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An Exploration of the College-Educated Female Incarceration Experience

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Administration

by

Taniska Monique Wilson

B.A. Southern University at New Orleans, 2001
M.Ed. University of New Orleans, 2004

December 2010

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons, Earl Roderic Jones, III and Jedidiah Terrence Wilson and to my mother, Shirley Mae Thompson-Halley. You have inspired me to see beyond what is and to embrace what could be. Thank you for being my inspiration.

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ABSTRACT

There has been a significant increase in the nation's female incarceration rate. During 2006, the number of women in prison increased by approximately 4.5 %. The increase of female prisoners from 2005 to 2006 was larger than the average growth rate of 2.9% from 2000 through 2005. Women ages 35 to 39 made up the largest percentage of female prisoners. At the end of 2006, females made up 7.2% of the prison population under State or Federal jurisdiction, up from 6.7% in 2000. Oklahoma had the highest female incarceration rate in the nation, approximately 129, 000 inmates; followed by Louisiana, which incarcerated 108, 000 female inmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to describe how college- educated incarcerated females in a state prison perceived their incarceration experiences. The central research question was: how do college-educated incarcerated females perceive their incarceration experience? Data were collected by conducting interviews with nine women who had a minimum of two years of college-level coursework from a regionally accredited college or university and who did not have a history of drug abuse. Findings suggest that while there are negative aspects of college-educated females' incarceration experiences, the totality of the experience was not negatively perceived.

Female prisoners, Female inmates, Women in prison, Women prisoners, Educated offenders in prisons, Vocational programs for women, Prison education, Prison programs

INTRODUCTION

“Trends in women’s imprisonment in the United States reveal that women’s share of total imprisonment has actually increased. In 1980, there were just over 12,000 women in U.S. state and federal prisons. By 1999, there were 90, 668. In two decades the number of women being held in the nation’s prisons increased eightfold, and that gave birth to the women’s imprisonment boom (Beck & Karberg, 2001, p.5).” The growth rate of women’s imprisonment has also outpaced that of men. Since 1990, the annual growth rate of female prisoners has averaged 8.1%, higher than the 6.2% average increase in male prisoners (Beck & Karberg).

“Research on women in prison gives no indication that women’s crime problems are spiraling out of control; in addition, arrest data do not suggest major changes in women’s criminal behavior” (Beck, 2000, p. 6). The rise in the female incarceration rate and the lack of data to support that women’s crimes are out of control lead one to ask: what explains the increase in female incarceration rates, and who are these women offenders? Criminologists suggest that the increase in women’s imprisonment can be explained by the array of policy changes within the criminal justice system, rather than a change in the seriousness of women’s crimes (Copeland, 2000). According to Chesney-Lind (2003), the penal system has experienced and will likely continue to experience an increase in the female incarceration rate; it is also likely that the increase in the female incarceration rate will reflect a diverse population of women. Thus, the intent of this study was to learn how college-educated incarcerated females perceived their overall incarceration experience.

For many years—from 1940 to now—the role of education in corrections has been of interest to correctional administrators, lawmakers, the media, and the public. (Ryan & Mauldin, 2002). Many studies have examined the benefits of correctional education in relation to recidivism rates (Bonta, 1995; Bierie, O’Neil, & Mackenzie, 2007; Nuttall, Hollmen, & Staley, 2003). However, these studies have examined only the benefits of adult literacy, parenting, character and adult basic education programs in correctional settings. There are few studies that address, in particular, the educational achievements females have attained prior to incarceration and how those educational achievements shape the perception of the overall incarceration experience (Mauldin and Ryan, 1994; Stevens & Ward, 1997).

The ambivalence about what it means to be a prisoner and whether and how prisoners should be educated shapes prison education, in part, because prison education has been used to help reform prisoners’ thinking about their criminal behaviors (Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Lawrence, 1994). The theoretical concept that primary, secondary, and higher education are the basic tools needed to help the offender become a productive citizen upon release has been the premise for most recidivism studies that examined the role of education in prison settings (Chesney-Lind, 2003; Williford, 2007). Thus, those types of studies have traditionally been used to implement adult basic education programs in correctional facilities, both for men and women. Significantly, though, studies that are applicable to educational programs for incarcerated women who enter the prison system with degrees are still scarce in the literature. However beneficial recidivism studies are to correctional education constituents, the increase in the female incarceration rates forces

an examination of how correctional facilities can adequately address the educational needs of all its prisoners, in particular the college educated female prisoner.

Exploring the perceptions of the college-educated female incarceration experience can give insight into what this particular population may need for a successful re-entry into society as well as help others understand how they adjust to prison life. An examination of existing and future educational programs for incarcerated and previously incarcerated females may lead one to ask if the needs of the college-educated incarcerated female are different from those of their uneducated, incarcerated counterparts. And if so, how can those needs be addressed?

This study is important because it gives college-educated incarcerated females an opportunity to share their experiences about prison education programs. At present, the voice of the college-educated incarcerated female is missing in research literature. The perspective of college-educated incarcerated women can contribute not only to the research literature on prison education, but also to the review of policy for women in prison and the current correctional education model for women. This study is also timely because research has shown that simply providing educational and vocational programs does not guarantee that women prisoners receive appropriate training, nor does it guarantee that they will benefit from the training received (Belknap, 2001; Pollock-Byrne, 1990).

Defining the Problem

Over the last decade, researchers have realized that greater emphasis and concern has to be focused on women (Bloom, Owen, & Covington; Sharp, 2003). In fact, much research on women in prison suggests that women prisoners are a forgotten population

and little attention has been given to them, both as offenders and candidates for reform (Belknap, 2001; Williford, 1994). In addition, research on prison education programs has been drawn from experience and research in men's prisons. Comparatively, little has been written about women and crime, much less about women prisoners and postsecondary education. What does exist is mostly anecdotal material about adult literacy, parenting, health care, and character-based programs ((Hrabowski, 2002; Lewis, 2006; Nuttall, 2003; Wilson, 1994).

Admittedly, there have been limitations on the data collected about women in prisons because crime against women and data on women as offenders have been under reported (Muraskin, 2003). The scarce data about women in prisons are one of the reasons why legislators and corrections officials give more priority to men's programs (Muraskin). Recent data on crime statistics show that women's rates of offending is increasing faster than those of their male counterparts, and they are being arrested at a faster rate than men (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006). These facts mask a trend that attracts scholarly attention. Criminal statistics only give quantitative data about female prisoners. Qualitative data about the experiences of female offenders can provide a more holistic view about women in prison. As of 2006, the Bureau of Criminal Justice Statistics reported that approximately 210,000 women were in prison, but this number does not provide data that capture any of the lived experiences of women.

Attention needs to be focused on women to understand their status as offenders, particularly as educated offenders because as earlier stated, these perceptions help to shape prison education and can contribute to the reformation of correctional education. While there is no lack of quantitative data to show incarceration trends, there is a need for

more qualitative studies that specifically focus on understanding the experiences of women and their educational needs. With a sizable number of 210,000 incarcerated women, assumptions cannot be made that most of these women share the same commonalities. This study did not make that assumption and sought to understand the experiences of the college-educated incarcerated female.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore participants' incarceration experiences. Creswell (2003) suggests that exploring the experiences of individuals is a way to understand the experience from the individual's point of view. This study was informed by Megeehon's (2003) research study that focused on understanding women's prior educational histories and how their prior histories influenced the way they adjusted to prison life and studied for their General Education Diplomas (GEDs). However, Megeehon's (2003) research sample consisted of five women who had little to no education prior to incarceration. Similarly, Hrabowski and Robbi's (2002) research investigated the need to increase funds for incarcerated adult offenders, women included, to attain their General Equivalency Diplomas (GEDs). The problem is that these studies only focused on one demographic of the female prison population, the uneducated. In this study, I analyzed the other end of the continuum by focusing on the college-educated offender.

The current correctional education model for women has been viewed as stereotypical and discriminatory (Belknap, 2001; Naffine, 1996). Johnson (2002) contended that women offenders and their programs have been "relegated to secondary and tertiary status within the United States' Criminal Justice System" (p. 30). While

male inmates are often given an opportunity to participate in work release programs that assist them with reintegrating into society, female prisoners in a Louisiana state prisons are limited to two paid work-release sites. Because these sites have limited space and few job sites in which to place women, it limits opportunities for incarcerated women to make a successful reintegration into society. In a study of state- run facilities for women, Weisheit (1985) reported that most of the 36 institutions surveyed provided programming, education and work opportunities, which reinforced the traditional roles of women. This programming included sewing, food services, clerical work, domestic work, and cosmetology. In a later research study on women prisons conducted by Simon and Landis in 1991, data revealed an increase in women programming but despite the increase, the programs still tended to reinforce traditional roles for women. Today, some women prisons still reinforce these traditional roles through vocational programs.

Throughout the first part of the twentieth century, training in domesticity was feasible in the life of women prisoners. However, in a time where women have advance degrees and the option to gain employment in male dominant careers, there is a need to look at the other end of the continuum: the college-educated female offender. Because so many research studies focus on the experiences of offenders with little to no education (Bierie, O'Neil, & MacKenzie, 2007; Lewis, 2006; Visher & Travis, 2003), limited knowledge is available for scholars, corrections officers and legislative bodies about how to address and respond to the needs of offenders who are educated. Therefore, this research focused on a central question: How do college-educated incarcerated females perceive their incarceration experience?

Significance of Study

In 2007, Louisiana State Senators attended a Senate Focus Forum that focused on two major issues involving corrections and criminal justice: (1) alternatives to incarceration and (2) the costs of housing inmates. These discussions revealed that there has been a 70% increase in Louisiana prison population in the last eight years with an approximate expense of \$1.2 billion. According to the data from Senate Focus Forum summary (2007, p.3), “The current projected growth of the prison population will demand at least 2, 000 more beds in Louisiana prisons per year.” The need for such an adjustment is attributed to the 303% increase in male incarceration and the 576% increase in women’s incarceration over the last decade. In addition, Dr. James Austin, the co-director of The Institute on Crime, Justice, and Corrections at The George Washington University indicated, “work programs should be an integral part of the penal system because 24% of the prison population does not do anything meaningful with their time while incarcerated” (Senate Focus Forum, 2007, p. 3).

The Senate Focus Forum concluded with suggestions for the following: (1) Amend the statutory makeup of the parole board to include the warden at an inmate’s facility as a voting member because each warden has specific knowledge of an individual’s performance while incarcerated; (2) Release on medical parole individuals who are incarcerated for first or second degree murder, have no infectious diseases, or who are not on death row to help defray prison costs; (3) Re-evaluate mandatory sentences; (4) Assess every incarcerated inmate to determine which inmates can be released or paroled back into society; and (5) Provide educational or training programs for inmates to learn a skill and find employment when released or paroled.

Although these discussions have not produced any new solutions to the financial challenges that affect Louisiana penal institutions, it is a clear indication that lawmakers are concerned about the increase in the prison population, and they are searching for solutions to help defray prison costs and to reintegrate employable offenders back into society. A study that captures the perspective of college-educated female offenders can be a significant contribution to finding solutions to the above discussed dilemmas.

This study may help lawmakers and legislative bodies better understand how to implement policy that can reduce an inmate's time in prison, which can decrease the financial burden of housing inmates. Additionally, qualitative data can help lawmakers find alternatives to incarceration for college-educated women who do not pose a serious threat to society. Correctional educators may find this research helpful by acquiring a better understanding of how to appropriately respond to the educational needs of college educated incarcerated females who cannot benefit from literacy instruction.

This study is equally significant to mainstream society as it could serve as a resource for information about women in prisons. In February of 2007, CNN reporter Anderson Cooper went on assignment to investigate the increase in women's incarceration. His report titled, "*Putting a Human Face on Prison Statistics*," revealed his surprise about women in prison. Cooper remarked, "I'm not sure what I expected for a story about women in prison, but I have to say right off the bat that I had no idea so many women with children were incarcerated" (Cooper, 2007, "*Putting a Face on Human Statistics*," para. 5). As indicated by the research literature and Cooper's (2007) prison assignment, the need to understand *who* is incarcerated warrants qualitative research on women in prisons.

This study can also be significant to the participants, as it will document their incarceration experiences from their point of view. The significance of their experiences and the implications their experiences can have on the reformation of correctional education has not been well documented in the literature. Thus, a qualitative study on this topic can add diversity to the current literature about women in prison. Also, this study may help participants gain a better understanding of their experiences both prior to incarceration and during incarceration. In doing so, they may be able to use their newly acquired knowledge to make positive adjustments in their lives once they are released or if they have to continue their time in prison.

Overview of Methodology

This study used a qualitative phenomenological methodology to explore the attitudes and perceptions of college-educated females' incarceration experiences. A female correctional institution in the State of Louisiana was chosen for this study. Data collection was accomplished by conducting individual interviews. Interviews occurred over a two day period. Participants for this study met the following criteria: a) had at least an associate degree or have completed two years of college level course work from a regionally accredited college or university; b) had been incarcerated for at least one year, and c) was or have actively participated in educational services or a work program at the facility.

Definitions of Prison Terminology

The following terms and concepts will be used throughout this study:

Correctional Education is a term used to represent educational services that are rendered

in a prison setting. The range of services includes— but is not limited to— literacy instruction, preparation for General Equivalency Diploma, and Christian studies (Steurer & Smith, 2003).

Correctional Educator is an individual who teaches inside a prison setting (American Correctional Association, 1990).

Incarceration is a term used to indicate that someone is serving time in a prison.

Educated Female is a term used in this study to indicate that the participant has at least an associate degree or two years of college-level coursework at an accredited college or university.

Inmates, prisoner, incarcerated are words used to indicate that one is serving time in jail.

Kyros is faith-based program taught by Life-Way ministry volunteers. The program focuses on morals and spirituality.

Prison Administration is a term used to represent individuals who work at the prison as guards, wardens and social workers (Riveland, 1999).

Recidivism is a word used to indicate the number of times an individual with a prior arrest record has been re-arrested.

Prison, institutionalized, penal institution, facility, correctional facility are terms used in this study to represent the place where individuals must stay a substantial amount of time to make restitution for a crime.

Toastmasters is an inmate-led organization that focuses on enhancing speech and communication skills.

According to Fogel (2003), imprisonment is a stressful life event necessitating drastic change in one's life. Exploring the perceptions of the college-educated female incarceration experience documented their experiences from their point of view, which has direct implications for changing prison educational and training programs for women. Incarceration rates for females have increased significantly over the past few years, with profound implications for correctional education, for rehabilitation, and for society. Exploring these implications through the perceptions of college-educated female offenders can provide a resource for many entities. This study focused on how college educated incarcerated females perceived the benefits or non-benefits of having a higher education while incarcerated. In doing so, this research used a phenomenology approach to describe the lived experiences of college-educated incarcerated females.

Organization of the Study

The subsequent chapters of this study focus on several aspects of correctional education. Chapter Two is a review of the literature on women's imprisonment and prison education programs, the scope and diversity of prison higher education and the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter Three is an in-depth discussion of the methodology used for this study. This includes assumptions of the study, type of design, the role of the researcher, unique contributions of the researcher, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and methods of verification. Findings are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five is a discussion of findings as well as implications for higher education, prisons, businesses and legislative entities. Chapter Five also includes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is an historical overview of women's prisons and how it evolved, a review of the literature on women's imprisonment and related theories, the scope and diversity of prison higher education, and the conceptual framework for this study.

An Evolution of Women's Imprisonment

According to Killinger, Wood, and Cromwell (1979), prisons in America have existed since 1787 in one form or another. Even then, the ambiguity surrounding the role of the prison system existed. The debate about the purpose of prison systems has been ongoing because prison systems have been given responsibilities to protect the public, isolate crime, and reform the prisoner. In the midst of this debate, women's crimes started to rise and the solution to what a prison should be to society and to the female offender became more ambiguous.

"The history of women's institutions reflects the history of women" (Pollock-Byrne, 1990, p. 36). According to historical viewpoints of Carlen and Worrall (2004), women who committed crimes were thought to be deviant, and they were treated differently from male offenders" (p.6). Prior to the development of prisons in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, punishment for women and men took a variety of forms. Serious offenders were put to death by hanging or burning, or they were banished from their community or sold as slaves. Less serious offenders were subjected to physical punishments such as whippings, stocks and pillories. Mask like devices, such as bridles, were used in England up until the 1800s and were designed to punish and control

outspoken women who gossiped or disobeyed their husbands (Belknap, 2000; Killinger, Cromwell, & Wood, 1979).

During colonial times in the United States, 1620 to the 1760s, women were punished far more harshly than men for adultery, and the church as well as the state could punish women for their crimes (Belknap, 2003). Belknap suggests that the strength of these anti-woman values carried over into the twentieth century. In 1923, half of the women in U.S. prisons were convicted of sex offenses such as prostitution, fornication, and adultery. Until 1950, women in Massachusetts were still being sent to prison for having sex outside of marriage (Janusz, 1991).

When social change occurred in the United States between 1815 and 1860 due to migration and the development of a market economy, lower class women were the most negatively affected. During this time, women occupied marginal positions in the economy because of limited work opportunities. As a result, they earned much lower wages than men (Banks, 2003, p. 3). Because of these limited work opportunities, many women resulted to prostitution and theft. During this period, women were significantly involved in the category of crimes against public order and petty larceny. As a result, the rate of women imprisonment began to increase. In New York courts, convictions of women increased at a much higher rate than men between 1847 and 1860. According to Carlen and Worrall (2004), the increase in women's imprisonment was attributable not only to the incidence of public offenses, especially prostitution, but also in crimes against other persons.

