctional institutions in the U.S. can appear to be very apathetic. From harsh sentencing practices to the prison culture itself, isolation and the idea of "unworthiness" is present throughout the U.S. incarceration experience. For incarcerated individuals, the feeling of apathy seems to echo throughout their imprisonment due to how correctional institutions are designed in a way to isolate individuals from society. Earhart (2014) discussed apathy and how it can be combated when incarcerated individuals are provided with opportunities to practice autonomy. For this study, Earhart (2014) examined how to combat the grueling effect of prison culture by offering college classes to an incarcerated individual. Although this study primarily focused on the importance of job placement, the author also put greater emphasis on the importance of autonomy and how it can increase an individual's willingness to connect with people within their community.

The study by Haney (2002) discussed the role incarceration played in hindering RCMs as they adjust back to life post-incarceration (civilian life). Haney provided evidence to suggest the negative impact incarceration could have on an individual but failed to truly emphasize the social

implication of imprisonment and how to reverse those effects. Even with information from this study regarding how prison distorts social skills, a somewhat limited solution was suggested by the author that focused on the basic tools for reintegration: *employment*; the author states that employment is "the most critical aspect of post-prison adjustment" (Haney, 2002, p. 89). According to the researcher, what made Haney's suggestion problematic is that it reiterated the idea that only offering RCMs with basic reentry services such as employment would create a successful reintegration process in which the researcher believes that to be false.

As previously mentioned, incarceration is essentially a tactic used to isolate an individual who has caused harm to others. This form of social isolation, coupled with prison environments being a melting pot of individuals who have committed small to large criminal offenses, has caused prison culture to embody fear. For example, a low-operational drug dealer could be sharing a cell with someone who committed first degree murder. Once an individual is released from prison, that fear does not easily subside especially if they were incarcerated for a long time. An argument could be made that an individual's alertness, due to fear, kept them alive and once released they continued to hold on to that fear since that's all they knew upon their release.

RCMs experience of living in trauma while incarcerated is not commonly discussed although people are aware that it happens. Post traumatic stress disorder or PTSD is often discussed in relation to military veterans. However, more studies are being done around PTSD as it relates to prison. The study conducted by Jones (2020) which focused on prison-related PTSD, measured the rate of PTSD amongst RCMs. The author distributed a "Prison-Related PTSD Questionnaire" which consisted of 25 questions to 1000 participants and discovered that there was a higher rate of PTSD amongst the RCM population in comparison to other members in

society. With this high occurrence, the author suggested that more resources, especially in the

form of community support, need to be established in order to provide long-term care for this

sub-group of an already marginalized population. In another study related to prison-related

PTSD, Liem and Kunst (2013) discussed prison-related PTSD as it relates to the number of years

incarcerated. The study utilized qualitative and quantitative methods that included a

semi-structured interview with 25 RCMs that were incarcerated for homicide. The findings

indicated that there is a greater presence of PTSD symptoms for those who had a life sentence

(known as lifers).

Although this study does not focus on prison-related PTSD, the importance of this topic

is being highlighted to usher in opportunities (1) to change incarceration conditions and (2) bring

a more humanistic approach to addressing the challenges that RCMs experience. Oftentimes it

seems as if community members, government agencies, and correctional institutions designate

both incarcerated individuals and RCMs as "bad people". Therefore since they are considered to

be "bad" they do not deserve support in the form of compassion. That stigma is extremely

problematic because it has created an environment, both while incarcerated and

post-incarceration, that incarcerated individuals and RCMs should be treated less than human.

Impact of Recreational Social Activities

In general, recreational social activities are not commonly associated with incarcerated

individuals or RCMs. However, depending on the correctional facility, recreational social

activities are available to individuals during incarceration. *Recreational social activities* is a term

created for the purpose of this research to describe an activity that an individual engages in based

on their personal interests/ hobbies. Although limited research existed regarding recreational

social activities for incarcerated individuals, some literature existed that touched on those social activities and its impact on individuals. It should be noted that no literature exists that explores the impact of those social activities on RCMs post-incarceration. Within this literature review category, three types of recreational social activities were explored due to its team-building/ communal components: recreational sports activities, community volunteer groups, and religious support groups.

<u>Recreational Sports Activities</u>

Along with being entertaining, sports are also a great activity to engage in to foster community building and impact one's social skills. Rosso and McGrath (2017) conducted a study that involved examining a program in South Australia that focused on how community-based sports and physical activity can be used as a tool for community development especially for "disadvantaged populations" (Rosso & McGrath, 2017). This study explored the concept of community engagement and community building through leisure activities. For this study, Rosso & McGrath (2017) included populations that lacked access to those resources as well as time to engage in joyous activities. Although this study focused on disadvantaged communities in Australia, it's significance to this study highlighted the important role sports can play by creating opportunities of social inclusion and community building.

In order for community building to occur, members of the community must utilize their social skills. Participating in sports creates a fun, interactive experience for individuals to practice those social skills and ultimately build strong relationships with others. When individuals are able to practice those social skills it is reflected in their ability to empathize with others, express themselves clearly, and work with others in a constructive way. The study by Lv and Takami (2015) discussed the impact of sports activities on social skills even further by

examining how college students' participation in sports activities at a Chinese university impacted the students' level of social skills. Lv and Takami wanted to explore how one's social skills changed over time but unfortunately due to not conducting a longitudinal analysis, they were unable to answer that part of their research.

Another literature reviewed focused on sports and peacebuilding. In the book, *Sports, Peacebuilding and Ethics*, author Dr. Linda Johnston (2014) discussed the role of sports programs in peacebuilding efforts and the challenges those programs have faced. Although this book focused on peacebuilding, its significance to this study is due to the fact that peacebuilding, in a way, is an extension of community building. In order for peacebuilding to be effective, strong social skills seem to be necessary. The difference between peacebuilding and community building lies in the circumstances that created the disorder in the community. For example, Johnston states how the sports programs mentioned in the book were used to "deal with issues of post-conflict aggression and violence" (Johnston, 2014, p. 2). Whereas civil unrest creates a need for peacebuilding efforts, poverty and crime which are common issues that disadvantaged populations in the U.S. face regularly, creates an overarching need for community building efforts to occur in those areas.

Community Volunteer Groups

Volunteering seems to be a vital recreational activity because it can help an individual learn a new skill and connect with their community. In their study, Miller et al. (2015) measured the impact of volunteering on students with disabilities. The authors also examined how volunteering benefited non-disabled students as well. The results showed that both of the student populations benefitted with skill development, feeling empowered, and improved social skills in regards to relationship building and verbal communication (Miller et al., 2015). Along with

helping individuals with their personal growth, volunteering is a great tool for society to use for community building. In the study by Janoski, Musick, & Wilson (1998), the authors conducted a longitudinal study to better understand how to create programs to increase individuals' "performance of civic obligations" (Janoski et al, 1998). The research findings concluded that volunteering, especially starting during adolescent years, can improve social participation as well promote pro-social attitudes within individuals. Therefore, participating in this type of activity could greatly benefit society by having more people be invested in the wellness of their community.

So, what are pro-social attitudes and how does it relate to RCMs? Pro-social attitudes are behaviors and beliefs that individuals have that are intended to benefit others within society. In regards to crime, criminologists such as Robert Merton, Robert Agnew, and Travis Hirschi have discussed in their research how an individuals' willingness to engage in criminal activity is a way to go against pro-social attitudes. This anti-social behavior is discussed further in the theoretical framework section of this paper. Overall, the connection between pro-social attitudes and the criminal behavior of individuals is very interesting when examined through the lens of volunteerism. In the study by Young et al. (1995), the authors "investigated long-term recidivism among a group of federal inmates trained as volunteer prison ministers" (Young et al., 1995, p. 97). The findings concluded that inmates who volunteered to participate in this program had lower rates of recidivism in comparison to inmates who chose not to participate. Another impactful literature that was reviewed was the study by Graham, Graham, & Field (2015) that focused on how community service was used for the social reintegration of RCMs. The study, which was conducted in Tasmania, Australia discussed how community service can be

"harnessed in creative ways to support prisoner reintegration and desistance processes" (Graham et al., 2015, p. 32). The findings discussed how different types of social support systems in conjunction with "traditional blinkered focus on securing essential items to aid survival post-release" is necessary for desistance to occur (Graham et al., 2015, p. 32). This study aligns very closely with this research by advocating for the need of external social groups (such as non-family members) during the post-incarceration reentry process.

<u>Religious Support Groups</u>

The presence of religious support groups for RCMs is a common extension of a RCMs social network, both during incarceration and post-incarceration (Stansfield, Mowen, & O'Connor, 2018). Religious support groups have been used as a very common social circle for RCMs because of the prosocial beliefs that are promoted (Stansfield, 2017). Those prosocial beliefs primarily focus on compassion for others (Heineck, 2014; Stamatoulakis, 2012). The desire to care for others can also be seen in the RCMs path to redemption in which religious support groups have utilized "shame" and the need for self-forgiveness to change an individual's engagement in criminal behavior (Jensen & Gibbons, 2008). Another reason why religious support groups are common for RCMs is because of the resources they provide such as assistance with housing and employment (Stansfield, 2017).

Overall, religious support groups play a pivotal role in the life of an RCM. Although an RCM's involvement in religious activities, both during and post-incarceration, has not been linked to desistance of criminal activities (Stansfield, Mowen, O'Connor, & Boman, 2017), it has had an impact on other issues that an RCM may have to address such as drug abuse. In the study by Stansfield, Mowen, & O'Connor (2018), the authors discussed how RCMs are likely to

practice desistance from substance abuse but not necessarily from criminal activity; "Overall, results of this model suggest religious/spiritual support is an important predictor of decreased substance abuse both between individuals (time invariant), and within individuals (time variant), yet is not significantly associated with criminal offending" (Stansfield, Mowen, & O'Connor, 2018, p. 269). Participation in religious support groups has been known to help with the social reintegration of RCMs (Stansfield, 2017) but inconclusive findings still remain on how religiosity (one's participation in religious activities) can impact desisting from crime (Stansfield, Mowen, O'Connor, & Boman, 2017).

Summary of Literature Review

Overall the various literature discussed in this paper has provided a greater understanding as to why the social needs of RCMs need to be examined more closely especially during the post-incarceration reentry process. From knowing how community support can positively impact the reintegration process, to understanding the negative impact of social isolation, to gaining more insight into options to assist with reintegration, all of this information provided opportunities to set the foundation for assisting this vulnerable group even more. The lack of research regarding the social needs of RCMs, excluding the basic reentry programs (employment, housing, mental health), has shown that more studies (and more reentry programs) need to place a greater focus on trying to understand the basic human needs of RCMs such as social bonds. It's imperative for society to remember that RCMs are human beings and as human beings they desire meaningful connections with others especially after a traumatic experience like incarceration.

Although not the primary focus of the literature review, it is necessary to highlight how reentry services have been important in the reintegration process of RCMs overall. Successful

reentry programs do exist however, what the researcher aimed to express within this study is how there is a humanistic aspect missing in the planning of reentry programs and the services they provide. Nonetheless, the following literature highlights research that has explored the components of successful reentry planning that has led to positive results. Highlighting a few of these articles will hopefully show how various factors have been explored to understand how to best serve RCMs as well as society as a whole. Additionally, it was necessary to also briefly discuss the role of parole and how it can impact the post-incarceration reentry process.

Successful Reentry Planning

In the article by Lowenkamp & Latessa (2005), the authors discussed the different correctional intervention (or reentry) techniques that produce effective results. Effective results were primarily measured by examining whether or not reentry programs were useful in reducing recidivism and dismantling challenges that RCMs experience post-incarceration. Lowenkamp & Latessa concluded that successful reentry programs (1) implement programs prior to the release of incarcerated individuals, (2) designate residential housing to RCMs who are high-risk, (3) create programs that address an individuals' criminogenic needs, (4) have programs that focus on cognitive behavior and "theoretically sound program like role-playing and practicing new skills" (Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005, p. 31). Additionally, the authors expressed how important it is for correctional staff to create and implement programs rooted in evidence that shows how reentry programs can be effective.

The fact that the authors were able to identify areas within reentry programs that made them effective shows how reentry programs are pivotal in the reintegration process. However, the approach to being effective and overall achieving that success needs to incorporate a more

RCM-centric approach in which the specific needs of an individual are addressed. What was gathered from this study was that more time and effort from correctional professionals is imperative in order for programs to be created that addresses those needs while also combating the challenges associated with reintegration post-release. Although the study highlighted how reentry programs are necessary, another highlight that the researcher assumed the authors alluded to was how reentry programs lack a humanistic approach to program development. In other words, the programs were more focused on providing services that reduce crime and less focused on trying to understand the person behind the criminal activity.

Similar to the previously discussed article, in the editorial about effective reentry programs, Visher (2006) discussed the division when it comes to understanding the effectiveness of correctional programs (also referred to as reentry programs) from a theoretical and evidence-based perspective. Due to this divide, the development of reentry programs have lacked consistent effectiveness in reintegrating RCMs back into civilian (non-incarcerated) society post-incarceration. The author expressed how it is important to incorporate evidence-based approaches into the design of reentry programs but to also establish quality tools to evaluate those programs. Overall, what was gathered from this article was that although theory can provide the foundation for creating effective reentry programs, it is necessary to incorporate evidence-based approaches in the design of these programs. Without taking evidence into consideration, reentry programs may continue to lack the ability to positively impact the lives of RCMs in greater numbers.

In the article by Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Harker Armstrong (2010), the authors discussed the different factors that lead to a successful reentry experience for parolees. To measure success,

the authors engaged in a mixed-method study in which 51 parolees participated in interviews and surveys to further understand the types of environment that would cause those individuals to be released from parole after three years. The different factors used to analyze the research was rooted in the life course theory which assumes that desistance is a "process that depends on structured routine activities, social controls, and agency (control of self)" (Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Harker Armstrong, 2010, p. 672). This theory is a combination of the social learning, social control, and cognitive transformation theory (Bahr et al., 2010, p. 672). The different factors that were analyzed were drug treatment, friends, employment, agency/identity, and age. The authors concluded the study by emphasizing the importance of providing reentry services such as drug treatments prior to release; the essential role social support, particularly friends, play during this process; and the importance of agency or self-efficacy in redefining how the RCM viewed themselves and interacted with society. Overall, what was gathered from this study is that when RCMs felt supported through access to services and community support, they were more capable of having a successful reentry process.

Reentry and Parole

With the focus of this study placed on the importance of community building, parole was not heavily discussed within this paper. However, the significant impact parole has on the reentry process became quite evident during phase two of the data collection that it seemed necessary to briefly discuss what parole is and how the overall process can be counterproductive to the reentry process. Parole, also referred to as community supervision, is a process in which a prisoner is conditionally released from a correctional institution based on their performance while incarcerated (*U.S. Department of Justice*). Access to parole is not available to all

incarcerated individuals such as those who are sentenced to life in prison. However, those who are eligible for parole can plead their parole case in front of the parole board if they have good behavior and/or show signs of corrected behavior (discretionary) or if they reach the parole eligibility period that was determined during sentencing (mandatory). Whether discretionary or mandatory, undergoing a review by the parole board does not guarantee that an incarcerated individual would be granted parole. For those that are granted parole, the conditions of their parole is where the issue with the reentry process becomes detrimental to an RCM's ability to connect with their community. By not adhering to the conditions of parole (or violating parole), RCMs run the risk of being incarcerated again.

Common parole conditions aligned with findings from past studies' that discussed the importance of RCMs accessibility to employment/ job training opportunities, housing, and social services. Those conditions include securing a place to live as well as a job, avoiding criminal/illegal activities, avoiding drugs, and requesting permission from their parole officer before leaving a geographic area (Steiner, n.d.). According to The Center of Sustainable and Just Communities, additional conditions of parole can include engaging in community service projects, meeting with their parole officer regularly, not having access to any weapons such as a firearm, making restitution payments for court-related fees, and not violating restraining (no contact) orders. Based on the conditions of parole and the fact that it involves an individual being released from a correctional institution, parole can be seen as a technique used to navigate the reentry process for RCMs. However, although the intentions of parole can be seen as beneficial and a stepping stone for RCMs to readjust to life post-incarceration, the conditions of parole (previously mentioned) can be counterproductive by placing stress on the RCM to meet those

conditions. Those stressors in combination with prison-related PTSD that RCMs can experience along with communities shunning this marginalized group because of their involvement in the criminal justice system, again makes the reentry process a very big challenge for RCMs. In the later part of this study, those challenges were further verified by interview participants in which both program managers and community supervision supervisors expressed the compounded stressors RCMs experience. The stress caused by those different conditions can negatively impact the reentry process and the RCMs overall ability to connect with their community. Those challenges were further discussed in chapter five.

<u>Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework</u>

From reviewing the literature, the criminology theory that the researcher wanted to further explore within this study is the social bond theory. Within the context of the social bond theory, the researcher was curious as to what different social groups encompassed the social network of RCMs. By having a general overview of RCMs social network, the researcher would then be able to better understand the lack of community bonds and how that could be repaired. The social bond theory was used as the basis of this study's theoretical framework because the theory highlights human connections and the impact (whether positive or negative) that it can have in the life of an RCM. From the social bond theory, the researcher created a working theory that dived deeper into the types of human connections that can impact the RCM during the post-incarceration reentry process. The working theory, which is further discussed in the next section, aims to further explain how if one's social network lacks a social bond that is not motivated by one's passion, self-interest, and/or joy that acts as an emotional release, then the individual may be more susceptible to engaging in rebellious acts within their community such as criminal activity.

Social Bond Theory

Causes of Delinquency by Travis Hirschi (1969), an American sociologist, is a well-known piece of literature in the field of criminology. In the book, Hirschi discussed what causes delinquent behavior to occur by using the social control theory to understand and explain that behavior. Social control or control theory is defined by the idea that a person's actions or involvement in delinquent behavior is not necessarily a reflection of innate morals that humans have, an assumption common when discussing strain theory (Hirschi, 1969, p. 10). Instead,

delinquent behavior is more so linked to an individual's attachment (bond) to society. Therefore the bond created between the individual and society controls their actions and overall involvement in delinquent behavior (Hirschi, 1969). The social bond theory (SBT) is an extension of the social control theory which examined delinquent behavior from the assumption that when an individual has a weak connection to social norms then there is a greater likelihood to engage in delinquent behavior which can then lead to involvement in criminal activities (Chriss, 2007, p. 692). Although Hirschi is not the originator of these theories, he is regularly referred to when discussing these theories because of the contributions he made, particularly to SBT, through his studies (Costello & Laub, 2020).

According to Hirschi, four types of social bonds influence an individual's social control: attachment, involvement, belief, and commitment. *Attachment* is viewed as an individual's "emotional ties" to others in the social group; *involvement* is viewed as an individual's participation and overall time spent in socially acceptable activities; *belief* is viewed as an individual's willingness to accept the values and rules within society; and *commitment* is viewed as an individual's willingness to invest resources such as time and money into conforming to the social standards to the group (Godenzi, Schwartz, & Dekeseredy, 2001). These bonds work in tandem with another by strengthening an individual's bond to their community; however separately they can still have an impact on an individual's life (Costello & Laub, 2020). These categories played an important role in the design of the survey questions which is further discussed in chapter four. The following diagram captures how the social bond theory works.

Figure A

Elements of Social Bond
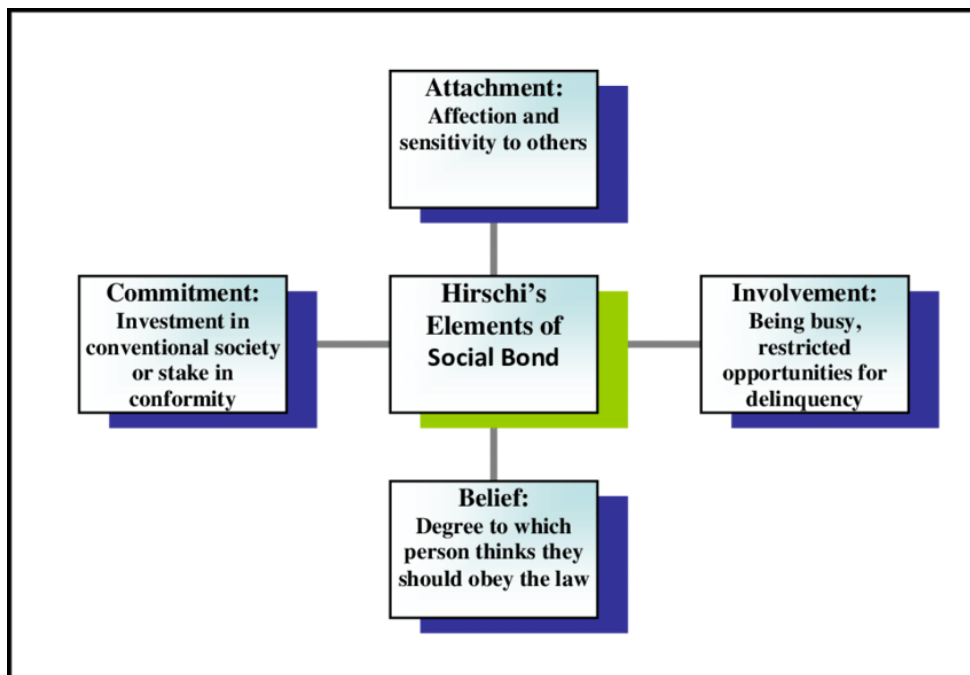
Source: Gentle-Genitty, C. (2009).