The history of women's prisons in the United States is marked by a number of stages and developments that parallel men's prisons. The first stage of female prisons

was introduced in the colonies. Until the 1870s, all women prisoners were housed with men within the same prison complex (Banks, 2003). “This thinking reflected practices the colonists brought with them to the United States” (Banks, 2003, p. 3). The second stage occurred between 1870 and 1930 in which the conditions of some women prisoners changed after the women’s reformatory movement, which was a meeting that consisted of prison administrators and reformers. As a result of the women’s reformatory movement, new principles and a new aim for female inmates emerged: (1) the separation of female and male inmates; (2) the provision of specific feminine care for women, and (3) control over women’s prisons by female staff. Although men and women prisoners were no longer housed together, custodial conditions for many women inmates did not change. They continued to be housed in conditions similar to men (Banks, 2003; Chesney-Lind, 1997).

The third stage, 1930 to 1940, marked a significant event in the life of women prisons. Instead of being supervised by all men, women staff was hired to supervise women in prison and women were appointed to govern women’s institutions (Banks, 2003; Carlen & Worrall, 2004). But, vocational programs, such as cosmetology and housekeeping training, still tended to reinforce gender stereotypes.

By the 1940s and 1950s, the medical model of corrections emerged. The treatment philosophy of the behavioral sciences resulted in significant improvements in penal legislation. As a result of these improvements, a variety of specialized programs such as probation, parole, indeterminate sentences, and juvenile courts emerged. However, none of these improvements placated crime. The medical model treatment regime attempted to diagnose, classify and treat inmates prior to their release (Killinger,

Wood, & Cromwell, 1979). The process involved attempting to entice or force individuals to become a member of a group that does not own criminal behavior. This practice is embodied in probation and parole programs where ex-inmates are supposed to establish relationships with new groups and avoid criminal behaviors. According to Killinger, Wood, and Cromwell (1979) and Talvi (2007), prison institutions embraced the correctional reform model by providing educational and vocational training programs designed to provide individuals with the tools needed to establish non-criminal associations after release.

Rehabilitation as a new philosophy of punishment called for a change in prison practices and name symbolism. “Correctional institutions” replaced “Prison institutions” and “Correctional officers” replaced “prison guards.” Under the medical model, prisons moved away from harsh discipline and work orientation practices. Instead, prison administration attempted to introduce treatment to a newly defined inmate, rather than the convict (Banks, 2003; Belknap, 2000; Carlen & Worrall, 2004). But, according to research conducted by Pollock-Byrne (1990), there is little evidence that this approach has had success in rehabilitating women.

Correctional Education Models

Cohen (1983) introduced three models of correctional change that influenced rehabilitation practices. The first model emphasized moral training and attention to the psychological and social welfare of criminals and rejected physical incarceration. This rehabilitative approach dominated work with offenders in the first half of the twentieth century and alternatives to custody were justified on the grounds that: (1) Prisons are ineffective and may strengthen criminal commitment by bringing offenders into close

association with each other; (2) The stigma attached to imprisonment and the disintegration of family and community ties may make it harder for the criminal to return to a normal life after prison; (3) Most offenders can be dealt with in the community safely, effectively, humanely and crucially more cheaply than in prison, and (4) Since the cause of crime lie in the relationship between the offender and the community, that is where the cure also lies. In the 1960s, this model of rehabilitation came under attack by community leaders for both ideological and pragmatic reasons (Worrall, 1997)).

Cohen's (1983) second model of correctional change emphasized focus on ways to manage prison systems and individual criminal careers. The rationale for this model stemmed from an effort to reduce prison costs and minimize crime in communities. However, prison reformers viewed this model as "Mystical" and believed that it offered no real solution to social reform. Cohen's (1983) third model of correctional change emphasized intensive supervision and monitoring in community settings, which was not drastically different from the first two models previously introduced. With a focus on social control and power, Cohen (1983) did not believe that "good intentions and reform rhetoric would produce change in criminal behaviors" (p.25). Instead, he believed that the "Exercise of power itself" would change a criminal into one who was disciplined by new knowledge and one less likely to associate with criminal behaviors. This correctional change model was intended to be another alternative to incarceration.

Carlen and Worrall (2004) argued against Cohen's (1983) models for women with the argument that women are already subject to greater social control than men, so the ideal of subjecting them to greater formal social control is not persuasive in determining prison sentences for women. They argued that "sentencers" regarded Cohen's (1983)

models as either inappropriate (in the case of minor offenses) because there was already sufficient informal social control to rehabilitate women, or in the case of more serious offenders, the correctional change models proposed by Cohen (1983) have already failed. So instead of using Cohen's (1983) models as an alternative to imprisonment, women were sentenced to jail or prison anyway. Carlen and Worrall (2004) have argued that the alternatives to custody models introduced by Cohen (1983) ignore women.

The correctional education model has and continues to be subject to changes. However debatable these changes are, the intent of this model is clear: a reformed offender. Most theories that conceptualize women's imprisonment are not gender-specific although they are not always about male imprisonment either. Some theories about imprisonment are gender neutral, which means that the theories can be applied to either male or female offenders. But, past research literature has shown that most of these theories have been tested on males and not female offenders (Chesney-Lind, 2004; Talvi, 2007; Young & Reviere, 2006). Belknap (2003) suggested that previous studies on imprisonment have failed in attempts to be inclusive of most prisons. However, a theory purporting to explain why certain women break the law will not explain why they receive or do not receive a custodial sentence. According to Banks (2000), explaining law-breaking behavior tells nothing about why any particular woman goes to prison or about the meanings of penal incarceration from their perspective, thus one of the reasons why examining the incarceration experience of college-educated female offenders is needed in the research literature.

Women's Imprisonment and Related Theories

Women's imprisonment can be studied through a variety of theoretical lenses. The labeling theory, social control theory, power-control theory, and Marxist theory each inform the research on women's imprisonment but two of these theories were significant to this research study. They are the labeling theory and the social control theory. As described by Belknap (2000), the labeling theory, which originated from Frank Tannenbaum in 1938, is a process by which deviant descriptors are applied and received. The labeling theory speculates about how people are branded with a criminal or deviant label and the effect labeling can have on future behaviors. This theory suggests that once a person is negatively labeled, then he or she will accept the labeling and continue to commit crimes.

To advance the concepts of the labeling theory, Naffine (1996) analyzed the research of Howard Becker, a major contributor to the labeling theory. Becker conducted a study on male and female jazz and dance musicians. He collected data through participant-observation. The number of men and women studied are unknown. In the conclusion of Naffine's (1996) analysis, she posited that Becker "Used innovative and in-depth methods to really get to know and understand male musicians, while his approach to studying women remained highly orthodox" (p. 40). She further concluded that Becker's research depicted the wives of male musicians as "Nags who threatened the livelihood of their husbands' bands." (p.41). Belknap (2000) suggests that this theory is "an all too-familiar approach" in studying women offenders.

Critics of the labeling theory do not accept labeling as a final state of mind and suggest that it ignores the ability of human beings to think intelligently. One of the key issues of applying the labeling theory analysis to offenders is determining whether there

are gender differences in how offenders are labeled. “The possibility that women are less likely than men to be labeled “deviant” or “criminal” may help to explain why women have had lower arrest rates than their male counterparts in the past, or maybe women are labeled more harshly than men for some crimes while men are labeled more harshly for others” (Belknap, 2000, p. 45). The labeling theory was one of the first theories that emerged to explain law-breaking behaviors. Strengths and limitations of this theory provide insight into understanding the theoretical foundation of how sociologists and criminologists perceived law-breaking behaviors in the early eighteenth century.

Late in the eighteenth century, social control theories emerged. The approach to understanding criminal behaviors shifted from attempting to explain why people committed crimes to attempting to explain why people obeyed the law. Belknap (2003) described four of Travis Hirschi’s social bond theory concepts that he believed prevented people from acting on their criminal desires: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. The underlying principle of each of these categories is that an individual must be personally connected to family, employment, recreation and the rules of society to stay in compliance with the law. Yet, educated individuals are assumed to have these connections but they still break the law.

Social control theory studies have delineated specific gender differences behaviors. For example, Lauristen’s (1993) study reported that men are more likely to be negatively labeled than women and that women, although they may have fewer connections to family, employment and education than men, are still more inclined to follow the law. Blottcher’s (1995) follow-up study reported that social structure and participating in constructive activities was a major form of social control.

Both the labeling and social control theory are paramount to understanding the experiences of the college educated incarcerated individuals. One reason is because college educated incarcerated women have experienced, to some extent, connections to education and society. Another reason is because incarceration in and of itself is associated with negative connotations. Both theories indirectly support gender roles, which relates to the number and types of educational and vocational programs offered in Louisiana women's prisons. As a result, educational programming that fits the needs of college-educated female offenders is non-existent in correctional settings (Case, et al. 2005). Finally, there have been too few studies and theories applied to college-educated incarcerated women.

The Effects of Prison Education on Recidivism

Education in prison systems has been an important consideration since the emergence of the medical model. Although female incarceration rates continue to rise, most female offenders, those serving less than six years, will be expected to re-integrate into society (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006). Significant to the success of the re-integration process is the type of experience and training college-educated incarcerated women experience during incarceration. The term "re-integration to society" encompasses many interpretations. For the incarcerated mother, it could mean re-connecting to children beyond prison walls, for the incarcerated employee, it could mean re-establishing financial stability to self-sustain, for the unskilled individual, it could mean finding immediate job and educational training to become employable. For some, it could mean all of these things, but what does it mean to the college-educated incarcerated female who was once connected to society in meaningful ways, as conceptualized by the

social control theory, but is now imprisoned? This study proposes to explore an answer to this question since most research studies do not include this population of women.

Some may debate the need to study college-educated incarcerated females. Previous research about prisoners have suggested that college-educated offenders were few in number so studying that end of continuum was assumed to be unimportant (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Ubah, 2002). However, there is evidence that the number of college- educated offenders convicted of crimes is on the rise and that the types of crimes they commit, e.g., tax fraud, insurance fraud, and bribery, are different from the types of crimes committed by non-educated individuals (Lochner, & Moretti, 2001). Regardless of the crimes committed, crimes are still punishable by law and people who commit these crimes, educated or not, still end up in the same place: prison. The perspective of the non-educated inmate is well documented in the literature, but the perspective of the college-educated offender is not.

Educational and vocational programs, a major component of correctional education, currently emphasize the importance of offenders attaining adult basic education, parenting skills, or learning some type of skill for employment. When offenders enter the prison setting having already accomplished the goals of what prison education intends, it leaves a major gap in the literature about how these offenders not only perceive their incarceration experience but also about the effectiveness of prison programs and how and if college-educated offenders successfully re-integrate into society.

Although there are numerous prison studies, most of them about un-educated offenders, many authors of these studies conclude that education is an important factor in

rehabilitating prisoners, which reduces recidivism. Winifred (1996) set out to examine vocational and technical training programs for women. Surveys were mailed to “all state prisons for women” (p. 168). Hawaii, Nebraska, North Carolina, West Virginia, and Wyoming responded that they did not have technical or vocational training programs for women. Florida responded that its program administration was in transition and programs needed to be re-evaluated. Several other states reported problems with equipment, such as sewing machines and computers, limited funding, an inability to hire competent staff that was willing to work with offenders, and low attendance for existing programs.

Louisiana’s women prison did not respond to the survey.

Winifred’s (1996) study concluded with “It is important that vocational and technical programs teach and provide women with marketable skills, increase interaction with employers in the community and develop a stronger partnership between the Department of Corrections and the Department of Education” (p. 170). Her findings also called for equal pay for women and men in comparable inmate jobs and for prison administrators to encourage women to enroll in nontraditional prison programs.

Similarly, Hrabowski and Robbi (2002) stated that education could help deter people from committing criminal acts and can greatly decrease the likelihood that people will return to crime after their release from prison. Hrabowski and Robbi (2002) compared a group of 120 Maryland parolees who had completed a correctional education program with inmates who did not. Both groups of parolees were released during the same time period. It was concluded that there was a “positive and significant benefit of education for students at all levels when compared to those who had no education while incarcerated” (p. 98). They further posit that educating prisoners minimizes the negative

economic impact of high recidivism. Hrabowski and Robbi (2002) acknowledge that their study did not take into account the length of parolees' sentences or the type of crimes parolee's committed. In addition, the study did not examine the different types of prison education programs in which parolees participated or the gender of parolees.

Studies that document the belief that education is one of the most important tools, if not the most important, to help deter crime are plentiful. Forero (2000) remarked, "It is impossible to overstate the importance of education to people who have gotten in trouble with the law. Acquiring a high school degree can mean the difference between returning to society and playing a positive role as a citizen or becoming a career criminal" (p.96).

According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (2006), there is an inverse relationship between recidivism rates and education. "Inmates with at least two years of college education have a 10% re-arrest rate compared to non-educated counterparts" (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002, p.97). In a similar vein, O'Neill, MacKenzie and Bierie (2007) believe that educational opportunities within correctional institutions are effective in reducing recidivism. In their study, they examined whether or not facility type made a difference in the effectiveness of a GED program. Using a sample of 143 non-violent offenders, the study compared two types of prison facilities, a boot camp and a traditional prison setting. Offenders were randomly assigned to their facilities; 79 to the traditional prison and 64 to a boot camp. Findings from the study suggest that facility type for access to and quality of education make a big difference, more than just an inmate having an education. The 64 offenders who entered the boot camp all attained GEDs, while only 45 percent attained GEDs in the traditional prison setting. The strength of this study is that it compared two types of prison education programs, but a limitation is that a

description of the operational processes of the educational programs is absent; as well as background information on inmates' educational levels.

Some researchers contend that academic education within prisons is more effective at reducing recidivism than many other types of programs, such as work programs and vocational education (Brewster & Sharp, 2002; Mackenzie & Bierie, 2007; Wilson et al., 2000). But Ubah (2002) contends that previous studies about education and recidivism are not trustworthy. In his examination of recidivism studies, he pointed out inconsistencies in studies conducted in the late 70s, 80s, and 90s. In Ubah's (2002) critical examination of Schumacker's 1990 study "*Vocational and academic indicators of parole success*," he points out the findings from a study that compared inmates who participated in a vocational education program to those who participated in an academic program. A total of 760 participants from 19 adult correctional education institutions were studied. The study took place over a period of twelve months. The study found that inmates who received vocational but no academic training had the lowest arrest rates and highest employment rates. The comparison group, those who received only academic training, had the lowest employment rates and the highest arrest rates.

Vacca's (2004) literature review, *Educated Prisoners are Less Likely to Return to Prison*, examined studies that reinforce the concept that education is the key to rehabilitation. He suggested that effective education programs are those that help prisoners with social skills, artistic development, and techniques and strategies to help them deal with their emotions. In addition, he suggests that these programs emphasize academic, vocational, and social education. From the studies Vacca examined, a

recurring theme was that inmates who participated in a prison education program were less likely to return to prison.

The concern with these recidivism studies is that (1) They do not give success indicators of what reduced recidivism rates should be. Thus far, many recidivism studies only report the number of offenders who do not return and any number that is less than the number of released offenders is reported as a success. (2) Data supporting the type of crimes committed by repeat offenders are needed to fully understand if an offender is repeating the same criminal behaviors. For example, if a paroled offender who was previously convicted of a felony is later re-arrested for a traffic violation, how does that affect recidivism data? (3) Research has shown that prison studies, although conducted on the same topic, have had inconsistent findings (Case, et al., 2005; Lewis, 2006; Ubah, 2002).

Deppe (2002) states:

Some popular misconceptions that hamper correctional education playing a realistic role in the distribution of inmate services are that education is a panacea that will modify criminal behavior, that incarceration should be punitive, that career education is the answer to inmates' problems, and that offender employment is the ultimate aim of corrections (p. 256).

Further, Deppe contends that prison education programs should be based on inmate interests and should maximize institutional cooperation and community involvement. Studies reviewed in this section of the literature review do not indicate that inmates'

interests or prior educational histories contributed to the implementation of existing prison programs.

Lewis (2006) in "*Correctional Education: Why it is Only "Promising"*" suggests that most studies used to document the effectiveness of education on recidivism rates indicate only a weak, negative causal relationship between correctional education and recidivism. Similarly, MacKenzie (2002) believes that studies that have found significant support for negative causal relationships have been plagued by weak methodological vigor.

Lewis (2006) also posits that a "more holistic approach, based initially on smaller samples and a qualitative, medical model would permit a social productivity assessment of the effectiveness of various correctional education and post-release programs."(p. 128). In doing so, the outcome measures would focus more on how various correctional education programs affect released offenders, their families and their communities, while still controlling for recidivism and public safety, without using them as the primary measures of program effectiveness (Spangenberg, 2004).

Essentially, Lewis (2006) argues that little research has been conducted to specifically identify what qualities of life are for former inmates who have not returned to correctional facilities. Lewis argues that research should attempt to address if education had any impact on family and community acceptance, on family cohesion and affection, and on future and past relations and friendships. Finally, Lewis posits that research should determine if there is a link between correctional education and self-actualization and argues that a more holistic approach will lead to understanding the true impact of correctional education on the individual, her family, or the community.