Working Theory: RCM Social Network Pillars

The concept surrounding this research focused on how different types of community support can play a role in impacting the post-release reentry process for RCMs. Various studies related to social support/ community support discussed community support in terms of employment (Berg & Huebner, 2011); community support in terms of institutional support (Orrick, Worrall, Morris, Piquero, Bales, & Wang, 2011); and community support in terms of familial relationships (Skinner-Osei & Stepteau-Watson, 2018). For this study, community support was viewed through the lens of friendship building. This was primarily done to add on to current research surrounding the topic of community support and recidivism in order to fill a gap when discussing different types of social support for RCMs. The second reason was to further

examine the different components of an RCMs' social network to better understand how they build relationships with their community.
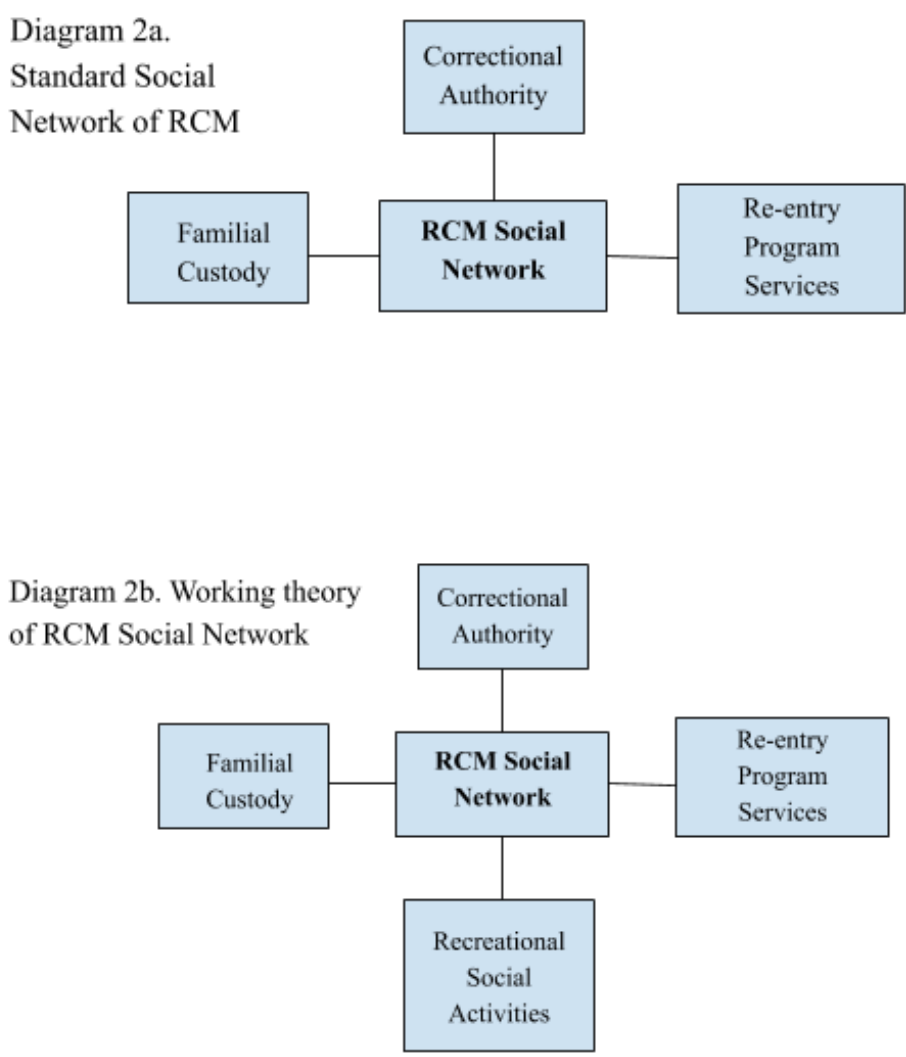
In the standard post-release reentry process, an RCMs' social network involves three groups: (1) local authority such as parole officers, (2) reentry program services such as counseling, job training, housing, and (3) familial custody. All three of these categories, although beneficial to RCMs, involve an *obligatory social support system* according to the researcher. Obligatory social support is a term created for the purpose of this research to describe social ties in which an individual is obligated to engage in relationships with individuals (nodes) within those designated groups. Although those nodes greatly benefit the RCM, overall the social network of RCMs' is limited. This limitation could be caused by the lack of a node that involves a *discretionary social system*; a system that is more focused on self-identity. Discretionary social support is a term created for the purpose of this research to describe social ties in which an individual has the option to engage in relationships with individuals within those groups at their own discretion. The social systems that focus on self-identity not only allow the RCM to practice their autonomy which is important to do when coming from a highly structured environment like correctional institutions but the self-identity component could allow the RCM to find themselves and see past the RCM label. Those nodes could also be helpful in establishing meaningful social bonds. The working theory for this research suggested that an obligatory social support system in conjunction with a discretionary support system creates a well-rounded and meaningful social network for the RCM which could possibly lead towards a path of resistance from criminal activity.

The working theory could also be viewed through another angle regarding a student in

high school. In high school, a student's social network for success can include four groups: family such as making good grades to please parents, government (institutional) authority such as mandatory attendance to avoid punishment, classes/ classroom performance such as having good relationships with teachers, and extracurricular activities. Whereas the first three groups can be seen more so as obligatory social support networks, the last group is a combination of both obligatory and discretionary. This duality is due to the fact that students may participate in extracurricular activities to make their college application more appealing to school recruiters (obligatory) or because those activities represent their personal interest (discretionary). Figure B provides a visible representation of the standard social network of RCMs (Diagram 2a) and the working theory related to the social network of RCMs also known as RCM Social Network Pillars (Diagram 2b).

Figure B

RCM Social Network Pillars

Diagram 2a.
Standard Social
Network of RCM

Correctional
Authority

Familial
Custody

**RCM Social
Network**

Re-entry
Program
Services

Diagram 2b. Working theory
of RCM Social Network

Correctional
Authority

Familial
Custody

**RCM Social
Network**

Re-entry
Program
Services

Recreational
Social
Activities

Chapter 4: Methodology

The methodology used for this study needed to encompass an approach in which data was collected in a way that analyzed the currently available information around the post-incarceration reentry process for RCMs (inductive reasoning) while understanding that as human beings, connecting with one's community is an important part of self-development (deductive reasoning). According to Nayar (2012), grounded theory is intended to "discover and explain the underlying social processes shaping interaction and human behavior" (Nayar, 2012, p. 77). To understand those processes it was necessary to examine the individual (or group) and the overall interaction they have with society. For this reason, a grounded theory approach was used to understand how and/or why RCMs do not feel connected to their community and how that impacts their post-incarceration reentry process. The researcher decided to further explore the types of recreational social activities that could increase community bonding while also examining the RCMs access and overall participation in those social activities. A grounded theory approach that utilized open-ended survey questions and semi-structured interviews seemed like the best method to use for this study. The researcher settled on those two data collection techniques in an effort to provide a space for RCMs' opinions and needs to be heard and reflected upon in a non-intrusive manner. Overall, the researcher wanted to further understand what social processes, regarding RCMs, are shaping how they interact with society. The grounded theory method, according to the researcher, provided the best method to engage in that exploration.

Although unintentional, to understand the needs and concerns of RCMs even further, the researcher decided to incorporate a participant observation approach by attending virtual meetings that centered around RCMs. Attending those meetings occurred towards the end as well as after phase two of the data collection period. In total, the researcher attended three meetings: (1) a weekly support group for RCMs (based in Washington, DC) which involved RCMs expressing their current challenges, (2) a community event that discussed housing issues for RCMs in Washington, DC, and (3) a community event that focused on the post-release reentry challenges for RCMs and the legislation needed in the state of Maryland to address those challenges. Through observation, the researcher was able to hear directly from RCMs the social challenges they currently or had experienced.

The researcher's attendance at those meetings were, again, unplanned for this study. Awareness about the weekly support group meeting came about while searching for a contact person to reach out to for an interview; the additional meetings were shared by a volunteer who regularly attended the weekly support group. For the first meeting, which involved the weekly support group, the researcher introduced themselves as a student researcher and provided a quick overview of the purpose of their research and why they were in attendance. Due to the neutral role in this setting, the researcher could be classified as an observer-as-participant. For the second and third meetings, since they were community-centric meetings that uplifted the challenges that RCMs experience, the researcher was not as vocal about their research in those meetings in comparison to the first meeting. Therefore, those in attendance did not know that the researcher was there for research. Since the researcher did not share that information in those

settings, but instead attended the meetings as a "community member" (which they are), the researcher could be classified as a complete observer.

The primary objective of attending those meetings was to become more familiar with the challenges that this vulnerable group faces. Few notes were taken while in attendance and therefore not a substantial amount of data was collected. However, from the notes taken, there was a pattern in grievances (and frustration) that both RCMs as well as non-RCMs expressed regarding the reentry process post-incarceration. Since the meetings were focused on tackling the everyday challenges that RCMs experience, the meetings did not discuss the type of community bonding that aligned with this study. However, the fact that those meetings provided an opportunity for RCMs to socialize and build a connection with their community did show how having opportunities to connect was mutually beneficial for all in attendance. RCMs were able to share their successes and challenges and connect with individuals who may have the ability to assist them. Additionally, non-RCMs were able to learn more about everyday injustices that RCMs experience as well as offer different ways to assist them as they transition back into civilian society.

Data Collection

The data collection method utilized for this study involved two phases. A qualitative research method involving an online open-ended survey encompassed phase one. The online survey was geared towards RCMs that resided in the DMV area. Additionally, phase two involved a data collection method utilizing a semi-structured virtual interview with professionals from nonprofits and government agencies that work directly with RCMs in the DMV area. In phase one, nonprofits were reached out to in order to distribute the survey to the RCMs they

serve. The data from phase one, although limited due to lack of participation, aided in providing

a framework in regards to collecting additional data. It should be noted that due to the lack of

participation, the researcher needed to expand upon their data collection method while

conducting research. Therefore the research was intended to have only one data collection phase

(the online surveys) but expanded into two phases. Whereas phase one centered around

understanding RCMs access (and overall ability) to community building activities, phase two

involved interviewing program managers and community supervisors about social activities and

challenges of RCMs. Phase two involved interacting with a different population, although they

were connected to the primary population (RCMs), in an effort to obtain the desired information

from individuals who are exposed to (and heavily aware) of the social challenges that RCMs

experience. It should be noted that this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic which

greatly impacted how individuals interacted with one another especially in social settings. The

impact of those social restrictions can be seen in the researcher's effort to respect the safety of

participants and reduce their exposure to being sick due to COVID-19, which is why all the data

collection took place virtually.

Data Collection Procedures

Phase one of the data collection process involved the distribution of an online survey (see

Appendix B) to nonprofits in the DMV work directly with RCMs to address their needs. The

survey was intended to be completed by RCMs yet distributed by the nonprofit in an effort to

respect the boundaries of this vulnerable population. The responses from survey participants

played an important role by asking additional questions in regards to what kind of social

activities should be available to RCMs, why are those social activities important to have, and

how do those activities impact the RCM in a holistic way that would allow them to build a stronger bond with their community. Although the responses from the survey were important for this study, the communication with the nonprofits via email and telephone, played a significant role as well (see Appendix D). Initial responses from the nonprofits ranged from being welcoming of this study (by agreeing to share the survey with RCMs they serve) to denying the survey distribution request to highlighting the problematic nature of this study; the assumption from the latter is that the individual did not clearly understand the purpose of the study. Gauging nonprofits' receptiveness to this study, provided a better understanding of which nonprofits to approach for phase two of the study which involved talking to program managers (or those that held a similar job title) The online survey was available to complete on Qualtrics from January 2021-March 2021. The survey included 22 questions and was intended to be completed in less than 30 minutes.

Phase two of the data collection process involved conducting a virtual, semi-structured interview with program managers (or those that held a similar job title) from nonprofits in the DMV area. In addition to program managers, community supervision officers, from government agencies, were interviewed as well. The outreach to those agencies for an interview request were a bit more challenging due to their internal protocols (see Appendix D). However, community supervision officers needed to be interviewed for this study due to the important role parole plays in the reentry process. The interviews were held through Zoom, the video conferencing software, and were scheduled to last no more than 60 minutes. The semi-structured interviews included feeder questions (see Appendix B) which were slightly different based on the group being interviewed; those questions were used to guide the interviews. For the program managers,

questions related to program development such RCMs' experience with their programs were used to further examine how those programs impact their ability to connect with others as well as what kind of programs are needed to build a stronger community bond. Additionally, for community supervision officers, questions related to community supervision officers and RCM relationships were asked. The interviews were conducted between July 2021- September 2021.

Data Collection Tool Analysis: Survey Design & Interview Design

The survey design for this study encompassed aspects of the social bond theory. To further understand RCMs' connection with civilian society, RCM participants were provided with questions that examined the social bond they have with their local community and society overall. Survey responses were grouped into the four categories associated with the social bonds of influence: attachment, involvement, belief, and commitment. For the interviews, the questions designed for that phase of the data collection focused on how the social needs for RCMs are being met (or neglected) through current programs. As previously mentioned, the interviews were semi-structured in which feeder questions were used to begin the conversation as well as fill in any lagging moments within the interview. However, once the conversation began, the researcher, as well as the participants, had the opportunity to ask each other questions based on the flow of the conversation. Overall, both the survey questions and the interview questions were designed in a way to better understand (1) the limited community bonding opportunities for RCMs and (2) to uplift the importance of having those opportunities for RCMs post-release.

Although everything was done virtually, the researcher wanted to be intentional about creating a comfortable space for participants in both phases of the data collection. Prior to and during the interviews, the researcher encouraged participants to speak openly; they were assured

that anything discussed would not be used in a way to harm their career. Along with participants

being informed that the interview was a space for open dialogue, participants that requested

interview questions prior to the interview were provided with those questions as well. This was

an additional effort made by the researcher to create the space for a more open/transparent

interaction. A disclaimer was relayed to participants that although some of the interview

questions were going to be asked, they were mainly feeder questions used as a way to guide the

interview.

Additionally, understanding that during the COVID-19 pandemic, operating in a virtual

space could be exhausting due to "Zoom fatigue", a phenomenon in which an individual

becomes mentally drained from interacting with others through video conferencing software, the

participants were also encouraged to not be on camera if they did not feel like it. The researcher

also believed that this added to the participants being comfortable with doing the interview. This

small gesture may have pleased the participants who could have felt as if the researcher was

understanding of the current times as well as the current challenges of socializing in a virtual

space. All those parameters were set in place for participants to speak freely in order to have an

honest conversation regarding the social needs of RCMs.

IRB Process & Confidentiality

Due to changes in the data collection methods, which was previously discussed, the IRB

process for this study involved submitting two applications (an original application and a revised

application) to the IRB committee (see Appendix E). The original application, which was

originally submitted in November 2020, only discussed one data collection tool, online surveys

(see Appendix B). When the researcher became aware that additional data would be needed, a

revised IRB application was submitted in May 2021 to include the additional data collection tool, virtual interviews. During the resubmission period, the researcher could not proceed with the study until the revised application was approved. Since this study involved interacting with RCMs, which is defined as a vulnerable population by the IRB, the researcher designed the online survey in a way that no unique identifiers were collected from participants. For the interview participants, no unique identifiers were collected in an effort to protect them as well. Additionally, no interview participants were directly quoted within this paper. A coded list of organizations that participated in the interview can be found in chapter five. When referencing an organization, each organization is coded within this paper as Organization A, B, C, and so forth. Before completing the survey and engaging in the interview, each participant were required to complete the consent form which provided additional information regarding confidentiality of the information collected (see Appendix C).

Sampling

Primary Target Population

A major theme within this study focused on socialization; how do RCMs socialize outside of incarceration and how has incarceration impacted their ability to socialize. Therefore, the participants selected for this study were RCMs that have been incarcerated for a minimum of one year. Although no study was found, the researcher believed that being in a correctional institution for at least one year could impact how an RCM interacted with society post-release. Another major theme within this study is recidivism. When discussing how recidivism rates are determined, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), discusses the discrepancies when defining the word researchers have different views on how crime is measured for an RCM (*National Institute*

of Justice). However, for the purpose of this study, the NIJ's definition of recidivism was used which is defined as the rate in which an RCM is arrested for engaging in criminal behavior within the first three years of being released (*National Institute of Justice*). While keeping in mind the period at which an RCM has the highest likelihood to recidivate, the additional criteria for the RCM participant was that they needed to have been released from a correctional institution for three years since the beginning of this study; RCMs needed to be released between 2016-2019. In addition to the three-year period from the start of this study, the participant must have not been arrested and convicted of a crime for an additional seven years (2008-2015). Similar to the minimum incarceration requirement that the RCM participant needed to meet, this time span was chosen by the researcher with no supporting research. The researcher made the assumption that passing the three-year recidivism threshold in addition to staying out of trouble for an additional seven years could mean that the RCM was on a good path to not recidivate. The additional criteria, listed below, provides further explanation as to why those criterias were significant to this study:

- Adult RCMs (18 years+) – The significance of this criteria is that the researcher wanted to examine a population, such as adults, who are more capable of traveling around the DMV to meet with people

- Reside in the DMV and Baltimore area – The significance of this criteria is the diverse, transient environment of the area. The assumption was that if the area is diverse, then individuals within the area will have options to find a social activity that matches their preference.

- Incarcerated in the U.S. - The significance of this criteria is that the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world.

- Released from prison and/or jail between 2008-2019 – The significance of this criteria is that the researcher wanted a time span that was long enough to signify a successful reentry process.

- Incarcerated for at least 12 months consecutively - The significance of this criteria is that the researcher wanted a time span that was long enough for an individual to experience significant changes in their behavior.

Secondary Target Population

To better understand the needs of RCMs, gaining the perspective of professionals that worked directly with RCMs was critical for this study. The professionals that were targeted for this study were individuals that worked for community supervision (parole) agencies in the DMV area. The other group of professionals that were targeted were individuals that worked for nonprofits in the same geographic area. The perspectives that those professionals brought to this study provided greater context regarding the social needs of RCMs. Those participants also provided insight into what next steps should look like in the future when serving RCMs. Along with being a working professional within these two groups, the additional criteria to being a participant involved having at least one-year of professional experience working directly with RCMs. The significance of this criteria is that the researcher needed a time span that was long enough for an individual to have a practical understanding of what their job entailed. The following is a summary of the criteria for the interview participants:

- At least one year of professional experience working directly with RCMs

- For government agencies, participants need to either be active field agents or a supervisor of field agents

- For nonprofits, participants needed to either be a program manager, outreach coordinator (or have a title that relates to this position) or an executive director

For the purpose of this study, professional experience is defined as an individual whose current employment involves working directly with RCMs. Understanding that not all nonprofits use the term "program manager" to describe employees that work directly with RCMs, interviews were conducted with individuals with various job titles but similar job roles.

Reliability and Validity

Each online survey and virtual interview participant brought a unique perspective to this study that yielded similar yet different results. Therefore, the reliability of this study could be seen with the data collection tools that were used even though the responses varied. To best replicate this study, the researcher recommends conducting the study in transient geographic areas that share a border with nearby states such as tri-state areas. One example of a tri-state area is New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Those types of areas are ideal due to the broad range of social activities that they provide. Along with transient geographic areas providing greater access to various types of social interactions, another perk to replicating this study is that all the data collection can be conducted virtually.

Based on the data collection instruments (surveys and semi-structured interviews), descriptive validity was used to better understand the accuracy of the data. Since this study utilized the grounded theory approach, all of the data was subjective and therefore did not yield the same results/ responses. Errors within this study could be seen by research bias and

participant bias. Since this study involved two data collection components, each error was present in either of the data collection instruments. In regard to research bias, this error was present in the design of offering an on-line survey to RCMs. The assumption which caused the error, was that RCMs not only had access to a computer but were also comfortable using a computer. Since the researcher has grown up using technology, specifically computers since elementary school, computers and maneuvering through the internet is a learned skill that they assumed everyone had. Another assumption that proved to be erroneous was how the survey was distributed to RCMs via nonprofits in the DMV area. With nonprofits viewed within society as good-hearted organizations (because they usually address a social issue), the researcher assumed that nonprofits selected for this study would be more eager (and willing) to assist the researcher. Again, this assumption proved to be erroneous because (1) not all nonprofits have that type of altruistic spirit and (2) nonprofits that serve RCMs, a vulnerable population, need to be very protective of this population. Therefore, if the nonprofit did not know the researcher and/or the researcher's request was not directly benefiting this population, then the nonprofit would deny the request by not distributing the survey. To avoid those errors in the future, it would be beneficial to firstly build relationships with nonprofits that serve RCMs as well as provide an incentive that could be beneficial to RCMs such as a grocery store gift card. Another error to avoid is not taking into consideration where an RCM is within their life. As previously mentioned, the lack of understanding regarding access to technology for this study may have had a big impact on the number of participants. The best way to combat that error in the future would be to attend RCM support groups and connect directly with RCMs to ask if they would like to and if they are capable of participating in an on-line survey.

Validity errors with the virtual interview encompass both research bias and participant bias. Although the ethnicity and gender of interview participants was not relevant to this study, the role it played during the interview was very much present, especially considering that the researcher is a Nigerian-American female that grew up in a lower middle-class household in the U.S. Of the thirteen interviews conducted ten participants were African-American, two participants were Caucasian-American, and one participant was Asian-American. In regards to gender, six females and seven males were interviewed. Since incarceration disproportionately impacts minority communities, such as African-Americans, along with speaking in vernacular that is commonly present in African-American communities (which provided slight difficulty during the transcription), the participants also seemed to express themselves/ share their insight in a way that sounded as if they were comfortable with speaking with the researcher. This comfortability could have been due to the researcher's biological and cultural makeup (which was previously mentioned) but it could have also been because the participant may have been familiar with doing interviews. The role those factors played could have created biases that influenced how the researcher analyzed the data. Participant bias is another error that could have impacted the validity of this study. For some of the interviews, it seemed as if participants were responding in a way that showed their employer in a positive light. However, for most of the interviews, it seemed as if participants were speaking as freely as possible, especially since some of the questions involved critiquing their employer.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

Thematic and Discourse Analysis

To analyze the data from phase one, a thematic analysis approach was used to further understand survey responses. The researcher reviewed the responses and identified overarching themes which are further discussed in the findings section of this paper. By having open-ended survey questions, each participant was able to respond to the questions based on their own unique life experiences and yet each had the same sentiment regarding having better relationships with their community. The limited participation (based on the information from Qualtrics, there was a total of three participants) did not provide enough data to do a deep analysis, however the data did provide additional context for this study.