Akin to Lewis's (2006) suggestion, Clark (2001) conducted a study of 24 incarcerated women, ten African-Americans, seven Hispanics, and seven White women, to explore how the women constructed a sense of self. The women ages ranged from early 20's to late 40's. Data were collected by conducting life history interviews with each woman. Each interview was 90 minutes each. After transcribing and analyzing each interview, Clark's (2001) findings concluded that the women in her study saw themselves as good people although many of their life histories contradicted that concept. Although Clark's (2001) study was not associated with education, it attempted to reach beyond statistical data to provide a glimpse of real life experiences about incarcerated women. But from the onset of the study, Clark stated that she set out to study "the uneducated, the invisible, and women who have been marked as unfit for civil life and relegated to society's trash heap" (p. 14). Clark's study, like others reviewed for this study, implies the need to insert perceptions of another incarcerated demographic of the prison population-the educated.

Social Integration for Incarcerated Women

Successful re-integration into society has been closely associated with the level of education and vocational skill of inmates. Since the emergence of the correctional education model, prison systems have been obligated to provide educational and vocational opportunities for the incarcerated (Case, Fasenfest, 2005; Lahm, 2000; Visher & Travis, 2003). In fact, female prison systems have been scrutinized and criticized for their few program offerings. Once released, previously incarcerated educated females face a different educational and economic dilemma than their uneducated counterparts. Especially if the incarcerated period outdates their vocational skills set. Lahm's (2000)

study provided a more contemporary model of educational and vocational programs available to male and female inmates. Lahm sent letters to 50 states, including Washington, DC., requesting information about available academic and vocational programs, gender make-up, population size, staff size, security level, and age of all the institutions in each state. Each state was given one month to respond. Information was received from 30 states, resulting in a sample of 417 male and 47 female institutions. Private facilities, co-educational and medical facilities were excluded from the sample.

The goal of the Lahm's (2000) study was to determine if women's institutions were offering the same "types" of educational and vocational programs as men's institutions. In terms of general education programs, including GED and adult basic education, results showed that almost 100 percent of both male and female institutions offered some form of general education. According to Lahm (2000), these results show that educational opportunities for incarcerated females have greatly increased from the 70s, 80s, and early 90s. In terms of college program availability, findings revealed that 52 percent of female institutions and 51 percent of male institutions offered some form of post-secondary education opportunities.

However, findings for vocational programming suggested that female institutions still offered training in service and clerical occupations, jobs historically associated with gender stereotypes. Male institutions offered occupational training in electronics, construction, graphic arts, plumbing, and building trades, vocations that parallel that job market beyond prison. There are two implications of this study that relate to the proposed study (1) Progressive research on women's prisons must be ongoing. (2) Research studies continually show a gap in acknowledging the programming needs of college-educated

incarcerated women, which in turn, could shape the overall incarceration and re-integration to society experience.

Programs that provide support for social integration of college-educated incarcerated and previously incarcerated females could be more effective in decreasing recidivism rates than education. Case, et al. (2005) investigated the effects of a program support model for Post Release Opportunities for Vocational Education (PROVE) for ex-female inmates. Clients of the PROVE program were recruited by staff who interviewed women at two Michigan correctional facilities. Staff was responsible for negotiating arrangement and enrollment of women into vocational programs and colleges and assisting with housing and family relationships. Eighty women signed up for the program, 72 completed the orientation. Of the 72 women who completed orientation, 46 applications were fully processed and 41 women went on to enroll into a vocational program. Twenty-five cases were closed due to incomplete data.

Initial findings of PROVE indicated that women had multiple needs that interfered with reintegration into the community and their overall quality of life. Although the experiences of the women were generally positive and PROVE helped women with training, the scope of the program was vastly limited and women indicated that their need was far greater than educational attainment. Several women indicated that their status as felons, regardless of educational level, limited their employability and income opportunities. Further, findings from the PROVE study indicated that women were looking for jobs in business, nursing, and mental counseling industries, training not currently provided during incarceration.

In Visher and Travis's (2003) review of *Transitions from Prison to Community*, they suggest that understanding individual transitions from prison to community is best understood in a longitudinal framework, taking into account an individual's circumstances before incarceration, experiences during incarceration, and the period after release. They further posit, "...individuals returning home from prison have been shaped by their offending histories, their work skills and job histories, their prison experiences and their attitudes and beliefs" (p. 91). In considering prison experiences, Visher and Travis suggest that researchers consider length of stay, participation in treatment programs, contact with family and friends, and pre-release preparation. Visher and Travis's suggestions have implications for this study because it focuses on exploring the holistic experiences of college-educated incarcerated females.

According to Clark (2001), major life events, particularly negative or culturally undesirable ones, have been shown to be predictive of psychological distress which underlies the assumption that specific life events are stressful is the notion that the human organism is fundamentally intolerant of change. Imprisonment is a stressful life event necessitating drastic change. Specific stresses reported to confront women entering prison include disorientation due to the abrupt termination of individual freedom; lack of opportunity for heterosexual activities, loss of support from family and friends; insults to self-esteem and self-concept from humiliating, depersonalizing experiences; loss of autonomy and responsibility for self; and lack of privacy and security.

Singer, Bussey, Song, and Lunghofer (1995) posit that female offenders are more likely than males to have been economically discriminated against prior to incarceration. They also posit that female offenders "come from impoverished backgrounds, are

addicted to drugs or alcohol, and have emotional and mental health problems” (p.103). They also suggest that female offenders are more likely to have to cope with histories of childhood physical and sexual abuse. Prior to incarceration, they are often robbed, beaten, raped, and murdered because they are among the most vulnerable women in our society (Singer, Bussey, Song, & Lunghofer). Earlier studies, such as the one conducted by Singer et al. (1995), depict the characteristics of women in different economical and educational times. However, this study aimed to capture the incarceration experiences of college-educated women living in the millennium era.

The results of Singer, Bussey, Song and Lunghofer (1995) suggest that the present methods of incarceration are neither effective nor cost efficient. They further state:

This high rate of recidivism among young women, many of whom are the sole supporters of children, is an important indicator of problems with current methods of incarceration. Female offenders are returned to the streets facing the same issues they faced when they were sentenced with little choice but to use the same survival tactics that precipitated their incarceration (P.110).

“The United States has more women behind bars than any other developed country” (Young & Reviere, 2005, p. 179). In the grand scheme of things, there has been progress in women’s prisons. For example, women are no longer punished for gossiping or for committing adultery, and they are no longer housed with men, or segregated by race. However, the journey to a prison system that recognizes gender equality is far from over (Young & Reviere). According to Sharp (2001), the lack of sensitivity to the gendered nature of the problems that women face before, during and after incarceration

reduces opportunities for rehabilitation and reform. “If returning to homes and community is vastly different for women and men, then it is also different for women of different social classes. If a woman has a husband, an education and a home, reentry may be embarrassing and reintegration slow, but there is usually little worry of recidivism” (Young & Reviere, 2005, p. 184). Further, Young and Reviere (2005) and Sharp (2001) suggested that planning for programs and policies for women is only possible if it is grounded in sound research, using quality data and a solid theoretical base. “Both data and theory are in short supply for examining issues relevant for women in prison. The lack of real information about smaller subgroups of women in prison is particularly pressing” (Young & Reviere, 2005, p. 189).

Conceptual Model

Historically, prison programming in the United States was predicated on the notion that educational and vocational instruction would help offenders and ex-offenders to lead successful lives (Austin & Irwin, 2001; LoBuglio, 2001). The first box in Figure 1 depicts that individuals come into prison with a set of individual characteristics that must be taken into account when considering how college-educated females perceive their incarceration experiences. Prisoners have individual profiles that reflect their prior work experience, educational level, society and family connections, and criminal records (Austin & Irwin, 2001).

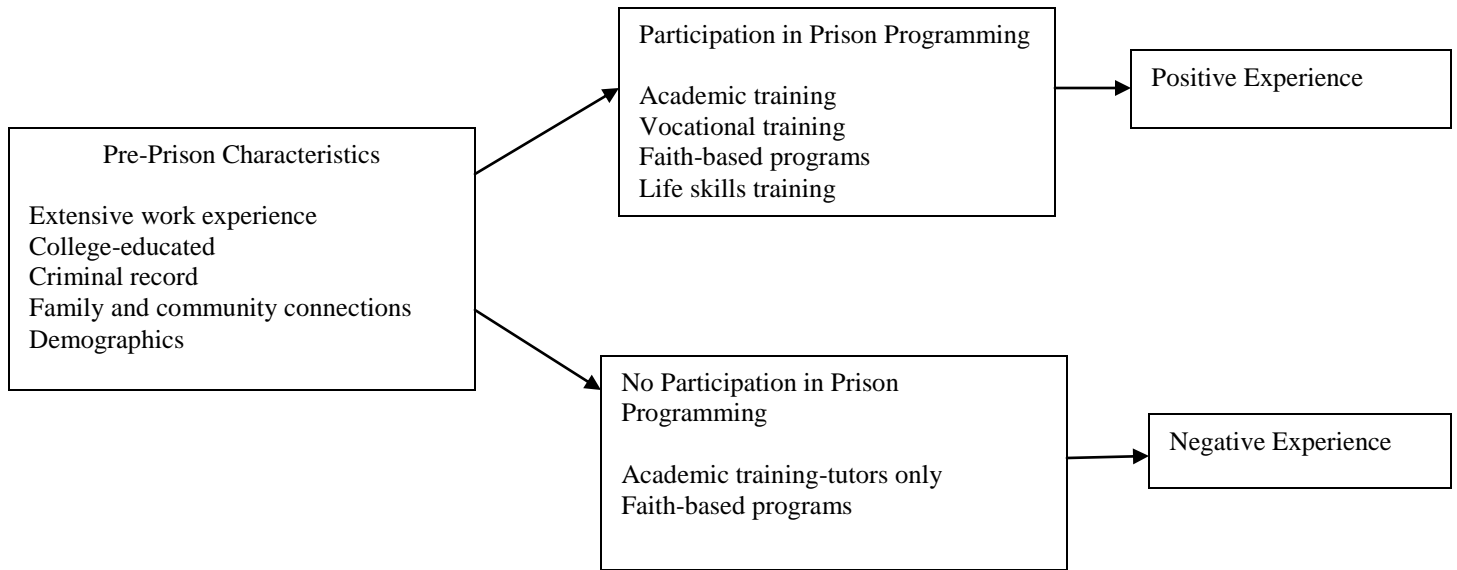
In exploring the holistic experiences of college educated incarcerated females, I believed that pre-prison characteristics influenced the type of prison programs in which college-educated inmates participated. As a result of participating in prison programs, I assumed that the prison experience would be enriched because inmates would have

frequent peer socialization, gain the respect of others, and engage in positive learning experiences. As a result of these experiential gains, I assumed that female inmates would want to share their experiences with family and use them to assist with re-integrating into society. Inmates who chose to not participate in any of the prison programs would negate opportunities for frequent peer socialization and for positive learning experiences. As a result, the female inmate would not have gained the skills and knowledge offered to help with re-integrating into society, which prompts a negative experience.

The second top box depicts the range of prison programs offered to help prepare prisoners for life during and after prison. Four categories of prison programs are offered at Beaver State Correctional Facility: academic instruction, vocational training, faith-based programs, and life skills training. Academic instruction encompasses GED attainment and the opportunity to participate in college correspondence courses. Vocational training encompasses several programs, each with its own focus, such as cosmetology, horticulture, office technology, upholstery, and culinary arts, and prison industry sewing. Faith-based programs are spiritually focused and the life skills program emphasizes enhancing communication, banking, and parenting skills.

In recent decades, researchers have depicted prison programming as a contributor to a range of positive outcomes such as reduced recidivism, stable employment, healthy family relationships, public safety, and community cohesion (Lawrence, Mears, Dubin, & Travis, 2002). For the purposes of this study, prison programming is used as a foundation to explore the incarceration experiences of the college-educated female.

Figure 1 Influential Factors That Contribute to the College Educated Female Incarceration Experience



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I explain the methodology selected to explore the research questions, the phenomenological approach, and qualitative research methods. In addition, I explain the role of the researcher, researcher biases, data collection methods, data analysis methods and trustworthiness.

To explore the perceptions of college-educated incarcerated females, I used a phenomenological approach. According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study describes the meaning of “lived experiences” for several individuals.

Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of universal essence. To this end, the inquirer collects data from persons who have experienced a phenomenon, then develops a description of “What” they experienced. Phenomenology draws heavily on the writings of German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and has a strong philosophical component” (p. 58).

I selected the phenomenology approach because I sought to understand the experiences of several individuals who share commonalities of being incarcerated and female. In addition, I believed it was important to understand the experiences of college-educated

incarcerated females through a phenomenology approach to allow participants to articulate their experiences and to learn what impact those experiences had on their lives.

Research Questions

In order to better understand the college educated female's incarceration experience, several research questions, a primary question and a subset of questions were used to explore their perceptions. The primary research question for this study was: How do college-educated incarcerated females perceive their incarceration experiences? Secondary questions were used to gain insight into the holistic experience of the college-educated incarceration female as well as to determine pre-incarceration goals, family status and career experiences prior to incarceration. Those questions were:

Describe your life prior to incarceration.

Have you ever been labeled as the black sheep or the bad one by a family member or friend?

What led you to incarceration?

Describe a typical day for you.

How is your college experience used in your incarceration?

What does it mean to you have a college education and be incarcerated?

What type of opportunities did your education afford you or prevent you from obtaining while incarcerated?

Describe how this experience has affected you.

How do your peers perceive you? Why do you think this is so?

How does prison administration perceive you? Why do you think this is so?

What type of educational advancement have you made while incarcerated?

Describe any events or experiences that positively affected you while incarcerated.

Describe any events or experiences that had a negative effect on you while incarcerated.

How do you imagine your life once released?

Describe your plans for employment and housing when you are released.

Why did you participate in this study?

Rationale for Phenomenological Qualitative Research Method

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative research is conducted through an intense and/or prolonged contact with a “field” or life situation. Moreover, Creswell (2003) explains that phenomenological research is “when the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon as described by participants in a study” (p.15). The phenomenological approach is a procedure that involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships for meanings (Creswell, 2003).

In qualitative research, the researcher attempts to capture data about the perceptions of local actors “from the inside” through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding, and of “bracketing” preconceptions about topics under discussion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). They further state that a main task of the qualitative approach is to explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations. Likewise, Creswell (2003) explains that qualitative research takes place in the natural setting and uses multiple humanistic and interactive methods, which involves active participation from participants. Active participation from participants is important to the

credibility and completion of a research study. Without it, a rich description of experiences would be difficult to convey to readers, which could result in readers not understanding the totality of others' experiences with a particular phenomenon.

According to Creswell (2003), qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. This means that the researcher makes an interpretation of the data. This includes developing a description of an individual or setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically, stating the lessons learned, and offering further questions to be asked. Glesne (1999) explains that the qualitative researcher filters the data through a personal lens that is situated in a specific sociopolitical and historical moment. He further states that one cannot escape the personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis (p. 182). Because this study describes the experiences of college educated incarcerated females within the natural setting of a penal institution, a qualitative approach, namely a phenomenological approach, was better suited for this study.

The Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I had four complex roles in this project. My primary role was a researcher's role because I collected and analyzed the perceived facts from participants. My second role was a learner's role. Glesne (1999) states that the learner's perspective will lead the researcher to reflect on all aspects of research procedures and findings. I was cognizant of the fact that I knew nothing about how college- educated females perceived their incarceration experiences. My third role was that of a correctional educator. Although I had no personal connection to the specific site studied or the participants, I have experience teaching incarcerated males and females in correctional settings, and I

realized that having been in the capacity of a correctional educator that I bring specific biases to the study. As a researcher, identifying my roles and biases were important because it helped me to minimize subjectivity. I stayed aware of personal feelings I needed to monitor as I conducted this study.

In my role as a researcher, I was accountable for determining which site to use to conduct this study, which participants to study, who to contact for site access and establishing trust and rapport with participants. In addition, I was responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of both the site and participants. In my role as a learner, I was responsible for “bracketing” all that I thought I knew about offenders so I could clearly understand the experience of the participants. In my role as a former correctional educator, I was responsible for monitoring my subjectivity about correctional education so data collection was not contaminated by what I wanted to see and hear instead of what I actually observed and heard. To monitor my subjectivity, I kept a subjectivity portfolio. Prior to entering the prison site, I wrote about my assumptions, feelings, and experiences that were connected to this research project.

Researcher Bias

According to Creswell (2003), a qualitative researcher is one who “systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study” (p.182). In my role as a correctional educator, I taught men and women who I believed received incarceration sentences for crimes that could have been remedied through community service. I believe that our criminal justice system needs more modern practices and solutions for non-felony crimes. This belief stems from my own brief incarceration experience. Last year while on my way to work, I was

arrested for having a suspended license. Although I tried to explain to the police officer that the ticket that prompted my license to be suspended had been paid and that it must have been an error, he did not listen. Instead, he handcuffed me, put me into the back of a police car and escorted me to the parish jail. As a college-educated, professional woman, I expected to be treated with respect. I expected jail personnel to recognize that I was not a common criminal, which was evidenced by the reason I was arrested, but a law-abiding citizen.