To analyze the data from phase two, the researcher transcribed each recorded interview. By re-listening to each interview, the researcher was able to identify common words said amongst the participants such as therapy, mental health, coordination, mentorship, individuality, high expectations, trauma, and trust. From those words, three themes were identified: (1) the importance of mental wellness, (2) lack of coordination amongst organizations, and (3) building trust between RCMs and their community. Using the thematic analysis approach to identify themes amongst the various participants, created the foundation of what next steps could look like when discussing social needs of RCMs. Those next steps were further discussed in chapter six.

Language played a very important role during the data analysis. Utilizing the discourse analysis approach, the language used by each participant, whether a gesture or slang, provided better understanding of participants' responses. While conducting the interviews and even while

transcribing, language that involved slang were used by participants to explain their opinions

further. As discussed in the reliability and validity section of this paper, based on the researcher's

biological, economic, and cultural background they were able to understand certain words and

phrases participants' used that are also commonly used in either African-American communities

and/or in underserved neighborhoods. While transcribing, the researcher experienced some

challenges when trying to include slang within the text. The challenge was that certain parts of

conversations would not translate well, making the transcript harder to read. However, if the

interviews were listened to then it would be easier to understand the conversations. With

participants sharing their own professional opinion, each interview was unique. Along with each

interview having its own uniqueness, the usage of slang by some participants provided deeper

context into the challenges that RCMs experience regarding their social needs.

Findings

Phase one of the data collection took place over a six-week time span. Of the 25

nonprofits that were reached out to in the DMV area, nine organizations responded to the initial

request to distribute the survey to the RCMs that they serve. Of the nine that responded, four

organizations declined to distribute the surveys either for legal concerns and/or lack of

understanding regarding the nature of the study. By the time the survey submission period

closed, three participants submitted the survey. Although there was low participation, the survey

responses that were received provided additional context regarding community bonding for

RCMs during the post-incarceration reentry process. Whereas the semi-structured interviews

were geared towards analyzing the responses of professionals to understand the importance of

community bonding, the surveys were geared towards highlighting the importance of community

bonding but through the perspective of those directly impacted by it, RCMs. Although not much

analysis took place when reviewing survey responses, what could be concluded from the survey

responses is that (1) community relationships amongst RCMs and their local neighborhood can

always be improved especially with the presence of more social activities, (2) RCMs desire more

opportunities to connect with their community, and (3) self-improvement is very important

especially during the post-release reentry process. Although those responses could not be

generalized and applied to every RCM in the U.S., the survey responses were definitely helpful

in providing insight into the social challenges as well as social goals of this population. Table 1

highlights a few responses from survey participants. It should be noted that all of the survey

participants were self-reported RCMs. No additional research took place to confirm whether or

not they were actually RCMs.

Table 1

Survey Participant Responses

Questions	Participants Responses
Q17 - How has participating in these social activities impacted your self-perception?	It has helped to improve it because social activities help you to perceive things differently.
	I picked up pointers that successful, determined people operate according to.
Q18 - Has your involvement in these social activities made you more focused on your life goals?	Yes. They have helped me to interact and network with more like-minded individuals with similar goal
	Learned that there was no excuse except that you didnt finish for whatever reason
	Yes it do
Q22 - How has participating in social activities, post-incarceration, benefited your life?	I have been able to network with people with similar circumstances and backgrounds.
	Met more people which equals more resources. more resources equal more opportunity
	A lot

Phase two of the data collection took place over a three-month timespan, in which 13 interviews were conducted via Zoom. The duration of the interviews ranged from approximately 13 minutes to 58 minutes and included a mixture of government agency employees and nonprofit employees. A total of ten interviews were conducted with nonprofit employees that worked in the DMV area. The remaining three interviews were conducted with government agencies in Washington, D.C. and Prince George's County, Maryland. Although government agency

participants from Virginia would have been ideal in an effort to have representation from the DMV area, due to an extensive interview request process related to research projects, no formal interview request was made with the Virginia Department of Corrections (VA-DOC). Of the 13 interviews, three interviews were not examined during the data analysis. This was due to the fact that the interview participant criteria of being a "professional that currently works directly with RCMs" was not met by those individuals. However, their perspectives were highly valuable when discussing next steps which is further discussed in chapter six.

Amongst the interviews analyzed, similarities as well as differences were seen in how participants spoke about RCMs as well as their social needs. The first two questions the researcher asked focused on (1) how much experience participants had working directly with RCMs throughout their career and (2) how their organization refers to RCMs. The RCM terminology chart (see Table 2) shows how organizations refer to RCMs differently. Although certain terms were commonly used, overall the lack of unison around a name when serving a distinct population, foreshadowed the discoordination that is currently present when serving RCMs. The terminology used also dictated (1) how society, especially those tasked with serving RCMs, interacted with this population, and (2) how RCMs see themselves and therefore interact with society. Names are very important because they can be used to not only identify but describe an individual; through a name/label an individual can either be embraced or shunned by their community. The idea surrounding the importance of a name can be seen throughout this study which is why the term RCM (returning community member) is used in an effort to promote inclusivity.

Table 2

Various RCM Terms

RCM Terminology	# of Occurrence
Returning Citizen	6
Client	5
Ex-Offender	2
Mr. or Ms./Mrs.	2
Offender	1
Legal Involved	1
Formerly Incarcerated Individuals	1
Previously Incarcerated Persons	1
Participant	1
Resident	1

Below (see Table 3) is the list of the organizations that participated in the interview. To protect the privacy of participants, names of the participants as well as the organizations they work for are not mentioned in this paper. Each interview is coded and includes the duration of the interview as well as the number of years participants have worked directly with RCMs. It should be noted that the duration of the interview as well as the years of experience did not directly impact the results of this study, but instead is mentioned for contextual purposes.

Table 3

List of Interview Participants

Organization Code	Type of Organization	Interview Time (minutes)	Years of Experience	Job Role
Organization A	Nonprofit	50.30	3	Director of Transition Services
Organization B	Nonprofit	38.47	4	Outreach Coordinator
Organization C	Nonprofit	17.07	10	Executive Director
Organization D	Nonprofit	29.14	10	Program Manager
Organization E	Nonprofit	47.31	20	Program Manager
Organization F	Nonprofit	35.29	20	Executive Director
Organization G	Nonprofit	18.02	14	Program Manager
Organization H	Nonprofit	36.52	5	(Senior Position)
Organization I	Government	13.04	30	(Senior Position)
Organization J	Government	31.46	14	(Senior Position)

Table 4 consists of the interviews excluded from the analysis. As previously mentioned, those

interviews were excluded because participants did not meet the participant criteria. However,

their significance is that they provide important insight on what next steps could look like as reentry programs are reimagined to include prioritizing the social needs of RCMs.

Table 4

Excluded Interviews

Organization Code	Type of Organization	Interview Time (minutes)	Yrs of Experience	Job Role
Organization X	Government Agency	35.11	6	(Senior Position)
Organization Y	Nonprofit	46.25	-	Volunteer
Organization Z	Nonprofit	58.16	-	Former Program Coordinator

Throughout the interviews, similarities were seen by the usage of following common words previously mentioned: therapy, mental health, coordination, mentorship, individuality, trauma, trust, community, and high expectations. The researcher grouped those common words into the following three categories: self-reflection, mentorship and coordination, and expectations. Those categories will be further discussed in the following section.

Commonalities in Responses

Self-Reflection

The common words expressed by participants that fall into the category of self reflection are therapy, mental health, individuality, trauma, and trust. The researcher chose to group these words into this category because they each suggested that self-reflection is necessary in order for RCMs to know who they are and who they would like to be post-incarceration. By understanding

oneself, the researcher assumed that the RCM will seek opportunities as well as communities

that are more reflective of their interests and goals. By participating in those opportunities, the

RCMs and their community, will be able to strengthen their relationship. Many of the

participants, especially from the nonprofit group, discussed the trauma that RCMs experience

from incarceration. Participants also highlighted the trauma that RCMs have experienced prior to

incarceration, which has added to their hesitation or fear around connecting with others

post-incarceration. Additionally, due to (1) the stigma associated with being an RCM, (2) the

pressure placed on RCMs regarding following parole guidelines, and (3) the trauma related with

incarceration, interview participants expressed how those three factors created a rocky transition

experience for RCMs. In their own way, participants expressed how RCMs simply lack the time

and emotional capacity to self-reflect and move past the stigma of incarceration.

The impact associated with the stigma of incarceration could negatively affect an RCMs'

ability to trust their community. During the interview with Organization A, the participant stated

(see Table 5) how an RCM that is constantly told they would receive help from their community

but never received it or is shunned from their community, are more willing to keep people at a

distance to avoid being hurt or disappointed.

Table 5

Participant Response (Organization A)

Question	Participant Response
Researcher: I wanted to know, what type of socialization challenges do you witness participants experiencing? And by socialization challenges I mean just connecting with the community in general.	**Organization A**: Obviously it depends on who the person is. Like there are some individuals (we have a lot of types of individuals) that [when] they get out they're used to this…but then you have the individuals who are in like attack mode, survival mode. We're telling [them] we're trying to help [them] but they don't believe you. They hate the world, you know, like they hate their situation. They're homeless, they have nowhere to go and they just don't want to talk to nobody. And like they don't believe anything that's coming out of my mouth. They're like, "I've been through this before. Like nah whatever…" And it's really showing them that you're going to help and then breaking that wall. Because a lot of individuals will have that wall up because they just feel like everybody's just out to get them and doesn't have their best interests, if that sums it up.

In addition to being in a prison environment in which the mentality is to survive, participants also expressed that RCMs may adopt the mindset that in order to survive they must be alone. Participants also shared that the fear RCMs experience by being associated with individuals that could cause them to return to a correctional institution, is another reason why they choose to be

alone. In an interview with Organization C (see Table 6), the participant discussed the fear RCMs experience when they try to connect with others.

Table 6

Participant Response (Organization C)

Question	Participant Response
Researcher: And so, I think you said it, but is it that they're just so used to having their social circle around them, or is it that they are just afraid of just having someone new within their circle? Is it just a comfort level or does it stem a little bit out of fear?	**Organization C**: It's a combination. It's fear, it's the comfort level. You know, when you practice certain behaviors, it just becomes a way of life. And there are some other things that are centered in there and there are some things that are also hidden in there. You know, it could be a low self-esteem, you know, lack of confidence. You know, there's some things that are centered in there that they may not even be able to identify. You know, and they may sum it up in one word, you know of, "I don't mess with a lot of people" and that's it. And in their mind, that's what they would think and they won't be able to identify none of the other elements of that.

As stated earlier, each participant discussed the importance of mental health through therapy and wellness activities for RCMs. The presence of therapy during the post-incarceration reentry process was expressed by participants as being necessary in order to deal with past trauma. Additionally, therapy could also provide RCMs with the tools to manage their emotions when they experience setbacks. Some of the interviewees discussed the frustration that RCMs experience and how those experiences can cause setbacks for the individual. Overall, what can

be gathered from participant responses are the importance of self-reflection and self-care through therapy and wellness activities for the RCM.

Mentorship and Coordination

According to the interviews, oftentimes the struggle that RCMs experience as they try to navigate life back home comes down to mentorship and coordination. Participants expressed the importance of mentorship because it (1) allows the RCM to build a relationship with a community member, (2) connects the RCM with someone that understands their prison-related trauma, and (3) provides a guide for the RCM to better understand themselves post-incarceration. Mentorship in the form of an individual who could self-identified as an RCM (at some time in their life), could assist new RCMs in their transit by providing tips on how to rebuild their life. This concept was first mentioned to the researcher during the interview with Organization Z which will be further discussed in chapter six as the researcher discusses next steps. According to some participants, mentors have provided the RCM with the opportunity to see themselves in their mentor but also build a relationship with someone who has or is currently improving their life. And for the mentor, who is also an RCM, having the opportunity to give back to their community by helping a community member (a fellow RCM) could also be seen as a rewarding experience.

Whereas one way that organizations can better serve RCMs is through mentorships, another way is through proper coordination amongst organizations. Of the ten interviews analyzed, two of the interviews were conducted with homeless organizations. Although homeless organizations in which they focus on homeless individuals in general and not RCMs exclusively,

the lack of coordination between correctional institutions and RCM-centric nonprofits, would often leave homelessness-focused nonprofits bombarded with RCMs since they would need a place to stay once released. In an interview with Organization H, the participant shared stories about how correctional institutions would just send an RCM to their nonprofit office without coordinating with them first; see Table 7. The lack of coordination, according to the participant, would make the accommodation process for the RCM very disorganized. This would also cause an overall unpleasant experience for both the RCM and the nonprofit.

Table 7

Participant Response (Organization H)

Question	Participant Response
Researcher: And so because your organization serves a [broad] group, it'll be interesting to hear your perspective of what kind of programs would be needed just based on your interaction with returning citizens that came to your organization…. So I'm not asking about programs your organization needs to offer but in our past discussion, you spoke about how sometimes individuals are just dropped off at your organization.	**Organization H**: The thing that I appreciate about this attorney is number one, this attorney has reached out to us 36 months ahead of time, and that's very, very commendable...generally speaking, when they drop these folks off, they drop them off at any time of the night…and usually there is nobody there to deal with any of the issues…(And people feel like they can just do it; drop these individuals off, but they don't understand that we coordinate with people). We want this to be a good experience for everybody, the client and the agency…But when you drop a person off like that and we don't have any history of who they are, where they're from…it puts us in a very, very challenging position to not be able to give proper care to the individual…

Although the participant did express how other organizations such as hospitals do not engage in good coordination with them as well, the lack of coordination from correctional institutions was expressed as being highly problematic. With many RCMs experiencing homelessness either due to the current housing crisis in Washington, D.C. it is difficult to secure affordable housing. Additionally, being denied housing because of an RCM's background (such as criminal history or credit score), having to wait a long period of time for housing vouchers, or not having a liveable wage to acquire decent housing in an expensive area live the DMV, has caused confusion as well as frustration for both the RCM and the nonprofits trying to assist them.

Another example of lack of coordination that participants expressed was focused on RCMs being provided with basic identification once they are released from prison. Currently, the responsibility of obtaining those documents which includes a driver's license, birth certificate, and social security card, becomes the responsibility of the RCM. According to participants, depending on how long the individual was incarcerated for, they may not know how to navigate through the different government agencies to obtain those documents. To assist RCMs, nonprofit participants expressed how their organization is constantly working with the RCM to obtain those necessary documents. Government agency participants, however, did not express any involvement in this work. Although the researcher understood that parole agencies do not engage in that type of work, it seemed like additional assistance from government agencies could ease the process for everyone involved. Overall, what was gathered from participant responses were the importance of coordination between correctional institutions, nonprofits, and possibly even parole agencies in regards to obtaining housing and identification documents. According to

participants, having that type of coordination could put an RCM on the right path to rebuilding their life.

<u>Expectations</u>

Although some participants verbally expressed the high expectations placed on RCMs, most participants implied those high expectations by sharing the different tasks that RCMs have to manage post-release. Those tasks could involve securing a place to live, paying restoration fees, as well as attending court-ordered appointments. The expectation that RCMs place on themselves, as well as the expectation they receive from community members and correctional institutions seems to be: "don't mess up." Each interview mentioned how the tasks that RCMs are expected to do can be overwhelming. And particularly, government agency participants expressed how the expectations placed on RCMs (from parole) are somewhat excessive. According to participants, expectations are considered very high for RCMs because if they fail to complete certain tasks then they would be in violation of their parole. This could then cause them to return to a correctional institution. Overall, what can be gathered from participant responses is that the high level of expectations placed on RCMs could increase their stress level causing them to lack the capacity to build strong relationships with their community.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study was due to the design of the data collection tools and processes. Design bias was present in this study due to the researcher's assumption that each member of the primary target population (for the survey) were computer literate and/or had access to a computer. This limitation was previously expressed in the reliability and validity section of this paper. By keeping in mind technology deficiencies, either due to lack of

familiarity, desire, and/or access to computers, an alternative method of attracting survey participants should have been considered by the researcher. Suggestions on how to mitigate the design bias could have involved providing the survey in a way that did not inconvenience RCM participants as well as involve outreach to other types of organizations that serve RCMs. Additionally, in regard to survey questions that focus on social isolation, the survey questions should have tried to gauge RCMs' isolation level to understand how to improve their community relationships. Some of the survey questions could have focused on understanding their emotions to know how isolated they feel post-incarceration. Understanding their level of isolation would have provided additional context regarding the desire as well as the need to have a better relationship with their community.

In order to avoid inconveniencing participants, while also expanding their reach to more survey participants, the researcher could have also reached out to managers at local businesses in the DMV and Baltimore area that commonly employ RCMs. The researcher could have shared with managers an opportunity for RCMs to participate in the study. Also, the researcher could have reached out to employment services that specifically serve RCMs and again, offer RCMs with the opportunity to participate in the study. In regards to spaces that involve housing, the researcher could have invited RCMs to participate in the survey by reaching out to halfway houses in the area.

The lack of focus on volunteers was another limitation of this study. With community support being a challenge for RCMs, which the literature review highlighted, it would have been good to speak to more volunteers for their input on the social needs of RCMs. The interview with Organization Y, which was removed from the analysis, involved interviewing a volunteer that did

work for Organization E. They expressed how their work with the organization has evolved from attending support group meetings, to donating clothes to assisting the organization with grant applications for more funding support. Since volunteers are a part of the community, having their perspectives would have been beneficial in understanding how volunteers are able to move past the stigma associated with RCMs and connect with them.

Lastly, the working theory provided another limitation to this study. This limitation was due to lack of evidence regarding the social needs of RCMs. Although the theory aligned with the overall assumption of this study around the importance of community bonding for RCMs, the researcher failed to show whether the social network in Diagram 2b provides a better post-incarceration reentry process for RCMs in comparison to Diagram 2a. Since it is a working theory, the researcher should consider testing out the theory by interviewing RCMs to see how their social network impacted their ability to not reoffend or violate their parole. From this information, the researcher would then be able to formulate an evidence based assumption for the theory.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Although it is well-known that most RCMs experience challenges once released, what this study aimed to explore was how imperative community support is to addressing those challenges. From the survey and interview responses, to even attending meetings about RCMs, what the researcher discovered was that RCMs desire more opportunities to bond with individuals within their communities. However, in order for the bond to occur, community members need to be more willing to welcome these individuals back into the community. Whereas providing the basic reentry services provides a good start towards reintegration, more effort needs to be done. Welcoming those individuals could start by having opportunities for RCMs to engage in recreational social activities such as religious groups, volunteer groups, and community sports activities as part of their reentry plan.

Currently, a lot of pressure is placed on RCMs to follow the rules especially while on parole. Yet it is highly unrealistic for an individual to follow the rules and never mess up without help. Community support provides that help. And as some participants expressed, although it may be difficult to welcome home an RCM (especially depending on the crime they committed), in order to reduce the cycle of crime, occurrence of fractured communities, and prison-related trauma, steps need to be taken in which both RCMs and communities are working together. Overall, what can be inferred from this study is that the post-incarceration reentry process for RCMs need to be improved. In order to improve this process and reduce the likelihood of recidivism, more resources need to be provided to RCMs that not only reconnects them with their community but also provides them with the opportunity to learn more about themselves in

their new life stage. Without those resources, RCMs and their community may continue to experience conflict.

As mentioned earlier within this paper, the theoretical framework for this study focused on the social bonds of RCMs. Past studies that focus on successful reentry, emphasized the importance of social bonds during the reentry process. Those social bonds were seen through relationships with family and friends in which prosocial behavior were promoted. In regards to this study, the findings reiterate the importance of social bonds while also trying to relate (through the data) why certain types of social bonds are necessary during this process. Although social bonds are an important aspect of the reentry process, the data from this study highlights how there is a lack of emphasis being placed on the development of reentry programs in which RCMs are given more opportunities to expand their social network and increase their social bonds. The findings from this study indicated that although RCMs may desire more opportunities to expand their social network and strengthen their relationship with their community, parole restrictions in conjunction with the trauma from being incarcerated has and continues to make the reentry process difficult. The findings also showed that when an individual lacks purpose (and even) self-efficacy and is constantly bombarded with the stressors of being an RCM, the reentry process becomes even more difficult. What can be concluded from this study is that there is a social disconnect between what society desires from RCMs and how RCMs are treated. Society desires an RCM that is open to the community and the people in it. However, the reality is that society itself is not open to having RCMs back into their community. When RCMs are released through parole, the restrictions created by parole often feel as if they are still incarcerated. Since parole and trauma can both negatively impact the reentry process

post-incarceration, reentry programs and services should place greater emphasis on providing RCMs with the space to build genuine social bonds through informal relationships. Informal relationships which can lead to friendships (and stronger community bonds), can be fostered by engaging in activities that reflect an RCMs interest. In addition to creating more space/opportunities for these bonds to occur, the reentry process should be more strategic about taking into consideration the individual needs and desires of each RCM. Based on previous studies, it seemed as if the needs of RCMs are being addressed but maybe their social desires are not being met. An example of a social desire can involve engaging in a hobby that reflects their interest. Overall, as human beings, RCMs need space to socialize. Additionally, communities need to be more proactive in creating a space for RCMs. to feel a part of the community instead of being treated like a burden to society.