To my dismay, I was not treated as the college-educated, professional woman that I was. Instead, I was finger printed, reviled by deputies who were young enough to be one of my kids, and placed into a holding cell with individuals who had been charged with felony crimes. Because it was my first time being arrested, I was fast-tracked; which means I was released by signing myself out. However, the fast-track process took exactly eight hours, which was not so fast to me. Because I have experienced, although briefly, what it feels like to be incarcerated as a college-educated, professional woman, I was careful not to insert my own feelings into the study. To help ensure this, I did not share my incarceration experience with any of the participants and I was sure to analyze the data collected from participants without any inclusion of my personal biases, assumptions or incarceration experience.

As a prior employee in a prison environment, I believe that prison employees lack the necessary training to work effectively in a prison environment. At present, correctional officers and deputies need to have only a high school diploma to gain employment in a correctional setting. I do not believe that having a high school diploma is enough education to ensure efficient care, custody, and control of inmates. Also, I believe that

our criminal justice system lacks the financial resources and the tenacity needed to secure resources to meet the needs of inmates who will re-integrate back into our community.

Researcher Assumptions

As a qualitative researcher and former correctional educator, revealing my assumptions as I conducted this study was necessary to increase not only my awareness but also the awareness of the readers. My first assumption was that female offenders who enter correctional education settings with advanced education are neither recognized nor rewarded in the correctional education setting. My second assumption was that female offenders did not perceive the benefits or drawbacks of having advanced education in the correctional education setting because prison administration treats all offenders the same in the name of care, custody, and control. My third assumption was that correctional education had no adequate programming for the female offender who has a minimum of two years of college level education. My fourth assumption was that the educated female offender endures more humiliation than her non-educated counterpart because she does not fit the mode of the typical female offender.

Ethical Considerations

The issue of ethical integrity was constantly considered during this research project. According to Glesne (1999), a research code of ethics is generally “concerned with aspirations as well as avoidances: it represents our desire and attempt to respect the rights of others, fulfill obligations, avoid harm, and augment benefits to those we interact with” (p. 115). Because the prison population is a unique population with special needs, it was important to pay close attention to ethical codes. Glesne (1999) describes five basic principles as they concern ethics:

- Research subjects must have sufficient information to make informed decisions about participating in a study.
- Research subjects must be able to withdraw, without penalty, from a study at any point.
- All unnecessary risks to a research subject must be eliminated.
- Benefits to the subject or society, preferably both, must outweigh all potential risks.
- Only qualified investigators must conduct research.

To ensure ethical integrity, a consent form stating the topic and purpose of the study was constructed and explained to the gatekeeper and all participants who volunteered to participate in this study. In addition, the consent form clearly explained the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and that participants would not be compensated in any way for participating in the study. Confidentiality concerns were addressed and ensured by my commitment to replace participants' names and the study site with pseudonyms. All persons involved in this study, including the researcher, gatekeepers and participants understood that this research project was being conducted to fulfill doctoral requirements. The consent form stated that the research project was under the direction of a qualified faculty advisor. In addition, gatekeepers and participants were given detailed steps of the research process, such as the expected time that participants would be involved, the possibility of restructuring the topic, the expected date of completion for the dissertation and how to request a copy of the study.

In addition, I requested for the gatekeeper to designate an area conducive to research that would ensure the safety of the researcher and the confidentiality of the participants. Further, I did not bring any prohibited items on the premises, such as a cell phone, pager, or sharp objects that could have been used for harmful intent. I did not use language that I thought would offend, degrade, or devalue the participant or her incarceration experience.

Data Collection

“Data collection includes setting the boundaries for a study, collecting information through structured or semi-structured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information” (Creswell, 2004 p. 185). In this section, I discuss the site selection process, participant selection, the method used to collect data, and the interview guide and protocol.

Site Selection

To explore the experience of the college-educated incarcerated female, Beaver State Prison, a multi-purpose correctional facility, one that had vocational and educational programs to actively engage educated incarcerated females was selected. It was important for the research site to have vocational and educational programs because past research studies suggest that they make a difference in one’s incarceration experience (Lawrence et al., 2005; Messemer, 2007; Young & Mattucci, 2006). The research site housed female prisoners only, and it had offenders of all security classes.

Also, the prison site had a variety of educational programs, including literacy and character development programs as well job opportunities within the prison. Some job

opportunities in the prison included grounds maintenance, field operation-growing vegetables, kitchen workers, warehouse workers, beauty technicians, and tutoring. In addition, the prison site is a state facility. Essentially, this site offered a variety of prison programs so it was the ideal site to explore the totality of the educated female's incarceration experience. As well, the selected research site helped me to explore college educated incarcerated females' experiences using multiple applications as the site could be examined in a variety of contexts: work, learning, cognitive maturation, and recidivism.

Gaining Access

Access is a process. It involves giving the inquirer consent to observe what is deemed necessary, to talk to whomever is deemed important in the research process, to obtain and read documents relevant to the research process, and to conduct a study for as long as necessary (Glesne, 1999). Initially access to the research site was given for the pilot study, which was conducted in July of 2008. At that time, I called Beaver State Prison and requested to speak to the warden or the director of education. The call was forwarded to the warden. The warden and I discussed the research topic as well as the steps required to get permission from the Department of Corrections Headquarters. An email detailing the steps of the research request was sent to the warden. Once permission to conduct the pilot study was granted from the Department of Corrections Headquarters, my research requests were forwarded to the director of education. The director of education became the primary gatekeeper for the study.

Since initial contact with Beaver State Prison in 2008, the warden retired and a new director of education joined the staff. Prior to leaving, the former director of

education informed his successor of the possibility of my return to conduct research at the prison. To gain access for the actual research study, an email explaining the nature of the research along with the research criterion was sent to the deputy warden and the new director of education (see Appendix A). One day later, I received a phone call from the director of education stating that the deputy warden had approved the research request. While conversing with the director of education, I proposed two dates and times to conduct interviews.

Selection of Participants

To explore the experiences of college-educated incarcerated females, parameters were set by the researcher to identify who was considered an educated incarcerated female and how much time served in a correctional facility would be enough time to experience the fullness and complex nature of the incarceration experience. Also, special attention was given to the site where these females were incarcerated as it had to be a correctional facility that had multi-purpose programming. The selected site had multi-purpose programming to show its capability to offer correctional education services in areas outside of literacy education. In keeping with the conventions of qualitative inquiry, I chose a purposive sampling method for this study. Purposive sampling is the process of selecting a sample that is believed to be representative of a given population (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2003).

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of incarcerated females who had a minimum of two years of college-level education, who had been incarcerated at least one year, and who did not have a history of drug abuse. Participants could have been serving time for violent or non-violent crimes. The women for this study were

selected using purposive sampling because the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of incarcerated females who entered prison settings with advance education.

To enhance this study, I selected participants who represented a homogenous group. Because the director of education was privileged to the educational statuses of inmates who participated in prison programs, I asked him to provide me with a list of women who entered the prison with an associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree and beyond and who were not serving sentences for drug-related crimes. The list consisted of 76 names. I met with the women to explain the nature of the research and to assure them that participation in the study was strictly voluntary.

Women who were interested in participating in the study were asked to sign up with the director of education. Also, they were asked to complete a participant questionnaire (see Appendix B). The women were asked to sign up with the director of education for two reasons: (1) he had direct access to their educational records. For this study, the level of education attained had to be verified. The director of education was able to corroborate whether or not a participant attained the level of education she said she had; (2) the director of education had good rapport with the women. I discerned this during previous visits to the prison that were not related to this research effort. The director of educator had a non-threatened demeanor, which helped the women inmates relax around him.

From the list provided to me from the director of education, I selected twelve (n=12) participants. Although only ten women were needed for the study, I selected two women as alternates. I selected the twelve women (n=12) based on highest educational level and the answers to the participant questionnaire. To ensure that potential

participants met the research criteria, I needed to know the college(s) they attended, how long they attended, degree(s) attained, and how long potential participant had been incarcerated. The participant questionnaire requested the following information:

- Age of the participant
- Race and highest educational level attained, college (s) attended
- Length of incarceration
- Anticipated released date
- Involvement in education or vocational programs
- Employment prior to incarceration information

To ensure that the selected participants understood that participation in the study was strictly voluntary, I explained to them their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, the right to not answer any question posed by the researcher and the right to stop the interview process at any time. Because prison settings are sites in which participants must oblige by rules and regulations of prison administration, the gatekeeper needed to re-assure participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. After participants signed consent forms (see Appendix C) they were included in the dissertation study.

Rationale for Interviews

The best method for exploring how the college-educated incarcerated female perceived her incarceration experience was to give her an opportunity to share, in her own words, the complex nature of her experience. In order to optimize an opportunity of this kind, the interview method was selected. Interviews allow the researcher to be face to

face with participants and to provide participants with time and space needed to share the depth and intensity of their experiences (Creswell, 2004). Because interviewing is a complex act (Glesne, 1999), it is important for the researcher to do much listening and little talking during the interview process. Also, there are other attributes of interviewing that enhance the research process. During interviews, the researcher can establish rapport with participants as well gain a holistic perspective of the interviewee's experience. Face to face interviews provide researchers the opportunity to give consideration to voice inflections, sarcasm, humor as well as non-verbal communications. Essentially, these elements shape the context and content of the interviewee's experience.

Interview Guide

Researchers use interview protocols for recording information during a qualitative interview. The protocol should act as a guide for a researcher and should include key questions to inform the research study and probes to follow up on key questions (Creswell, 2004). The purpose of using an interview protocol was to ensure that all participants were given the opportunity to answer the same questions. I used an interview protocol to conduct this study. Glesne (1999) advises "phenomenological researchers to ask questions that fit the topic and that are anchored in the cultural reality of respondents: questions must be drawn from respondent's lives and an interview guide should not be a binding contract; but a best effort before having the chance to use them with a number of respondents" (p. 68) A set of predetermined open-ended questions (see Appendix D) were created by the researcher and used in the interview process. The interview questions for this study focused on asking participants to reflect on their pre-incarceration experiences and their overall incarceration experience. Other areas such as social

networking within the prison and internal and external factors associated with the female incarceration experience were explored.

Interviews

According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2003), the data collection of choice for qualitative studies is audio or video-tape recording. I interviewed nine women for this study. Although twelve women were selected, issues beyond my control resulted in only nine being interviewed. One woman withdrew her consent on the day of the interview. She wrote a letter to me that stated she “did not want to garner any more publicity about her crime.” The two alternates were not available on the day of the interview. One of the alternates was unexpectedly released by a judge and the other one was in court.

Data were collected by audio-taping each participant during a semi-structured interview. Interviews did not last more than one hour. Interviews took place in an air-conditioned conference room located in the prison’s church. The prison’s church was not in close proximity to any of the cell buildings. This allowed the women to feel a little less guarded. The conference room consisted of a brown elongated table, six leather chairs, a microwave, and an aquarium. To further ensure confidentiality, we were allowed to close the door. To ensure my safety, the conference room had four large windows that allowed transparency, and an unarmed guard remained outside the door during the course of interviews.

Prior to conducting interviews, each interviewee was made aware of the researcher’s intent to record the interview using an audio-tape recorder, and each participant was asked if that intent was permissible. During the interview process, I paid special attention to the participant’s verbal and non-verbal actions and voice inflection.

These actions were recorded as personal notes and they were used during the transcribing and data analysis process. Because of the sensitive nature of the research topic, interviews did not end abruptly. After each interview, I smiled at the participant, thanked her, and wished her well.

Field Notes

Field notes describe, as accurately and comprehensively as possible, all relevant aspects of the situation observed. They contain two basic types of information: (1) descriptive information that directly records what the observer has specifically seen or heard on-site through the course of the study and (2) reflective information that captures the researcher's personal reactions to observations, the researcher's experiences, and the researcher's thoughts during an observation session (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2003).

When I arrived at Beaver State Prison, I described the surroundings of the prison using an audio-tape recorder. During the data analysis process, I frequently referred to both my written and audio-taped field notes. This helped to me display the data using rich description.

Transcribing

Transcribing interviews is a time consuming task (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2003). I transcribed each audio-tape verbatim in correlation with the field notes. Each interview transcript was divided into three columns. One column represented questions asked by the interviewer, the second column represented responses given by the interviewee, and the third column represented my theoretical and personal notes. During the transcription process, I revisited the personal notes that I'd written about the interviewee several times.

This helped me to better cluster the interviewee's interpretation of her experience during the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2004) explains that data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study. It is not sharply divided from the other activities in the qualitative research process, such as data collection or formulating research questions. The following paragraphs describe the steps I used to analyze the data.

Memoing and Coding

The first part of the analysis consisted of memoing. Memoing is an early data analysis tool. According to Glesne (1999), "Memoing is a reflective field log that helps you to develop your thoughts and manage information" (p.131). Also, methodological reflections can tie together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster and they can also go well beyond codes and their relationships to any aspect of the study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). My analytic notes consisted of questions and speculations about the data and emerging themes. I also used them to them to document and enrich the analytic process and to expand the data corpus.

The second part of the analysis was coding. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), coding is analysis. They view it as "the process used to review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully" (p. 56). Rossman and Ralis (as cited in Creswell, 2004) describe coding as the process of organizing data into "chunks" before bringing meaning to those "chunks." Each individual transcript was

coded and labeled according to emergent themes. Codes and categories were sorted, compared, and contrasted until saturated. Themes that emerged from each interview were written down on color coded index cards. Each color of the index card represented a broad concept, and significant statements directly related to interview questions were extracted from the transcript and placed under the appropriate color coded card. To keep track of the codes assigned to the index cards, I kept a journal of assigned codes.

Analyzing Data with Rich Description

Each transcript was read multiple times in an effort to grasp interviewees' experiences. Then, I formulated meanings for recurring common themes emerging from each interview by extracting significant statements. This allowed the data to speak for itself. In analyzing the data within its context, I used a context chart for each interviewee. The context chart showed the relationship of the interviewee to her environment, peers, and prison administration (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The context chart gave me an opportunity to learn how the context of the environment influenced the women's perceptions of their experiences. Then, I extracted raw data from the transcripts and placed it into a conceptually matrix. I use the matrix to organize data that had similar themes that indicated positive or negative experiences.

Questioning

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), asking questions is a tool that is useful at every stage of analysis. In examining the data, I asked questions to probe, to think outside of the box, and to become acquainted with the data. Asking questions about the data helped me to better understand the role of the participant from her perspective. In addition, I asked theoretical questions about the data which helped me to make

connections between concepts. In doing so, I highlighted relevant passages that illustrated specific phenomena. Last, I asked practical questions of the data, for example, what concepts are well-developed and which are not and how is the data evolving? The data were analyzed in different contexts to get a firm grasp on college educated females' incarceration experiences.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers can establish trustworthiness with participants by developing good rapport (Glesne, 1998). Glesne describes rapport as "the relation characterized by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity and notes that it refers to the confidence of a subject in the operator as in hypnotism, psychotherapy, or mental testing with willingness to cooperate" (p.95). Appearance and behavior management as well as prolonged time spent at the site and with participants are factors that bear on rapport (Glesne). The establishment of trustworthiness in qualitative research addresses credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of studies and findings (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2003).

Some rapport with prison administration had been established prior to the request for research. As a current employee of a local college, I've attended correctional facility job and educational fairs since 2004. My attendance at these job and educational fairs afforded me the opportunity to network with prison administrators and inmates. In addition, I met the warden and the director of education when I conducted the pilot study on this topic in the summer of 2008. I've spent a considerable amount of time on the site selected for this research. Rapport was established with participants through the introduction, where I disclosed my role as former correctional educator. When the

women learned this about my background, it appeared that they became more receptive and relaxed in my presence. I interpreted this as positive rapport.

Credibility

According to Gay, Mills and Airasian (2003), credibility occurs when a researcher takes into account all the complexities in the study being conducted and addresses problems that are not easily explained. I addressed credibility by objectively describing the field notes, by using verbatim transcription from the participants, and by clearly interpreting meanings that the raw data support. In addition, I maintained a subjectivity portfolio throughout the process of this study, which allowed me to objectively assess interviewee's words and actions. A subjectivity portfolio held me accountable for the truthfulness of participants' answers by preventing me from inserting my experiences into theirs.

Transferability

The second aspect that contributes to trustworthiness is transferability, which requires connection-making, either to unstudied parts of the original case or to other cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2003) posit that transferability includes descriptive, context-relevant statements so the consumer can identify with the setting (p. 403). In this study, I addressed transferability by describing in detail the sampling method, the population, the research site, the research procedures, and by defining the scope and boundaries of the study.

Dependability

The third aspect that contributes to trustworthiness is stability of the data. This concerns whether the process of the study is consistent, and reasonably stable, over time

and across researchers and methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To address this aspect of trustworthiness, the research question and the method of inquiry used to answer the research question were clearly articulated. Additionally, the data collection and analysis process were described in detail. Data and coding quality checks were periodically conducted throughout the study to ascertain accurate information.

Confirmability

Miles and Huberman (1994) frame confirmability as neutrality and reasonable freedom from researcher biases. To ensure confirmability, I stated my biases, assumptions, and experience that directly relates to the research in the beginning of the research to ensure readers that findings from the data are the most true and accurate accounts as depicted by the participants. In addition, detailed procedures about how data collection occurred and descriptions of the site and setting addressed confirmability.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how the college-educated female perceived her incarceration experience. Participants were asked to reflect on their lives prior to incarceration and to answer questions about their educational and incarceration experiences. This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section is an overview of my visit to the Beaver State Correctional Facility. The second section is a summarized overview of the differences and commonalities among participants. The third section consists of major themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Overview of Visit to Beaver State Correctional Facility

The drive to Beaver State Correctional Facility (BSCF) was not long; to be exact, it took one hour and thirty minutes. The architectural design of BSCF can easily appeal to one's aesthetic sense. The design of the buildings made the prison seem less like a correctional facility and more like an enormous recreational facility. I arrived at BSCF at 7:45a.m. with no feelings of trepidation since I had visited this facility previously to attend job and education fairs. To enter the grounds, I had to give the correctional officer who guarded the entrance gates my driver's license. He checked the trunk of my car and glove compartment for weapons. When I arrived at the front desk, I had to give my driver's license to another correctional officer who in turn gave me a visitor's I.D. badge that had to be worn at all times while on prison grounds. Then, the correctional officer asked me to sign my name and document the purpose of my visit in a log book that was three inches thick. I sat down until another correctional officer was available to escort me to prison grounds.

Participants

Data were collected from nine incarcerated women who had a minimum of two years of college education from a regionally accredited college or university. For the purposes of this study, education attained from technical and vocational schools did not count as college-level education. Participants' sentences and alleged crimes were diverse, but none of the participants were serving time for drug-related crimes, and each woman expected to be released within one to ten years.

Table 1

Participant Profile

Name	Educational Level	College Attended	Age	Race
Crystal	Doctorate degree	4-year private	50	Caucasian
Nancy	Bachelor's degree	4-year private	39	Caucasian
Kyla	Three years of college	4-year public	23	African-American
Sanai	Bachelor's degree	4-year private	35	African-American
Tiffany	Associate degree	4-year public	52	Caucasian
Sharon	Bachelor's degree	4-year public	50	Caucasian
Dana	Master's degree	4-year public	33	Caucasian
Tammy	Two years of college	2-year public	53	Caucasian
Christina	Bachelor's degree	4-year private	51	Caucasian

Participant One: Crystal

The first interview took place with Crystal, a middle age Caucasian woman whose persona exuded confidence. Crystal has a bachelor and master's degree in nursing in addition to a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. Crystal, a mother of four children, is a first time, felony offender. As Crystal took her seat opposite of me for the interview, she crossed her legs and leaned back in a leather chair. For most of the interview, Crystal's

hands remained folded in her lap. On occasion, she would place her folded hands on the conference table. Her demeanor was calm and emotionless. However, when Crystal spoke of her children, she often raised her voice, made frequent gestures with her hands, uncrossed her legs, and sat in an upright position. During my interview with Crystal, I learned that her children had stopped writing to her several months into her incarceration and that her ex-husband married their former therapist. Crystal participated in this interview because “she hopes this dissertation open the eyes to the public that there are wonderful women in prison and that the public needs to open their businesses to them.”

Participant Two: Nancy

Nancy has a degree in psychology and was working in that field at an educational institution immediately prior to her arrest. Divorced with one daughter, Nancy is a first time felony offender. Nancy arrived to the interview five minutes early and sat next to me during the interview process. Her hair was neatly pulled back into a ponytail; her face was bare of any make-up and her eyes were puffy. Nancy shared that she had been recently diagnosed with a malignant form of throat cancer. Since learning of her diagnosis, she has been “reflecting on her life and thinking about how to do things differently with the time she has left.” Nancy participated in this study because she felt that “society has so many disjointed views about prisoners, especially about women prisoners, and our experiences needed to be shared and hopefully...um...people who hear them, will respond in a positive way.”

Participant Three: Kyla

Kyla swayed into the conference room like a model on the run way. Her voice was deep and eloquent, her clothes meticulously pressed, and her hair was short but

neatly trimmed into a round, black bush. At the time of her arrest, Kyla was a college student pursuing a degree in nursing. She had one year before completing her college studies. Although Kyla is a first-time offender, she is no stranger to prison because her older brother has had “run-ins with the law ever since she could remember.” The youngest sibling of three, Kyla was the youngest of the study participants and also the one who has to serve the most time. Kyla appeared energetic and eager. During the interview, she maintained eye contact with me as if she were trying to figure me out and she often gestured with her hands. When Kyla spoke about the relationship with her peers in prison, she quenched her eyes and swiveled in her leather chair. I learned that Kyla wrote some of the drama plays for the prison, sang with the prison’s praise team and wrote short stories about others in prison. Kyla participated in this study because she wanted “at least one meaningful thing to do with her day.” Kyla has no children.

Participant Four: Sanai

Sanai slumped into a chair next to me for our interview. Her dark skin dripped of sweat as she explained to me that she had been having “one of those days.” A chemist, mother of three, and a divorcee, Sanai learned how to “get over” on the law from a roommate in college. Sanai has a previous arrest record for misdemeanor crimes, but this sentence is her first conviction. A few days before the interview, Sanai learned that three years had been deducted from her original sentence. Unlike the other participants, Sanai was not arrested for her crimes. Instead, she turned herself in for crimes she had committed ten years prior to her surrender. Sanai explained that she was “tired of running and wanted to get the thing from over her head so she could live a normal life.” She shared how her family viewed her as the black sheep because she chose to leave her

hometown. Sanai's husband divorced her while she was incarcerated. The divorce sent "shock waves" through her body, and it took her a long time to deal with it. Sanai participated in this study because she believes in "helping others reach their goals."

Participant Five: Tiffany

The interview with Tiffany occurred after the prison count, a mandatory activity that she always disliked but became accustomed to. Tiffany was small in stature but very muscular. Her short, brown curly hair was combed away from her face, and she wore her glasses on the tip of her nose. Tiffany extended her hand to me before she sat down and promptly introduced herself. During the interview, Tiffany sat stoically in an opposite chair but gave very detailed answers to my questions.

After having children, Tiffany decided to go back to college. She attained an associate's degree in general studies. Of all the study participants, Tiffany has been incarcerated the longest. Her long time stay in BSCF has garnered her much respect from her peers and prison administration. Very active in some of the prison's most elite programs, Tiffany was appointed by the warden to give speeches outside of the prison, a privilege that only "a handful of the women" has. She spoke proudly about her incarceration record. Not once has Tiffany been written up, and she has managed to "avoid trouble" both with her peers and prison administration. She is a first time felony-offender. Tiffany was not at a loss for words and spoke freely and comfortably about her life experiences. When asked why she participated in this study, Tiffany shrugged her shoulders and skipped the question.

Participant Six: Sharon

Before I had a chance to ask one interview question, Sharon, the oldest sibling of two from an “upper middle class family who had strong political ties in her community,” began speaking about her life. She attended three 4-year public universities before graduating from a four-year private university with a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry. Prior to her arrest, Sharon had applied to medical school. She received an acceptance letter two days after being arrested. Sharon believes that “most...the majority of the people who come here [prison] do have an education.” She discussed two incarcerated peers who held impressive career positions prior to their incarceration. According to Sharon, one of her peers was the Director of Human Resources and the other was a veterinarian. Sharon further explained that her peers didn’t want to participate in this study “because of administration.”

Sharon appeared eager to talk about her life as she candidly spoke about her disappointment at not being able to have children, of losing her husband to cancer, and of her family for always hiding their “family problems and not letting the family get the help they needed when they needed it.” She attributed her incarceration to “trying to protect her family by covering up for what they did.” Prior to incarceration, Sharon focused on her education, husband, and volunteer work at different charities. Because her family “wasn’t hurting for money,” Sharon has never had a job. However, since her incarceration, Sharon has attained licenses in upholstery and horticulture. She was optimistic about her earning potential upon release. Sharon participated in this study because she “ain’t scared to call a spade a spade and she wants the outside world to know it.”

Participant Seven: Dana

Dana's interview took place immediately after lunch. During the lunch period, I left the prison compound. When I returned, Dana was sitting on the floor by the conference room door. As I approached her, I smiled and apologized to her for having to wait. She shook her head from side to side before informing me that she didn't eat lunch and that she was a few minutes early. Like many of the others, Dana sat in a chair right next to me. As I turned on the tape-recorder, I watched as she crossed her legs and tugged at her long blond hair.

The younger of two siblings, Dana attended two 4-year state universities before graduating with a master's degree in social work. Prior to incarceration, Dana was employed in her career field one month after obtaining her degree. Serious and serene, Dana explained that the nature of her crime. Although she was a first-time offender, Dana's crime prevented her from getting assistance from the prison with reintegrating into society. Dana described herself as a "low-key person who stays to herself to avoid trouble." Dana disclosed that she was going home the very next day. When I asked Dana why she looked so grim about it, she said, "My license is suspended and I have to pursue another career field...I'm...I'm mad at myself for what happened and angry at them for having no understanding in a field that is supposed to be very understanding." Dana participated in this study because her sister is a doctoral candidate and ignoring a request to help a fellow doctoral student would have "pissed my sister off."

Participant Eight: Tammy

Of all the study participants, Tammy appeared to be the most nervous. She peeped into the conference room before entering. I gestured for her to come in. When she walked into the conference room, she looked around as if she wanted me to tell her where to sit. I

told her to sit wherever she wanted, so she sat in a leather chair next to me. She constantly folded one hand over the other and when she answered the first two questions, her voice quivered. Tammy's hair hung to her shoulders, and her shirt hung loosely outside of her pants. Her wrinkled face made her seem older than she was and her hands displayed scars, which she later explained came from planting. Prior to incarceration, Tammy attended a community college in hopes of attaining a degree in nursing. Tammy's college studies were interrupted by unexpected pregnancies. She never found the time to go back to school once she had her children because she was "always busy working."

Tammy, a single mother of two grown daughters and a grandmother to an eight year old, proudly boasted of her recent accomplishment of attaining a license in horticulture. As the interview progressed, Tammy relaxed and gradually talked more about her life experiences. Immediately prior to her incarceration, Tammy was unemployed and "struggling to take care of her children." Although Tammy has been arrested three times before, this is her first time being convicted. Tammy participated in this study because no one has ever asked her about "her feelings, her days, what she goes through from day to day, or how she copes." She wanted the chance to "talk about how she really felt without worrying about if the word would get back to the wrong person."

Participant Nine: Christina

Christina bounced into the conference room holding a plastic cup of water. She had a huge smile on her face as she slid her tall, slim body into the leather chair next to me. She glanced at the audio-tape recorder, then back at me and smiled. Christina's gray hair hung loosely to her shoulders, her clothes were overly worn which was evident by

the small holes in her much faded light blue shirt. Her jeans seemed too big for her small frame, but her face seemed to glow with happiness. Christina has a degree in business management, and she wanted to use her incarceration experience to upgrade her technology skills. I learned that Christina was going to be released in two days.

During the interview, Christina made jokes about her incarceration and often laughed when she answered a question. She spoke about the lack of support she received from prison administration when she tried to upgrade her technology skills. Christina was, as she puts it, “kicked out” of a Vo-tech program because the instructor said that she was, “working ahead of the class too much.” According to Christina, most of the programs at the prison are too old and outdated for people like her. “The only good thing about some of these programs is that you get education credits.” She expressed her disappointment at not being able to get her Vo-tech education credits, but believed that participating in the program “wasn’t a total lost” because she did learn a few things.

Christina is an only child who has never been married. She has no children. She admits that she initially signed up for the study to be recognized by the educational director. Once she was accepted but then kicked out of the Vo-tech program, she said that she “wanted to be a woman of her word and follow through.” Christina is no stranger to BSCF. Six years ago, she served six months at the prison. She compared her recent incarceration to her previous one and was disappointed that the women were getting “younger and younger and dumber and dumber.” She referred to BSCF as a “kiddie camp” that was no longer the place for old women like her.

Emerging Themes

The aim of this study was to explore the incarceration experience of college-educated females. The original conceptual framework used prison programming as the foundation to explore these experiences because prison programming has been used to reform incarcerated individuals. According to Austin and Irwin (2001), recognizing pre-prison characteristics of incarcerated individuals is significant to assessing the outcomes of prison programs. To give consideration to the pre-prison characteristics of the participants' in this study, they were asked to describe their lives prior to incarceration. The major theme that emerged was stability. From the participants' perspective, they did not struggle with maintaining employment or housing and they had good family relationships. The participants described their pre-incarceration lives as follows:

Tammy: I worked. And my girls, you know, they were...uh...I have two daughters and you know, they were in school. I had a house, and you know, a pretty good life.

Tiffany: I was a mother. I was in PTA. I was uh...t-ball, baseball...all of that, you know, that kind of mom. I worked in the ballpark with my kids. Uh...I was family oriented. My second husband, we done a lot of rodeo, and a lot of things on that end of it. I was family...I was mom. I worked as a secretary. I also worked in the accounting field. I dispatched trucks. My daddy had a trucking company, and I dispatched trucks across country.

Dana offered a similar story:

Um...I had a good life. I had a home, a job, Um...I was married briefly in my twenties, then I divorced. I did what I wanted.

Nancy beamed when she shared her pre-incarceration life.

My life was the epitome of the Leave- it- to-Beaver mom. I worked at [educational institution] in the Psychology Department. And, I played the soccer mom and I

cooked and cleaned. I did it all. I was the supermom. And some things had uh... it was wonderful. It was exactly how I had always dreamed it would be when I was growing up.

The other women offered similar stories that depicted stability

Crystal: I was a doctor of pharmacy. I owned my own pharmacist. My husband was a pediatrician. I have four children and um...to all intent and purposes it was a beautiful and wonderful life.

Sanai: I was married. I have three kids. Um...I attended [name of university]. I worked as a quality control chemist at a um...local refinery. But prior to my incarceration I lived an everyday normal life, taking care of my children and my husband and working and doing the normal things of life.

Kyla: I grew up in a five -member family home. Mostly school and work and socialized a lot. I went to um [name of university]. I was in the nursing program. I worked part-time. Aside from that...um, hung out with my friends and stuff... mostly family and school and stuff.

Perception of Spiritual Awareness and Development

The women in this study perceived that the prison experience helped them to grow spiritually by allowing voluntary participation in Kyros, a faith-based program.

According to the participants, Kyros's curriculum focuses on forgiveness, togetherness,

and Christianity. The participants spoke highly of the program and other faith-based activities in which they participated. The women described the program as one that they needed, appreciated, and loved. Crystal shared that her participation in Kyros has given her a venue to share her problems and her joy:

Kyros is a Christian ministry that we...um..it's a weekend that you go to... to experience the love of God in a very personal way.

Interviewer: Is that here?

Crystal: Yes, that's here. And, after that, you meet every Wed. in a group and you share your problems, your joy. You pray for one another and you kind of give each other strength. I also do a lot of studying in the Word. There are numerous classes that you can attend here that further your education in the Word.

Basically, that's pretty much it as far as educationally wise.

Kyla expressed that Kyros was one of her positive incarceration experiences and shared that she frequently participates in Bible study services at the prison:

The only other positive is um... are the organizations...um... Christian based organization. We have a praise team. They have a church here...everyday of the week actually. So you know that's positive because they are teaching us the Word you know. I do that and I have Bible study that I go to. It's um... a discipleship program. We supposed to graduate from that in December.

Interviewer: Who teaches that?

Kyla: Lifeway...they send different volunteers and we work from different books for discipleship. We complete that every three months and we get a certificate. Actually, they're trying to get a seminary.

Tiffany believes that Kyros has had a significant impact on her life:

The first impact that I had was spiritually. When I got here, I went through what we have...Kyros, which is a spiritual retreat for four days. And, it's an ongoing thing. It's a pray and share group that you go once a week and you meet together with your group and you can pray, pray and share things that you're going through. It's spiritually oriented. That was my turning point in my life. That made me change my way of life and change who I was. [pause] Uh...cause I had no spiritual background before I got here. *None*. [emphasized] I knew God existed and that was it. No, um...very little church going...none of that. So when I got here, that was my major change, with my spiritually and it has grown over the years [interrupted by announcement].

Like Tiffany, Tammy believes that the faith-based program has been her most positive experience and alludes to her increasing knowledge in the ways of the Lord:

Tammy: My experience in faith based and learning the ways of the Lord and stuff like that has been the most positive, the most positive thing, definitely.

Interviewer: Were you involved in church on the outside?

Tammy: Yeah, I used to go to church in [name of city]. I didn't know that that was the way to know God. I didn't know that. I never went to... um... a spiritual type church. I was raised Catholic so...but that's changed now too. I've learned a lot in that also.

In Dana's interview, she stated that she was one who "kept to herself to avoid trouble," but she expressed strong feelings about the Kyros organization and its promotion of unity:

I got to do Kyros while I was here. It's community, togetherness. It's a church based organization and it teaches you about forgiveness and acceptance and really looking at people for who they are. I loved it.

While Sanai didn't participate in Kyros, she described prayer as being part of her daily ritual:

Um, I pray. I read. I read a lot...and I pray a lot. I don't do the social thing in the prison...I don't know...I just can't.

Sharon used the Kyros program to find soul-searching answers:

I never did counseling...but when I got here ...because I needed some spiritual answers... Kyros helped me with that.