Suggestions for Next Steps

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the importance of recreational social activities in the lives of RCMs. However, what was discovered from the data such as the responses from the few that participated in the survey as well as those that participated in the interview is that although recreational social activities are needed, RCMs lack the time as well as the self- realization to prioritize participating in those activities. The results are that most RCMs lack the emotional tools and a good support system to operate in society, post-incarceration. A major portion of this study was heavily focused on better understanding RCMs through professionals that work directly with them. In the future, the researcher would like to continue to explore this topic by creating an initiative that involves working directly with RCMs through the planning of recreational social activities. The goal through this work is to create a safe space for

RCMs to engage in personal self-development while also connecting with their community. As stated in chapter four, the researcher had the opportunity to attend meetings that focused on RCMs. By reaching out to these groups, the researcher would be able to gain participants for the initiative. Additionally, as a way to attract more participants as well address some of the challenges that RCMs experience such as paying court fees, the participants could also be compensated in the form of their restitution fees being paid off.

As mentioned in the mentor and coordination section, coordination is key when assisting this vulnerable population. The researcher suggests that coordination should begin by first creating a post-incarceration team for the RCM that involves three key players: therapist, wellness coach, and a case manager who can also self-identify as an RCM; this individual would also act as a mentor. A few of the interview participants discussed the importance of working with RCMs prior to their release. Additionally the literature review, also discussed how reentry work begins prior to the individual being released. Therefore, creating a post-incarceration team to assist the RCM could put them on the right track to understanding themselves, connecting with their community, and navigating through the ups and downs of life post-incarceration.

From a public administration perspective, in order for RCMs to have a solid support system, the researcher suggests that legislation should be created that makes it mandatory for RCMs to have a post-incarceration team prior to being released. One clause of the legislation would state that a team must be assigned to the individual six months to one year before they are released. This amount of time is suggested to provide enough preparation for the individual to subside any anxiety they may feel prior to being released. The legislation would also include a clause that allows those with a post-incarceration team to participate in a work-release program.

This program would allow the individual to leave the correctional institution to go to work but the individual would return back to the prison and/or jail once their shift has ended. The job would need to reflect the skills that the individual already has or is currently learning in the certificate programs being offered at the correctional institution. Although this suggestion is currently practiced in some prisons in Finland according to *Business Insider*, the U.S. may be hesitant about this approach because it would involve reimagining correctional institutions. With this shift, correctional institutions would no longer be a space to punish incarcerated individuals but instead could be used as a space to assist these individuals to navigate through life; a proactive instead of a retribution approach would be used. With a country like the U.S. that is rooted in slavery and therefore has a history of exploiting individuals for free labor, this suggestion may seem like a romanticized idea, especially since incarcerated individuals are essentially free labor for society as stated in the 14th amendment of the U.S. Constitution. However, the researcher believes creative/unconventional solutions are needed to aggressively address the cycle of recidivism which negatively impacts each member of society, especially RCMs.

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<center>**Appendix A**</center>

Figure C

Map of the DMV and Neighboring Counties

Source: Advanced Surveys, Inc.

Appendix B

Survey Questions (RCMs Only)

<u>General</u>

1. What is your age group?
    a.) 18-26   b.) 27-35   c.) 36-44 d.) 45- 53   e.) Over 54

2. Which gender do you identify with?
    a.) Female   b.) Male   c.) Rather Not Say d.) Other: _____

3.   Where do you reside: DC, Maryland, or VA?

4. Which ethnicity do you identify with the most? (Select up to 3)
    a.) African-American   b.) Caucasian-American c.) Indigenous American
    d.)Asian-American e.)Latin American

5. How long were you incarcerated?
    a.) 1-3yrs   b.) 4-6yrs   c.) 7-9yrs   d.)10-12yrs   e.) Over 13yrs

6. During which time period were you released from incarceration?
    a.) 2008-2010   b.) 2011-2013   c.) 2014-2016   d.) 2017-2019   e.)Not Applicable

7. While incarcerated, did you participate in any social activities offered at the correctional
    facility?
    a.) Yes   b.) No. c.) N/A

8. During the first 3 years of being released, what type of social activities did you
    participate in?

<u>Community Relationship</u>

9. List (up to 5) the types of social activities that you enjoy participating in.

10. In regards to the previous question, do either of these activities make you feel connected
     to society?

11. How would you describe your relationship with your local neighborhood community?

12. Do you participate in social activities outside of where you reside?

13. If so, what part of the DMV area do you participate in for your social activities the most?

14. How often do you engage in these social activities?

15. Has your involvement in these social activities impacted your relationship with family and/or friends?

16. How has participating in these social activities impacted your emotional intelligence?

17. How has participating in these social activities impacted your self-perception?

18. Has participating in these activities made you more focused on your life goals?

19. Besides your family, who else do you socialize with?

20. In regards to the previous question, are you close with these people or is it more of a casual relationship?

21. Do you think more social activities should be made available to returning citizens post-incarceration?

22. How has participating in social activities post-incarceration benefited your life?

Program Manager Interview (Feeder Questions)

Feeder Questions	Significance
How long have you been in your position?	Highlights the interviewees experience working with RCMs based on the number of years that have been in their position.
How do you refer to ex-convicts?	Provides context for the interviewer on the organizational culture of the interviewee based on they refer to RCMs.
How long have you worked with RCMs?	Highlights the interviewees experience working with RCMs, beyond their current position.
What socialization* challenge do you witness RCMs experiencing?	Highlights the interviewees' close relationship with RCMs by further explaining the challenges they experience.
Do you feel the programs being offered to RCMs at your organization assist any socialization challenges they experience?	Provides a deeper understanding as to how their programs are helping (or possibly hindering) RCMs ability to integrate back into society.

What type of programs are needed for RCMs and why?	Provides an opportunity for the interviewee to speak from a professional perspective on the needs of RCMs.
In your opinion, are RCMs offered enough programs related to recreational social activities? a. If not, why are social activities so limited to RCMs? b. In your opinion, do RCMs need more social activities?	Provides an opportunity for the interviewee to speak from a professional perspective on how common restrictions on RCMs impacts their ability to socialize with their community.
In your opinion, do you think social activities will help with community building for RCMs?	Provides an opportunity for the interviewee to speak from a professional perspective on the social needs of RCMs.
Are there any additional questions or comments you would like to ask or share with me?	Provides the interviewee with the opportunity to speak more about their experience as a program officer working with RCMs

Parole Officers Interview (Feeder Questions)

<u>Feeder Questions</u>	<u>Significance</u>
How long have you been in your position?	Highlights the interviewees experience working with RCMs based on the number of years that have been in their position.
How do you refer to ex-convicts?	Provides context for the interviewer on the organizational culture of the interviewee based on they refer to RCMs.
How long have you worked with RCMs?	Highlights the interviewees experience working with RCMs, beyond their current position.
How would you describe your relationship with RCMs?	Provides context for the interviewer on how the interviewee views their role and overall relationship with RCMs.
What socialization* challenge do you witness them experiencing?	Highlights the interviewees' close relationship with RCMs by further explaining the challenges they experience.

In your opinion, how would you describe the parole/ probationary rules for RCMs?	Provides an opportunity for the interviewee to assess from a professional perspective the parole/ probationary rules for RCMs.
Do these rules contribute to their socialization challenges?	Provides an opportunity for the interviewee to speak from a professional perspective on the parole/ probationary rules and how they impact RCMs integration with society.
In your opinion, do you think social activities will help with community building for RCMs?	Provides an opportunity for the interviewee to speak from a professional perspective on the social needs of RCMs.
Are there any additional questions or comments you would like to ask or share with me?	Provides the interviewee with the opportunity to speak more about their experience as a parole officer working with RCMs

<u>**Appendix C**</u>

Qualtrics Messaging: Consent Form and End of Survey Message for Participants

<u>Consent Form</u>

(**RCMs Only**) Project Title: Community Bonding for Ex-Convicts: The Impact of Recreational Social Activities During the Post-Release reentry Process

Investigator(s): Mfon Edet

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to further understand the role informal, non-familial social support systems play in positively impacting the lives of returning citizens during the post-release reentry process. As social creatures, the need for human beings' to build relationships with others is imperative for their personal development. And for returning citizens, the need for these social bonds is necessary as they readjust to their life, post-incarceration. This study will focus on social support systems through the perspective of recreational social activities because of the community-building atmosphere it creates for those that participate. Recreational social activities could range from participating in religious groups to joining a local community sports team.

If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:
Prior to starting the survey, sign the consent form.
Complete the survey.
This study will take 30 minutes of your time.

Are there any experimental medical treatments?
No

Is there any risk to me?
Participants who choose to participate in the online survey will not experience any risk. However, discomfort may occur due to the type of questions within the survey such as discussing the participant's life while incarcerated and post-incarceration. If participants experience any type of discomfort or no longer want to participate, they can stop taking the survey at any time. If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time.
If participants experience any type of emotional or mental distress from participating in the survey, they can reach out to the Crisis Text Line by texting "home" to 741741 for additional mental health support from trained mental health professionals. The mental health professionals for Crisis Text Line provide free counseling (24/7) to those in need throughout the United States.

Is there any benefit to me?
No direct benefits to participants. However, the findings from this study will hopefully be used to provide social activities that promote prosocial behavior and overall a successful post-release process for the returning citizen that makes them feel more connected to their community.

How will you protect my privacy?
The session will not be recorded.
Your records will be private. Only Mfon Edet will have access to your name and responses.
Your name will not be used in any reports.
Records will be stored:
Password Protected File/Computer
Confidentiality of the data will be maintained through a secured, password-protected account on Qualtrics. No personal information from participants will be collected.
Records will be stored a minimum of 1 year but a maximum of 3 years after the study is completed. The destruction date for the record (i.e. data) will not extend beyond 03/31/2024.

Do I get paid to take part in this study?
No

Who do I contact in case of research related injury?
For any questions with this study, contact:
Primary Investigator: Mfon Edet at 610-436-2438 or ME922347@wcupa.edu

What will you do with my Identifiable Information/Biospecimens?
Not applicable.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

Please check this box to agree _____.

(**Program Manager & Parole Officer Only**) Project Title: Community Bonding for Ex-Convicts: The Impact of Recreational Social Activities During the Post-Release reentry Process

Investigator(s): Mfon Edet

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to further understand the role informal, non-familial social support systems play in positively impacting the lives of returning citizens during the post-release reentry process. As social creatures, the need for human beings' to build relationships with others is imperative for their personal development. And for returning citizens, the need for these social bonds is necessary as they readjust to their life, post-incarceration. This study will focus on social support systems through the perspective of recreational social activities. Recreational

social activities could range from participating in religious groups to joining a local community sports team.

If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:
Prior to starting the survey, sign the consent form.
Participate in a recorded interview through Zoom
This study will take 60 minutes of your time.