Perception of Unfair Treatment by Correctional Officers

There are two populations in the prison that make up a social construct: the inmates and the administration. For the purposes of this study, administration consisted of teachers, correctional officers, social workers, doctors, wardens, and other employees of the prison who are not inmates. Two questions in this study aimed to explore the perceptions of participants' social relationships in the prison. One question asked participants to describe how they are perceived by their peers, and the other question asked them to describe how they are perceived by administration. Several of the study participants perceived their advanced level of education as the reason for prejudices and unfair treatment by correctional officers. From all the groups included as administration for the purposes of this study, correctional officers were the only group referenced when the women spoke of unfair treatment. They believed that their educational status made them targets for verbal abuse and victims of prejudices. They compared their experiences

to those of their uneducated counterparts. The women believed that correctional officers used their power to degrade them because of their educational statuses.

Nancy: Now, the COs, a lot of them are kind of um...snooty and you know, look down on you like well, umph, you must not be so great because you're in prison and I'm free. And they make comments, they do, they make comments.

Interviewer: To your face?

Nancy: Oh yeah, oh yeah, well Ms. [name of college] is not doing so hot now is she? You know, just really negative things. It takes a lot of self control not to say anything. It's different the way...different people view it differently, different levels and encounters. That's my personal experience. But correctional officers try to degrade you and that's who you deal with on a day to day basis, the correctional officers. Just the way you're treated daily. It's been very degrading, the way that they treat you. They view me in a certain light... because being educated, I feel more singled out. It's like they want to beat you down to prove their authority. It's like, hey guess what? You're still a prisoner. I'm aware of that, you know.

Crystal shared a similar experience by describing when a correctional officer negated her expertise as a pharmacist and reminded her of her inmate status:

I think there's some negative and positive experiences when you come here educated. Number one, the guards and the administration do not like you educated. Um, they think that you think that you're better than them, that you're smarter than them. And so I was told that I'm no longer a nurse or doctor of pharmacy when I walk through those doors, that I'm an inmate and I'm not

allowed to help in any kind of way. Some of the things...I was given the wrong medication and I told them that this was not my medication and they told me that when you get a license, you can tell me those things. Well, if I would have answered back , I could have gotten a report (written up). You are always walking a fine line with the guards and the administration. Some free people are fine and some are not. And that's the truth. And I don't know if it's just a matter of absolute power. It can be that because we (inmates) have no say. They say we have a say but we really don't.

Not only did Sanai express her dismay at the way the guards treated her, but also she distinctly identified her educational status as a motivation for the guards' unfair treatment. Further, she delineated the difference between her relationship with her peers and her relationship with prison administration.

Sanai: I think they try to make my walk in here a little harder. But, they are just a little more strict to me and little more condescending. And um... I think they kind of make you feel bad about being educated and being in prison. It's kind of like they...kind of like they are beating you over the head with it. So, I just take it day by day. I think the administration treats me worse than my peers. My peers don't treat me bad at all, but the administration, yeah. They kind of like...they're not as helpful. They're not helpful at all when it comes to...like a simple request that I might make that another person might make...it probably won't happen for me but it'll happen for the other person. And I...I don't know...I don't know if it's because I don't fit the normal stereotype of what they think an inmate should be

that they just give me that little bit of a rougher time, but you know I count it all joy anyway. It just makes me stronger.

Sharon described how she often shies away from others for fear of unintentionally intimidating others with her vocabulary:

Employees are intimidated when a lot of us speak They say that I intimidate people even in everyday conversation, not meaning to...and accidentally talk over someone's head, not meaning to... even when the subject seems to be simplistic. I was told by a few Black inmates said security... that they hated my accent. I was accused of using big words...and it could be a simple word like...like... association. I, unfortunately, am a doormat often when I go out and about. Others who are like I am learn from watching what happens to me and they tend to go into a shell...physically keep to themselves and mentally too.

Dana described how she was grouped into the inmate category without the recognition by staff that she was a smart person who made a mistake:

“...and they...the staff automatically assume you're stupid because you're in prison. Because smart people don't make mistakes, you know, that mentality. Um, so you get that a lot. You get talked to like you're trash. And...very strange, very strange. [Dana looks away].

Like her peers, Tammy had a similar perception of being unfairly treated by correctional officers:

The way guards treat certain people. Some are really mean. I don't think they like being here as much as we don't like it.

Interviewer: How are the guards mean?

Tammy: Verbally. It's a lot of prejudices. Its things that they will do for some people that they won't do for us [educated women].

Perception of Helpfulness to Peers

When asked to describe how they were perceived by their peers, several of the women described how their educational status made them an asset to those around them. The theme of participants being helpful to others by sharing their knowledge and skills set in their perspective areas recurred several times. Some participants admitted that initially they were not well perceived by their peers, but their willingness to use their education to help their peers and not degrade them resulted in positive peer relations between the educated and the uneducated.

Nancy: I guess I play counselor to a lot of people. Um...(six second pause). I'm good at listening. I'm a good listener and I'd like to think that I give fairly decent advice. So, people always come to me with that. And I always say boy I'm earning my degree all over again (laughs).

For Crystal, her pharmaceutical knowledge has helped others to relax, make informed medical decisions and enabled her to feel beneficial to her peers:

Crystal: Believe it or not, a lot of people will come to me and ask me, Crystal, what is this medicine I'm taking? Is this right? These are my symptoms. And I'll tell them, you know don't be worried about that, that's okay or you need to go to the infirmary to get that checked. You know, that kind of thing. Many of these people have cancer and have gone through chemo and I was able to sit down and say, okay, this is what is going to happen. Um, when they go through surgery, I will tell them well this is what is going to happen and I don't want you to be

upset about this. This is normal. Um, they would get afraid something's happening and they'll say, you know Ms. Crystal is this something I need to worry about? I would say, no baby, this is normal. Just relax. You don't need to be doing this. Go rest awhile.

Kyla's view was similar:

A lot of people come to me for help, so I use my education to help them better themselves, and that's it. I think people think I'm little stuck up...yeah but, I don't let it get to me. Some people are very receiving because I'm able to help them. I am a humble person if you get to know me. If you don't, then you will perceive me as stuck up. I'm humble...and...they appreciate that because...most people that are...that they might consider stuck up with me, they don't spend time to talk to them or to help them. But there are a lot of people here who are educated but...

Interviewer: Really?

Kyla: Yeah, way more than what people think. I write to a lot of people and you know I talk to them and I learn their life story, you know, about the struggle they've had, you know, and I try to understand it, you know, so I won't be...turn them away because of what they've been through.

While Tiffany expressed her frustration about having to help many of her peers, she also relished in her role as a well-respected peer. Tiffany uses her peer status to try to persuade others not to come back to prison and to live productive lives once released:

I try to encourage those that's leaving not to go back into society and do the same things they were doing that got 'em here. I try to encourage them to continue their

education because education is the key. But I try to teach...the students I teach, and those that I speak to... get your education. *Do what's right. [strong emphasis]*. You know, follow the law. Follow your authority. And, I just try to encourage them the best that I can. I find it...stressing...when somebody comes in here that can't read and write, or can't do your math. They want more help. They come to those who have an education. That's bad for me because I end up with a lot of work. And I end up with a lot of the major, major cases. I try to help as many people as I can because I wouldn't want my daughter to come to a place like this and nobody would want to help her.

Sanai attributed her positive relationship with her peers to being smart and helpful.

However, she separated herself from her uneducated counterparts by referring to them as "those people:"

They um...they kind of group us off...those of us that are kind of like educated, well, personally I don't know a lot of people but there are people that I help, like the people getting GEDs and things like that, so my circle is really small. But those people... they perceive me as this smart girl who uh.. is like very intelligent. I think they kind of um...they put me kind of on this pedestal. I don't think they should, but they do because of my education. They kind of um...even though I'm in here for the same crimes that other people are, they kind of give me a little bit more slack with mine because...because they know that I'm smart. So, I don't have a problem with my peers. They perceive me as this intelligent person who probably make a mistake or whatever, but who's very helpful and who's willing to help you at all cost. That's pretty much how I'm perceived by them.

Christina explained how she tries to help the younger women acclimate to the prison environment so they can avoid trouble:

At first they think I'm a smart ass, know it all. But then, they learn to love me [laughs]. Once they see that I'm not uh...uh...they don't know how to take me at first. And then after awhile... I'm very blunt [laughs] and uh... they get used to it, though and they look for it, you know. One of them tells me, "I know you're going to tell me the truth [laughs]. The main thing I tell the little ones when they come here the first time is that you're not coming here with any tricks. You can't do what we haven't seen already, okay? So don't even try it. When they tell you don't bother, then don't bother [laughs]. But if you really want to know and learn on your own, then just go on ahead [laughs].

Christina further explained how she uses her education to help others better manage their money:

Believe or not, there are some people who truly wanna learn, and it's nice to be able to help them. And I...it's simple stuff. To me it's simple stuff, to you it'll be simple stuff like uh, uh...I'll get 'em out of the habit of, "Oh, my mom sent me fifty bucks, I gotta spend all fifty bucks on this store." I say, "No, you don't." You know, I'll show 'em how to make a lil budget more or less. They don't know budgets.

The Perception of Shame and Rejection

Participants were ashamed of being college-educated and incarcerated. They did not view their crimes as cruel activities against society. Instead, they viewed their crimes as mistakes or bad choices that could have happened to anyone. They shared how they

were ashamed of themselves for not being role models, for letting down their children, and for not living up to the expectations of what it means to be college educated.

Also, several of the participants shared their fear of being rejected by society and family members not only because of the stigma that is placed on convicted felons, but also because of their own thinking and the way they previously perceived convicted felons. The emergent theme of stability from participants' pre-incarceration lives depicted family and community cohesion. For their post-incarceration lives, the women shared their fears about not being well-perceived by society and family members because of their time in prison. Thus, internalizing that their incarceration experience can unglue what was once cohesive and stable to non-cohesive and uncertain. When asked how they imagined their lives once released, they shared:

Crystal: I don't think it's going to be easy but I don't think it's going to be as hard as everyone is telling me it's going to be. Not in the fact that I won't be rejected, but I'm expecting it. I'm expecting to be ostracized. Why? Because that's how I was before I came to jail. If someone were to come to me and they told me that they were in jail, I would have been weary. I would have been, oh my God, you were in jail!...same intellect that other people have. So, I'm not going to fight it. I'm just going to try and understand it. And if I'm expecting it and I just push through it, it's gonna be okay. I know I'm gonna have it hard.

Crystal continued to speak about how society views incarcerated women as “uneducated, career criminals.” She admitted that she used to think the same way about incarcerated individuals until she became one:

...And I think the way that the grassroots people think is that you were a criminal all of your life and that's why you came here.

Sharon was uncertain of her post-incarceration plans and became irritable as she talked through her options. She refocused her post-incarceration plans to her health condition but admitted that she was unsure of what the future held for her:

I don't know exactly...I...at this moment, it's really...as I learned, my favorite saying in the world is, "Life is what happens when you're making other plans." And it's very true because you can plan, okay...I'm gonna live here and I'm gonna go there and I'm gonna do this. But first, I have to get the medical behind me before I can do any of it. Okay?

Nancy expressed sadness at not being able to build her future as she planned because of her incarceration. She shared how she is ashamed to disclose her conviction status even to some of her closest friends:

You know, there are some people who don't even know where I am because I'm so ashamed, certain friends of mine. I didn't want my daughter to say anything. Don't tell them where I am. I just expect to knock on the door one day, and be like, I'm back! And they're going to be like, where have you been? And I'm going to tell them the truth but I want to be the one to tell them. It makes me feel ashamed. I'm a convicted felon. I can't ever, you know, work as I wanted to with my own practice. I can teach you know, substance abuse, or I can do something in relation to the courts. It will always...even if I have my record expunged. With the type of work that I do, a background check further delves into what's required. The surface expunging is no good. I'm ashamed, you know. I'm ashamed of what

I did. I feel like now it's all wasted. You know, I literally made a mistake, made a bad choice, a bad decision. And now it's something that I will pay for the rest of my life. It will affect everything from my finances to... because now there's a substantial drop in income, you know. Of course it changes... it affects my relationships with the people that I knew prior to coming in. My colleagues are like, "girl, she was in prison." I had that view too. The stigma of ...prison. I cannot be around you. I cannot associate with you. And now that's a stigma I will carry with me. Its affected every aspect of my life and ashamed is how I feel.

Sinai shared a similar view:

To be incarcerated with a college degree just makes me feel like...(pause)...people made a lot of sacrifices for me to be able to go to school and to...get this degree because... I was a teenage mother also, and I think I left that out. Um...and, instead of my mom stopping me from going to school, she allowed me to continue on...doing everything that I wanted to do. You know, she gave me all these opportunities to be able to go and do all the things that I wanted to do for my life. But you know, I still chose...I still chose to do things that I knew were against the law. And, I just felt like an embarrassment to my family and...and to myself because I know that people...not saying that I worry about what people say, but you know, with having a college degree, it's things that people expect from you and it's things that you're supposed to be doing. You know, you're not supposed to be incarcerated. "...but for me to have a college degree and to be in jail...I just feel like a waste. And as a parent, you know, just to be a college-educated parent, I'm supposed to be a role model. And you

know...right now I just don't feel like one. I just...I just feel like I just wasted...wasted every opportunity that was given to me.

Dana expressed sadness at being rejected by her mother because of her incarceration:

My sister is letting me live with her. So, I'll be leaving [name of state]. I'll be living in [name of state] Um...when I got locked up, my mother had a very hard time with it. She still...I don't think she ever accepted it. And, she still hasn't admitted to the people closest to her that I'm in prison. So she told me that I was not allowed to come to her house.

She further elaborated how uncertain she was about her post-incarceration life:

I don't know. Right now I'm scared to look at it...my life [nervous laugh]. I'm scared to death because I don't know how to live outside of a correctional facility. So there's all these things that...I mean...you have a roof over your head all the time. You have three meals a day. You don't have to worry about paying the rent, the light bill, the water bill, or anything else. It's all done for you. So now, I'm looking at going back and...having to pay rent again and learn how to pay bills...and adapt back to that.

Acceptance of Self and Others

Eight of the participants shared how their incarceration experience changed the way they thought of others and themselves. When asked to describe how their incarceration experience affected them overall, the women responded as follows:

Tammy: It's taught me a lot about who I really was and you know, things about and how we should revolve our lives around the word of God and you know, how we should live...without hatred.

Nancy shared how her incarceration helped her to accept others and effectively deal with people:

The type of crowd, you know I didn't hang in those kinds of circles. Even in that relationship that I had that led to this, um, I still would have been too focused on him as my addiction to pay attention to anybody around me. I've met some really great people. People that...I'm very selective in who I choose to associate myself with...these are people who I would stay friends with outside of here. That is probably the most positive thing. That... and I've learned a little self-control and self-constraint when it comes to... I'm very quick to tell somebody exactly what I think and feel. Sometimes that's harsh. Here, you have to. So I've learned positive things about myself as well. I honestly, my experience with being incarcerated (participant begins to cry) helped me to a point where I have enough sense to know how to handle situations, and diffuse them.

Sanai elaborated about how her incarceration experience prompted her to self-acceptance and has given her a goal of helping others to stay out of prison:

It's changed my way of thinking because prior to being incarceration, I just thought that I was invincible. I just realized now how important...it's just important not to take anything for granted. You know how you get a degree and get complacent and you're just satisfied doing whatever it is you're doing and you just never go out and want to do other things, you know help other people? Well now, after being incarcerated, I know now I just don't want to be a person who has a degree. I want to do something with it. I want to help people. And, you know, I just want to keep people from going down the same road that I've gone

down. It's...my incarceration has broken me out of my selfishness in a way. Maybe I shouldn't say it like that. Because... I'm not going to say I was selfish, but I was selfish as it relates to other people...as far as people outside of my circle. But now I just have a greater love for people now that I've been incarcerated. Just watching...just watching the other inmates, the other ladies in here, just watching what they go through. Because even though I'm in here, I'm blessed because I still have family to support me in spite of what I've done. And there are people here who don't have that. This whole experience has taken me to a new level and a new way of thinking...how I want to use...you know the gift that I've been given to help others. That's what this incarceration experience has done for me.

Sanai continued to affirm how much her incarceration experience has helped her to accept herself.

But now that um... I've been incarcerated, I realized, you know what? I'm not a black sheep. I may have a different way of thinking but that's what makes me an individual. And being incarcerated has taught me to accept the fact that I am not like everybody else.

Sharon shared that her incarceration experience increased her understanding of others who didn't share the same pre-incarceration characteristics as she:

The people that I've met, that I never would have met otherwise. I've got to understand...in the world that I come from there's a lot that we don't say. What I've seen...the things that the children go through when they come and see their mothers...or the mothers that watch their children grow up without them..."

Dana shared how her incarceration affected her views of others as well as how it personally helped her:

It made me realize that people make mistakes and mistakes don't make who they are. They're some very good people in prison who made some very bad mistakes. Um, as for as myself, I think I'm a lot stronger. I don't... I'm not as scared as I was. I'm able to stand up more for myself...because if you don't stand up for yourself, they tend to roll right over you.

Crystal attributes her healing and individual growth to her incarceration experience:

Crystal: But for non-school education, for me, its developed the woman in me. Seems like I was always pulling myself up from a hole. This time in prison has allowed me to heal emotionally and physically...to the point where I can see my faults in my marriage as well as his. All of the healing took place behind bars. I'm not saying it was easy. But I would have never become the woman I am now if I wouldn't gone through this experience. You know, it's brought the strength out of me.

Kyla shared:

Well, um...I gained a lot of wisdom. Like I said, I grew up in a shielded home where I was shielded from the defects of the world. I have a closer walk with God definitely, but... this makes me see life from the other side. I never got to see that side of how people really hurt. Since coming here, I realized that people are just human, I'm human too and people make mistakes.

Christina's incarceration experience allowed her to reflect on the direction she wants to take her life:

And um...it also gave me time to sit down and realize, look you gotta stop doing this. This is gotta be it.

Desire for Beneficial and Practical Learning

With the exception of two of the women, Tiffany and Tammy, participants believed that the sole prison program designed to help them reintegrate into society was not beneficial to them. Tammy stated that her daughter didn't want her to work and that she planned to "stay at home and watch her grandkids' when she was released." She was less concerned about being abreast of societal changes because she "had her daughter to teach her what she needed to know as far as computers and stuff." Tiffany has a considerable amount of time left to serve on her sentence and she hopes that by the time she is ready for release that "the program would have come to date with what's going in society." At the time of this interview, she wasn't as concerned about the changes in society as the others were.

Christina depicted the difference between academic preparedness and work readiness and appeared to prefer work readiness over academic training:

I really believe that the biggest help that they can give these people is that they have more opportunity to have something to do as far as trades. Vo-tech is limited for the women, but you know, for the men, they have all kinds of things.

Interviewer: What would you like to see?

Christina: Yeah...but it just needs to be expanded. There's a lot of trades women are in and can do and don't have to worry about diagramming sentences, you know. There's electricians, welders, mechanics even, you know, and those jobs, that's big bucks.

Nancy offered a similar sentiment:

“...And re-entry is taught by social workers. You know, and its things that, I don't even understand why they have it in re-entry about the food pyramid. What does that have to do with me re-entering the world? I need to know what's changed out there. I need to know the technology, I need to know, just different things, you know, so that I'm not in total shock.

Crystal believed the re-entry program should teach them life-skills that incorporated a work-release program:

They try. I went to the re-entry. They try, but it's so far off the mark than what most of these people have ever had, you know. They're teaching you how to use an ATM. We don't need to know how to use an ATM. We don't need to do all those things. We need life experience... A year before you get out, you should be put in a facility where you actually go to a working job and pay your apartment, electric bills...all of that...out of your pay. Everyone should have that opportunity for at least a year.

Dana also wanted the prison program to teach her about navigating her way into society but she pointed out that it didn't:

At the time that I did the re-entry program...it wasn't as structured. They didn't have a lot of the information... I mean, it was things like how to balance a check book and how to write a resume and things that I already knew... that I've done for years. I think one of the biggest things would be teaching us...or helping us figure out how to live in that world again...in that...in society again, because there's not a lot of that here. You're told when to eat, when to get up, when to go

to bed, when to do everything. Your decision making capabilities are completely taken from you. You make no decisions...other than what book you want to read. Those are the only decisions you make. So I think maybe some type of, you know, this is what's going on in society, these are the things that are out there now. That type of thing.

Kyla pointed out that her friends and family were a source of knowledge for her to stay updated on the changes in society:

I don't think it'll be hard for me when I get out there. My sister keeps me in touch with the Facebook and all those things...and my friends keep me updated.

Sanai surmised that prison programs were not challenging or helpful:

The education here is not like the education you would get on the streets...I think they kind of um...it really doesn't matter because we're inmates. That's my opinion. It doesn't seem like not much thought was put into making it a viable program or a program whereby we can actually learn things that we need to know. Because it's...you know... I call it...you know, it's on an inmate level. They treat it like we should just be happy we can sit into a classroom.

Horticulture and Upholstery

Several of the women indicated their participation in either the horticulture or the upholstery program. One woman indicated her desire to participate in the upholstery program. As a result of participating in the horticulture or upholstery program, the women earned horticulture or upholstery licenses. However, only one woman had definite plans to make a living from what she learned in one of the programs. The other

women made no definite connections between the knowledge acquired from either program to their earning potential.

Nancy: Well, I recently enrolled in an upholstery class. I took a Vo-tech class, not so much to have a career in it. Um, but as a hobby, a stress reliever. Actually, something I figure I could probably do um once I got home as well. And if I needed something to fall back on, maybe you know, that might end up being a job of some sort, notice I said job and not career.

When asked about her future work plans, Nancy did not intend to pursue upholstery as a job prospect nor did she mention that the prison's social services department would help her to attain a job in the upholstery field:

Nancy: As for as employment, I think initially, I'm just going to take whatever I can get. They do kind of help you here in social services. It's nothing really that pays well, but it's something. Whether it be a job at a restaurant waiting tables or Wal-mart or what have you, um, something like that. Then, taking time to put the word out that I'm back and this is what I'm looking for. And, maybe um...making new contacts myself through the court system and through here (prison) to maybe be a speaker of some kind, maybe initially voluntarily, you know, and see where I can get with that...at least get somewhere near my field of work.

Crystal has a horticulture license but had no plans of working in the field once released:

Well, um, educationally I have um, also gotten studies in horticulture. I'm not in the class, but they allowed me to take the tests so I have that license under my belt.

When asked about her plans for work, Crystal stated:

I'm thinking about going over to Mexico to get my license to become a doctor.

You know, that's an option.

Although Kyla expressed a desire to get into the upholstery class, her employment plans did not match her desire for wanting to take class. Kyla tried to put her educational background into perspective with her incarceration experience:

Kyla: "...at this point, it's kind of useless but...yeah...I feel like...it's a waste but not really, but...I'm not able to use it to my full advantage because I'm here and there's nothing I can do. I mean I can't even get into any of the Vo-tech programs like culinary arts or upholstery..."

When asked to describe her plans for employment, Kyla's desire to learn about upholstery was not a part of her future plans. She stated:

Um...actually, I plan on going back to college. I plan on getting a job and...just... that's all...you know, forgetting this... go back out finish my education.

Dana: Well, I'm walking out of here with um three state licenses in horticulture, and I think that's really good. They allow the Department of Agriculture to come in and administer state tests to us so we can walk out with horticulture licenses.

Interviewer: Are you going into that field when you leave?

Dana: I would like to, but to be honest, I don't care if I'm stuffing tacos or flipping burgers [laughs] just as long as I'm free...as long as I'm working.

Of the participants who received licenses for horticulture or upholstery, Tammy was the only one who made a definite connection between her future employment plans and what she learned in prison's horticulture class:

Tammy: I've completed horticulture with several licenses. And you know, I love horticulture...you know, it's in me. And I've done it before at home. I think that's why I decided to take upholstery cause I can do that at home.

Interviewer: Are you going into that field when you leave?

Tammy: Oh yeah, cause I have licenses to do the horticulture. I'll probably get a job in that field. There's a company there [where she's going once released] that hires a lot of the girls that's left from horticulture. One lady left, and she was a tutor in horticulture and she has her own business now. She came to the job fair. She has her own company. But she can't hire people because she can't guarantee work from day to day to day to day. You know, this place is hiring felons and um... it's not...cause it is seasonal, you know, planting and all that, but they do let you stay there and work cause it's a nursery, you know, because there is stuff to do. But here business is not that big yet.

Although Sharon had a horticulture license, she was unsure about her employment plans. Initially she stated that she planned to "work for the Army Corps of Engineers, but immediately after that statement she said, "I don't know what's gonna happen...um...I have several irons I can pick up"

Tiffany did not attain horticulture or upholstery licenses. Instead, she pursued a paralegal diploma to assist her in preparing legal briefs for the courts, which directly relates to the job position she has at the prison. When released, Tiffany hopes to gain

employment as a paralegal. Similar to Tiffany, Christina enrolled into the office technology vo-tech program, which directly related to her previous job position. When released, Christina plans to “look after her mother and work in business- related career fields.”

Summary

The findings in chapter four revealed that the participants did not perceive their incarceration as an entirely negative experience, in part because of the opportunities offered through prison programming. Beaver State Correctional Facility offered a program that appeared to help each woman in some area of her life, even if it was outside of academics. The only perceived negative experience by the participants was unfair treatment by the correction officers. The women believed that their educational statuses made them targets for unfair treatment and prejudices.

Significant to how each woman perceived her incarceration experience was the length of her prison sentence, type of offense, and her personality. In relation to these characteristics, the data revealed that participants’ perceptions were shaped by their pre-incarceration statuses. In their own words, the women identified three categories of incarceration experiences: prison socialization, prison programming and reintegration. Since examining the data from college-educated incarcerated females, the original conceptual framework has been modified to better relate to the women’s experiences as well as to related theories about women in prison.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter is an analytic discussion of the findings that emerged from the data. It includes a revised conceptual framework as well as implications for prison systems, in particular women's prisons, higher education entities, businesses, and the legislative body. Recommendations for future research are included.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how the college-educated female perceived her incarceration experience. Using purposive sampling, nine women volunteered to be interviewed for this study. Each woman had to have a minimum of two years college-level education from a regionally accredited college or university. Women who had a history of drug-abuse were not selected to participate in this study. Using the phenomenology approach, data were analyzed for common themes and meanings. The results of this study have the potential to help prison administrators, higher education entities, businesses and the legislative body.

Theoretical Application

In the literature review of this study, two theories were mentioned as the theoretical framework: the labeling theory and the social control theory. The labeling theory, originated by Frank Tannebaum, is the acceptance and application of negative descriptors. The theory speculates that once a person has been negatively labeled, he or she will accept the label and continue to commit crimes. The women in this study were asked if they were ever referred to as the "black sheep" by a family member or friend. Two of the nine women admitted that they were. One participant shared that her

behaviors have reflected the label of “black sheep” ever since she could remember, while the other referred to herself as being the first black sheep in the family because of her incarceration. Theoretically, however, the labeling theory has little merit for this study as both participants who referred to themselves as “black sheep” were first time offenders. The labeling theory is associated with a pattern of criminal behaviors which had not been established by analyzing the data for the participants in this study.

However, there is analytic discussion to situate the data from the participants in this study in the theoretical framework of the social control theory. Social control theories attempt to explain why people obey the law instead of breaking them (Hirschi, 1969). Belknap (2003) argued that Hirschi’s approach of studying crime from “Why do people offend? to Why don’t people offend?” should have included women because research suggests that women are more law-abiding than males. This study attempted such an approach. In the literature review, Belknap (2003) described four of Travis Hirschi’s social bond theory concepts that he believed prevented individuals from breaking the law: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. Each of these concepts is examined in relation to the data from the participants in this study.

Data show that the women in this study described their lives prior to incarceration as stable until they broke the law. Several of the women had careers and all of the women were attached, to some extent, to either their families or communities. While all the women did not have children, each of them had a mother, or children, or a sibling or a relative that was present in her life prior to incarceration. This family cohesion depicts that women were involved with their families—and families make communities. This

ideology isolates the concept, for the purposes of this study, that women who are attached do not break the law.

What comes into question is how committed the women were to their families and communities. The data show that these women were not committed to their families or communities to the extent that it prevented them from breaking the law. Significant to their lack of commitment was the absence of a belief system that could have deterred them from criminal behaviors. The data show that although participants were college-educated, and attached—to some extent to their communities and families—they had no compass for righteous living until they encountered the faith-based program in prison.

In examining the data in relation to the concepts of the social control theory, the data support that if the women in the study exhibited characteristics of all four concepts, there is the possibility that they would have not broken the law. However, the data show that participants did not exhibit characteristics representative of all four concepts of the social control theory.

Pre-Prison Characteristics

Owen (1998) believes it is essential to understand a woman's life prior to incarceration to appreciate her experiences while in prison. Much of the literature about women in prison is about impoverished, illiterate women who have experienced some type of sexual trauma or drug abuse (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004; Miller, 1998; Owen, 1998). However, the women in this study had extensive work histories, were college-educated and were not impoverished. As well, none of the participants had a history of drug abuse or reported encounters of sexual trauma. Thus, the pathways to imprisonment for women in this study differ from what is usually written about in the

research. In recognition of this difference, the reader can better conceptualize the college-educated female's incarceration experience.

Education and Moral Conduct

College-educated incarcerated females did not associate education with moral conduct. Previous research studies depict a positive correlation between recidivism rates and education (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002; Forero, 2000; O'Neil, MacKenzie & Bierie, 2007). It has also been believed that college level coursework improves cognitive thinking skills, analytic abilities and critical thinking (Potter, 2001; Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002), factors that are significant deterrents to breaking the law. However, the perception of the participants in this study differs. None of the participants associated education with good decision-making and critical thinking skills. Instead, each participant portrayed spiritual awareness and development as the foundation for non-law breaking behaviors and in the absence of it; education did not prove to be a good substitute.

All of the women participated in a faith-based program or faith-based activities at Beaver State Correctional Facility (BSCF), initiatives they discerned as positive experiences. Many of the participants frequently commented on how the faith-based program helped them to love, share their joy and forgive. Several of the women indicated that the faith-based program helped them learn how to live and how to have a closer walk with God, things they had not achieved prior to their incarceration. This indicated that participating in the faith-based program was not just a desire but also a need. Spiritual awareness and development were perceived as characteristics significant to changing their behaviors, not education.

Prison Socialization

Socializing is a necessary and unavoidable aspect of the prison experience. Interactions must occur between inmate and staff and inmate and inmate. Data from this study revealed how participants discerned interactions with both groups. Two perceptions related to prison socialization emerged from the data. (1) Several participants perceived that they were being treated unfairly by correctional officers. (2) Many of the women perceived that their education was an asset to their peers.

The perception of being unfairly treated by correctional officers was prevalent in the data. The women believed that their advanced educational levels made them targets for biases. As a result of this perception, the women felt that staff and inmate interactions negatively affected their prison experience. Participants complained of frequent verbal abuse by correctional officers and of being discriminated against when they made simple requests. They measured their discrimination against requests made by and given to their uneducated counterparts. The women did not tell if the males treated them more unfairly than the female correctional officers or if the females treated them more unfairly than the male correctional officers. The findings from this study support data from previous research studies which posit that lack of respect from prison staff and prison practices reinforces powerlessness (Dobash, Dobash, & Gutteridge, 1986; Heney & Kristiansen, 1997; Pollock, 2002). But, the findings from this study offer an explanation as to why participants felt they were treated unfairly, an explanation not given in studies that examined prison socialization and related concepts. From her qualitative study, *Women, crimes, and prisons*, Pollock-Byrne (1990) posits this about correctional officers:

Prison is made up not only of female inmates but also

of officers. The nature of the institution for females is influenced in large part by the women correctional staff employed there. Their different style of supervision and different interactional patterns with the inmates make the women's prison in some ways a better place and in other ways a more confining place. Female correctional officers tend to maternalize their roles which puts the offender into an infantile position, which can be degrading to the female inmate (p. 125).

Peer- to- peer interactions were discerned as a positive experience for the college-educated female offender as they perceived that their educational level made them an asset to their peers because they were able to "help" them. The participants helped their peers in diverse ways. Some used their academic training to help their peers study for the GED, some used their academic training to counsel others, while others shared their wisdom about prison life with the younger women who entered.

In the role as helper, the women are not only assets to their peers, but also to the prison environment. In the absence of adequate human resources, BSCF relies on educated individuals to tutor less- educated individuals and to use their academic knowledge and expertise to help the prison with its efficiency. Women in this study felt empowered to be able to use their education to help others in some way. In conceptualizing this role, the educated female offender is helping to meet the needs of other prisoners at no cost to the prison. According to Sharp (2001), enhanced peer communication is an important facet to the success of a prison. A survey conducted by

the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in 2001 revealed that classification and screening procedures did not provide the information needed to match effectively women's needs with programs. As a result, recommendations to give greater concern to inmate's interpersonal relationships and to involve them in decision-making were needed to help the prison in meeting and carrying out some of its responsibilities (Morash, Bynum, & Koons, 1998).

Prison Education

As stated in the literature review, much of the data about women in prison are about uneducated offenders, which provides a justification for studies that emphasize the importance of education in prisons. There is a paucity of research about the college-educated offender and her perception of prison programs. This study attempted to address that gap. In exploring the college-educated female incarceration experience, the perception of prison education was complex. Academically, there were no prison programs that were beneficial to the participants. In the academic realm, these women were more beneficial to prison programming than prison programming was to them. Their perception of vocational programs was positive because of the benefit of earning educational credits, not necessarily for the sake of learning or to increase earning potential once released. Earning educational credits decreases the amount of the time an inmate has to serve.

Participants in this study perceived vocational programs in the prison as outdated, and their perceptions are supported by the research literature which contends that most vocational programming in prison still reinforces stereotypical roles (Ubah, 2002; Vacca, 2004; Visher and Travis, 2003). For example, upholstery and horticulture were the most

popular vocational programs amongst participants. Referring back to the Weisheit (1985) and Simon and Landis (1991) studies in the literature review, there has been no change in vocational programming from 1985 to 1991 to 2010 at some women's prisons. BSCF is one of those prisons. Data revealed that participants had limited offerings outside of farm and forestry, building maintenance, domestic, food services or secretarial work. They also perceived these programs as "something to do" instead of being beneficial to their futures.