Are there any experimental medical treatments?
No

Is there any risk to me?
Participants who choose to participate in the recorded interview via Zoom will not experience any risk. However, discomfort may occur due to the type of topics discussed during the interview. If participants experience any type of discomfort or no longer want to participate, they can stop participating in the interview at any time.

Is there any benefit to me?
No direct benefits to participants. However, the findings from this study will hopefully be used to provide social activities that promote prosocial behavior and overall a successful post-release process for the returning citizen that makes them feel more connected to their community.

How will you protect my privacy?
The session will be recorded.
Your records will be private. Only Mfon Edet will have access to your name and responses.
Your name will not be used in any reports.
Records will be stored:
Password Protected File/Computer
Confidentiality of the data will be maintained through a secured, password-protected account on Zoom. No personal information from participants will be collected.
Records will be stored a minimum of 1 year but a maximum of 3 years after the study is completed. The destruction date for the record (i.e. data) will not extend beyond 03/31/2024.

Do I get paid to take part in this study?
No

Who do I contact in case of research related injury?
For any questions with this study, contact:
Primary Investigator: Mfon Edet at 610-436-2438 or ME922347@wcupa.edu

What will you do with my Identifiable Information/Biospecimens?
Not applicable.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I understand that this interview will be recorded however it will remain private in the custody of the researcher. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

Please check this box to agree _____.

End of Messaging for Survey

Thank you for participating in the online survey regarding community relationships for returning citizens. Your opinion is truly valued and will be used to shape the criminal justice system for the better.

Thank you again for your participation.

Appendix D

Invitation to Participate in Survey

Email to Social Organizations in the DMV and Baltimore Area #1

SUBJECT: Request to Invite Returning Citizens to Participate in A Survey

Dear Social Organization,

My name is Mfon Edet and I am a doctoral graduate student at West Chester University. For my dissertation project, I have chosen to explore how informal support systems impact returning citizens' post-release process. For this project, I am seeking returning citizens to participate in an online survey for this project. Therefore, I am writing to request your permission to use your platform to recruit returning citizens your organization serves to participate in this project. All corresponding emails to recruit participants have been generated and can be viewed by you before being sent out to the returning citizens you serve.

Oftentimes, the tribulations of being a returning citizen involves social challenges such as the inability to build good relationships with their community. To further understand how returning citizens build good relationships during the post-release process, I will examine their participation in social activities. The benefits of this study will be its ability to show the importance socializing for returning citizens during the post-release reentry process. In the future, I hope to use the findings from this study to create reentry programs that place greater emphasis (and provide opportunities) for returning citizens to build good relationships with their community that extends beyond having good family and employer-employee relationships.

Individuals that would like to participate will be provided with a survey link in a separate email. The survey was created with Qualtrics and is therefore secure and confidential. No unique identifiers such as a person's name, date of birth, etc will be requested for this survey. Also, personal information such as their criminal history will not be requested as well. Information collected will only be used for the purpose of this study.

The questionnaire consists of approximately 21 questions and will not exceed 30 minutes. Since this is voluntary, participants are not obligated to participate and can withdraw from the survey at any time. No compensation will be provided for participating.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Mfon Edet
Doctoral Candidate 2021

West Chester University

Phone Call Script to Social Organizations in the DMV and Baltimore area

Good morning/ afternoon (Executive Director/ Community Outreach Manager),

My name is Mfon Edet and I am a doctoral graduate student at West Chester University. My dissertation project will explore how informal support systems impact returning citizens' post-release process by examining their participation in local social activities. Will you allow me to recruit participants for my project by sharing my survey with the returning citizens your organization serves? All corresponding emails to recruit participants have been generated and can be viewed by you before being sent out to the returning citizens you serve.

Email to Social Organizations in the DMV and Baltimore Area #1

SUBJECT: Gratitude for your Participation

Dear Social Organization,

Thank you for participating in this study by allowing me to share this survey with the returning citizens that your organization serves. Your role in this study was truly necessary and highly appreciated.

Once the study is complete, if you would like to read the findings, please let me know and I will share the research link with you.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,
Mfon Edet
Doctoral Candidate 2021
West Chester University

(**Program Manager & Parole Officer Only**) Email to Program Managers & Parole Officers in the DMV and Baltimore Area #1

SUBJECT: Request to Participate in An Interview

Dear (Program Manager),

My name is Mfon Edet and I am a doctoral graduate student at West Chester University. I reached out to your organization earlier this year to request survey participants (of the

ex-convicts that your organization serves) for my dissertation project. I am reaching back out to request your participation in this study regarding the impact of social activities on returning citizens' during their post-release process. Your perspective as a program manager will provide valuable insight into the social needs of the returning citizens that your organization serves.

Are you available, within the next week, to participate in an interview with me? If so, the interview will be held virtually, via Zoom, and will not exceed 60 minutes. If you are interested, please let me know and I can provide you with the consent form as well as suggest interview times that may work best with your schedule.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Mfon Edet
Doctoral Candidate 2021
West Chester University

(**Program Manager & Parole Officer Only**) Phone Call Script to Program Managers & Parole Officers in the DMV and Baltimore Area #1

Good morning/ afternoon (Program Manager/ Parole Officer),

My name is Mfon Edet and I am a doctoral graduate student at West Chester University. I reached out to your organization earlier this year to request survey participants (of the ex-convicts that your organization serves) for my dissertation project. I am reaching back out to request your participation in this study regarding the impact of social activities on returning citizens' during their post-release process. Your perspective as a (Program Manager/ Parole Officer) will provide valuable insight about the social needs of the returning citizens that your organization serves. Are you available, within the next two weeks, to participate in an interview with me? If so, the interview will be held virtually, via Zoom, and will not exceed 60 mins. If you are interested, I can send you an email for you to complete the consent form as well as select an interview time that works best with your schedule.

(**Program Manager & Parole Officer Only**) Email to Program Managers & Parole Officers in the DMV and Baltimore Area #1

SUBJECT: Gratitude for your Participation

Dear (Program Manager/ Parole Officers),

Thank you for participating in this study by allowing me to interview you about the social needs of the returning citizens that your organization serves. Your participation in this study was truly necessary and highly appreciated.

Once the study is complete, if you would like to read the findings, please let me know and I will share the research link with you.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,
Mfon Edet
Doctoral Candidate 2021
West Chester University

(Parole Officer Only) Initial Email to Parole Officers in the DMV and Baltimore Area #1

Good morning (Org. Leadership/ Supervisor)

My name is Mfon Edet and I am a doctoral graduate student at West Chester University. I am currently working on my dissertation research project and for my topic, I have chosen to explore how informal support systems impact returning citizens' post-release process. For this project, I am seeking parole officers to interview who will provide valuable insight into the social needs of the returning citizens that your organization serves.

If possible, can you direct me to the best person to reach out to within the Community Supervision department of your organization regarding my interview request?

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Mfon Edet
Doctoral Candidate 2021
West Chester University

(Parole Officer Only) Website Contact Form to Parole Officers in the DMV and Baltimore Area #1

I am a doctoral graduate student at West Chester University. I am currently working on my dissertation research project and for my topic, I have chosen to explore how informal support systems impact returning citizens' post-release process. For this project, I am seeking parole

officers to interview who will provide valuable insight into the social needs of the returning citizens that your organization serves.

If possible, can you direct me to the best person to reach out to within the Community Supervision department of your organization regarding my interview request?

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at ME922347@wcupa.edu.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Mfon Edet
Doctoral Candidate 2021
West Chester University

Advertisement to Interested Participants

Email to Interested Participants #1

SUBJECT: Share your opinion. Make an impact in the criminal justice system.

A researcher from West Chester University is conducting a study that focuses on community relationships for returning citizens. Participants are needed for this study that consists of an online survey with approximately 21 questions. The survey should take no more than 30 minutes to complete. Since this is voluntary, participants can withdraw from the survey at any time. No compensation will be provided for participating.

To access the survey, please click here. Before starting the survey, the consent form will need to be completed to proceed. **<u>The survey link will close in two weeks</u>**.

Thank you again for your participation. If you experience any technical difficulties, feel free to email me, ME922347@wcupa.edu.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Mfon Edet
West Chester University

Email to Interested Participants (Reminder) #2

SUBJECT: 1 Week Left! Share your opinion. Make an impact.

A researcher from West Chester University is conducting a study that focuses on community relationships for returning citizens. Participants are needed for this study that consists of an online survey with approximately 21 questions. The survey should take no more than 30 minutes to complete. Since this is voluntary, participants can withdraw from the survey at any time. No compensation will be provided for participating.

To access the survey, please click here. Before starting the survey, the consent form will need to be completed to proceed. **<u>The survey link will close in one week</u>**.

Thank you again for your participation. If you experience any technical difficulties, feel free to email me, ME922347@wcupa.edu.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Mfon Edet
West Chester University

Appendix E

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Office of Research and Sponsored Programs | West Chester University | Wayne Hall
West Chester, PA 19383 | 610-436-3557 | www.wcupa.edu

TO: Mfon Edet and Angela Kline

FROM: Nicole M. Cattano, Ph.D.
        Co-Chair, WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)

DATE: 1/5/2021

Protocol ID #   20200105E
This Protocol ID number must be used in all communications about this project with the IRB.

Project Title: Community Bonding for Ex-Convicts: The Impact of Recreational Social Activities During the Post-Release Re-Entry Process

Date of Approval: 1/5/2021

☒**Expedited Approval**

This protocol has been approved under the new updated 45 CFR 46 common rule that went in to effect January 21, 2019. As a result, this project will not require continuing review. Any revisions to this protocol that are needed will require approval by the WCU IRB. Upon completion of the project, you are expected to submit appropriate closure documentation. Please see www.wcupa.edu/research/irb.aspx for more information.

Any adverse reaction by a research subject is to be reported immediately through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs via email at irb@wcupa.edu.

Signature:

Nicole M. Cattano

Co-Chair of WCU IRB

WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)
IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155

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Office of Research and Sponsored Programs | West Chester University | Wayne Hall
West Chester, PA 19383 | 610-436-3557 | www.wcupa.edu

TO: Mfon Edet & Angela Kline
FROM: Nicole M. Cattano, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)
DATE: 7/2/2021

Protocol ID #
20200105E-R1

Project Title: Community Bonding for Ex-Convicts: The Impact of Recreational Social Activities During the Post-Release Re-Entry Process - REVISION

Date of Approval for Revision/Amendment**: 7/2/2021

☒ **Expedited Approval**

The submitted amendment/revision to this previously approved expedited study does not elevate the study risk. As a result, the amendments are approved for implementation. Any revisions to this protocol that are needed will require approval by the WCU IRB. Upon completion of the project, you are expected to submit appropriate closure documentation. Please see www.wcupa.edu/research/irb.aspx for more information.

Any adverse reaction by a research subject is to be reported immediately through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs via email at irb@wcupa.edu.

Signature:

Co-Chair of WCU IRB

WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)
IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155

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