According to Brewster (2001), two forms of rehabilitation have been used for women in correctional facilities: general education and vocational training. He further posits that vocational training can provide necessary job skills that may be helpful to prisoners released back into their communities. However, several of the participants in this study, even after attaining licenses in either horticulture or upholstery, did not discuss transferring their skills into tangible benefits after being released. One participant discussed her love of horticulture and her plans to pursue the field. Two participants generalized about the possibility of using the skills acquired, but they quickly added that they just wanted to work, and any job would satisfy the need. In light of the data from this study, the participants did not perceive vocational training as a helpful or long-term solution. But during their incarceration, participating in vocational programs was deemed beneficial to the prison experience because it promoted peer socialization, passed the time, and had the potential to decrease their prison sentence.

How Vo-tech education programs are perceived by female prisoners is important to their success (Carlson, 1995, p. 32). One study of the perceptions of incarcerated women found that prisoners themselves favored traditional, stereotypical female

programs such as nursing or child care over nontraditional programs such electrical, plumbing, or truck driving (Carlson). According to Winifred (1996), “this finding suggests that female offenders have a feminine perspective and part of the educational process of Vo-tech may be helping female offenders identify their employment needs” (p. 3). The data from the participants in this study correlate with research studies that show that vocational education programs need to teach marketable, modern and practical skills. However, BSCF has none of these programs, either traditional or non traditional.

Reintegrating into Society

Findings from this study depict that participants were ashamed of their felony status and both feared and expected to be rejected by society as they try to reintegrate back into the community. This finding suggests that the college-educated offender is ashamed of her felony status mainly because of her educational level and her awareness of society’s expectations for college-educated individuals. In context, it is presumed that college-educated individuals would become role models and pillars of the community—individuals who would teach next generation about being good citizens. The effect of the prison stigma on employability is well-documented in the literature. As indicated in project PROVE, a study conducted by Case et al. (2005), which is referenced in the literature review of this study, women, regardless of educational status, reported that the prison stigma limited their employment and income opportunities.

Findings also suggest that participants did not feel adequately prepared to reintegrate into society because the prison’s re-entry program, the one designed to teach them how to successfully re-enter society, was designed for the uneducated offender. As

a result, technological updates and employment trends, topics of interest to the educated offender, were not included in the program's design.

Unlike research for uneducated offenders that suggests successful reintegration includes immediate treatment for addictions and abuse, safe housing away from violence and drugs, or struggles to regain custody of lost children (Singer & Bussey, 1995), findings from this study indicated that the biggest challenge for successful reintegration for these participants was employment. This finding suggests that participants had a desire to reconnect with their community in meaningful and positive ways.

Equally significant to the successful reintegration of the college-educated offender is how she incorporates her incarceration experience into the overall quality of her life. Data from this study indicate that participants learned little from academic and vocational training but made significant and positive progress in the area of self development and the acceptance of others. Girshick (2001) believes that an inmate has to be receptive and ready to change the behaviors that brought about her incarceration. For the college-educated offender, deficient programming may not be detrimental to her overall incarceration experience more than a neglect to examine the prison environment and how management of inmates affects their anger, sense of safety, and self-esteem are more paramount to the college-educated offender prison experience.

Overall, findings indicated that while college-educated female offenders identified some negative aspects of their incarceration experience, they did not perceive the entire experience as negative. One of the most positive benefits of the incarceration experience was that it allowed them to re-construct the way they thought of themselves and others. This experience, although rare, has been documented in the research

literature. Clark's (2001) study of *Incarcerated Women and the Construction of Self* resonates with the theme of self acceptance perceived by the participants in this study. In Clark's (2001) study, 24 women, ten African American, seven Hispanics, and seven Caucasian with age ranges from early 20's to late 40's demonstrated how they managed conflict in stressful situations and how conflict management helped them to refocus their thinking and reframe their identities. The data for Clark's (2001) study were collected by conducting life history interviews. The results of Clark's (2001) study found that the women in the study showed "enormous skill and creativity in constructing a sense of self that sustained them in difficult circumstances" (p.15). She further posited that the process offered the potential for change and will enable others to begin theorizing about transformational learning and identity development in marginalized women.

Family

It is almost impossible to conduct a study about women and not address the issue of family. For these participants, family as an emergent theme was not prevalent in the data. While one or two participants briefly referenced their children or an aunt or a mother, there was not enough data to include an in-depth discussion about the influences family had on the college-educated female incarceration experience.

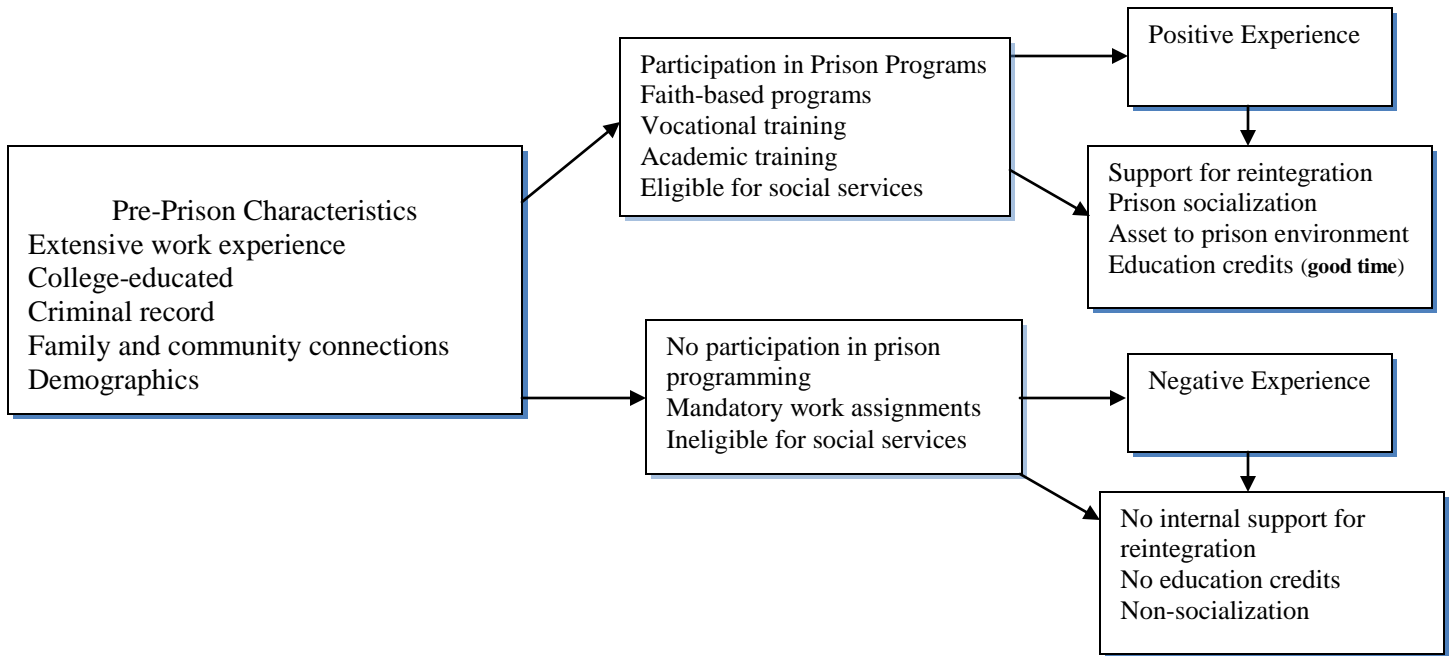
Revised Conceptual Framework

The revised conceptual model depicts factors most influential in contributing to the college-educated incarcerated female prison's experience. As in the original model, the box to the left shows that individuals come into prison with a set of individual characteristics (Austin & Irwin, 2001). Pre-prison characteristics do not determine if a college-educated female offender will participate in prison programming.

However, if the educated offender decides to participate in prison programming, she decreases the chances of having a negative incarceration experience. Data from findings suggest that participation in academic and vocational programs have benefits external to learning that can be useful to the educated offender. For example, participating in a vocational program can decrease sentence time. Participation in academic and faith-based programs has intrinsic value to the educated offender. When an educated offender does not participate in prison programming, she increases her chances of having a negative incarceration experience.

The two middle boxes depict the range of prison programs offered to help prepare prisoners for life during and after prison. Four categories of prison programs are offered at Beaver State Correctional Facility: academic instruction, vocational training, faith-based programs, and life skills training. As in the original model, prison programming is still used as a foundation to explore the incarceration experiences of the college-educated female. My assumption that participation in prison programming would increase communication with family members was unfounded, as was my belief that reintegrating into society was affiliated with peer socialization. Eligibility for social services offered at the prison was an influential factor to successful reintegration into society for the participants. Violent and sex offenders are not eligible to receive social services at the prison. Social services assist offenders with employment and housing prior to their release.

Figure 2 Revised: Influential Factors that Contribute to the College Educated Female Incarcerated Experience



Limitations

Although this study has the potential to enrich research literature on the female prison population, there are limitations to the study that may be significant. According to Glesne (1999), "...part of demonstrating the trustworthiness of data is to realize that it has limitations (p. 152). Gay and Airasian (2003) explain that a limitation is "some aspect of the study that the researcher knows may negatively affect the study" (p. 91). One limitation of this study is how the participants were selected. A list of women who met the research criteria was given to me by the prison's director of education. This could have limited the number of women who were actually eligible for study.

Another limitation of the study is the racial, ethnic and culture commonality of the participants. Two of the study's participants were African-American and the other seven were Caucasian. All of the participants were raised in the same state. Eight of the participants came from middle-class families. Because culture and ethnic experiences have a role in how a woman interprets her life's events, a more diverse sample could possibly yield differences in the findings.

Practical Implications

Higher Education

Women prisoners have largely been overlooked in the literature of prison higher education. From the outset, prison higher education programs have emphasized education for male inmates. Higher education's role in the lives of women prisoners is shaped by misperceptions regarding women offenders and by sexism in higher education, the prison, and the larger society (Wilson, 1998). To respond to the needs of college-educated incarcerated offenders who have not received terminal degrees or who are

forced to change career fields because of their offense or who simply wish to continue their studies while incarcerated or learn a marketable skill to earn a living once released, more higher education institutions can offer correspondence courses for graduate studies via a partnership with correctional institutions.

Moreover, technical and community colleges can take a more proactive role in partnering with the penal system in allowing offenders to receive licenses for in-demand, short-term programs, such as patient care technician training, phlebotomy training, and medical coding training.

Finally, higher education entities can become more involved in assisting correctional institutions in the design of its program offerings so that curricula in correctional education classes can be beneficial to a diverse population of learners. To do this, a program design board, consisting of a diverse body of experts representing both higher education and correctional education can be established. The board would be responsible for coordinating the curriculum, for ensuring that prisons and jails are using the curriculum equitably and for assessing the program's effectiveness. Assessment of programs should occur on a yearly basis.

Women's Prisons

Women's prisons can better respond to the educational needs of college-educated offenders, who are expected to reintegrate back into society, by giving them access to the outside world via technology. In doing so, college-educated offenders can have access to online graduate courses as well as access to search and apply for jobs in preparation of their release. Thus, college- educated offenders can start the reintegration process earlier.

Additionally, women prisons can partner with their respective states to sign up as recipients of the E-script system. This system allows entities to receive college transcripts electronically and free of charge from higher education institutions. Once a recipient of this system, prison administrators at women's prisons can require a college transcript from offenders who state they are college-educated. This process can help administrators at women's prisons better structure a classification system that can effectively match programming to inmates' needs.

Last, administrators at women's prisons can engage in consistent evaluation of prison programs and services; the implementation of subsequent programming should depend on the success of the evaluations. Essentially, women's prisons need a data tracking system to help them measure, report, and capture data.

Legislative Entity and Policy Implications

Lawmakers should consider the growing population of non-violent, educated female offenders and strive to understand how they differ from their counterparts. Then, lawmakers should consider changing the laws to give these women alternatives to incarceration (Sharp, 2001).

Moreover, legislative bodies should provide funding for women's prisons to modernize their current correctional educational model to include a diverse range of practical and in-demand training programs. As well, legislative bodies should require women's prisons to track their population and responses to their population's needs. If women's prisons can accurately provide the data requested, it should be the responsibility of the legislature to provide appropriate resources. Finally, legislative bodies can provide more tax breaks to businesses who hire ex-felons.

Recommendations for Future Research

Deppe (2002) contends that prison education programs should be based on inmate interests and should maximize institutional cooperation and community involvement. This study attempted to enrich the research literature and address the gap in the research about women in prison by exploring how the college-educated female perceives her incarceration experience. However, there is future research that can enhance this study. This study included one institution, but further inquiry across a larger sample of institutions would provide additional insight into the college-educated female's incarceration experience. Also, studies that examine the incarceration experiences of women who are not college-educated and who do not have a history of drug abuse or sexual trauma can enhance the literature on women prisoners and possibly provide more insight into what it takes to develop more effective correctional education programs.

Most of the women who participated in this study were non-violent offenders. However, one or two women were serving time for violent crimes. It'll be beneficial to the research literature for researchers to explore the differences between college-educated violent and non-violent offenders. Additionally, a follow-up study on college-educated women who reintegrate into society can provide more insight into the challenges, successes, and needs of the college-educated population. Moreover, a study with a larger sample of college-educated women, representing diverse age groups could prove beneficial to prison research literature as it could broaden the scope of perceptions. Finally, studies that explore incarceration experiences of college-educated males would broaden the perspective in understanding the college-educated prison population in regards to gender.

Conclusion

“Although punishment takes precedence over rehabilitation as is the goal of today’s prisons, there are still prison programs that can help the inmate. What is questionable is whether the prison environment lends itself to promoting personal growth and change” (Sharp, 2001, p. 171). The findings in this study suggest that Beaver State Correctional Facility does. The findings also suggest that the nine women who participated in this study voluntarily participated in prison programs that were not associated with academics. From the prison experience, they learned to value self, became more accepting of others and more forgiving of themselves.

Women’s prisons have multiple obligations to its offenders: punish, reform, and reintegrate. So many studies focus on recidivism that few of them, if any, give scholarly attention to the positive transformation that can take place behind prison walls. The data from this study indicate that prison was the right place at the right time for many of the participants. As offered by Sanai, “being incarcerated has taught me to accept the fact that I am not like everybody else. Now, I’m happy to be me. Now, I can finally say that I love me.” Readers of this study should be behooved to see, not the criminal behaviors of the participants, but the good person who did a bad thing.

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APPENDICES



Appendix A

Formal Research Request Letter

[Date]

LCIW
P.O. Box 26
St. Gabriel, LA 70776

Dear Warden _____

My name is Tanisca M. Jones-Wilson, and I am currently a doctoral student at the University of New Orleans in New Orleans, LA. In July of 2008, I conducted a pilot study at your correctional facility to determine if the prospect of my topic, *An Exploration of College Educated Females' Incarceration Experiences* was needed in the research literature. Since that time, I have received approval to proceed with the development of a dissertation. With your permission, I would like to conduct interviews with interested participants on dates that are agreeable with you.

I plan to use the data from interviews for the sole purpose of research and participants and your facility will remain anonymous. Participation is strictly voluntary, the risks are minimal, and participants can withdraw their consent at any time without explanation or consequence. Interviews will occur over the course of one day.

If permission is granted, please notify me by email at tmjones1@uno.edu. Additionally, you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Andre Perry, for more information concerning this study by email at aperry@uno.edu or by phone at (504) 280-6443.

Sincerely,

Tanisca M. Jones-Wilson, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling and Foundations
University of New Orleans
348 Bicentennial Building
2000 Lakeshore Drive
New Orleans, LA 70148

Andre M. Perry, Ph.D.
Associate Dean and Faculty Advisor, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, University of New Orleans
348 Bicentennial Building
2000 Lakeshore Drive
New Orleans, LA 70148



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Appendix B

Participation Questionnaire

Personal Information

Age:

Race: Caucasian African-American Hispanic Other _____

College Major:

Highest Level of Education: at least two years of college
 Bachelor's Degree
 Master's Degree
 Ph.D./J.D./M.D.

Marital Status: married separated single

What college did you attend?

Have you been incarcerated for at least one year? Yes No

Do you anticipate being released within the next two years? Yes No

Are you currently involved in educational services at LCIW? Yes No

Were you employed in a career field related to your college major prior to incarceration? Yes No

Thank you for completing this questionnaire



Appendix C

Consent Form

1. **Title of Research Study**

An Exploration of College-Educated Females' Incarceration Experiences

Co-investigator Information

Tanisca M. Wilson, Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations at the University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana 70148. (504) 419-0529. Email: tmjones1@uno.edu

This is a research project in partial fulfillment of course requirements for the Doctorate of Philosophy degree in Educational Administration and is under the supervision of Dr. Andre M. Perry, associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations at the University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana 70148. Office Phone: (504) 280-6443. Email: aperry@uno.edu

3. **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to explore how college educated females perceive their incarceration experiences.

4. **Research Procedures**

The co-investigator will interview ten females at an all female state prison facility. Participants will be interviewed over the course of one day, and interviews will be no longer than 60 minutes per each interviewee. Participants will be audio taped during the interview process.

5. **Potential Risks or Discomforts**

There is a possibility that participants will experience fatigue and stress during the interview process. Participants will be allowed to take breaks if needed and be given the opportunity to skip any questions at any time during the interview process. All aspects of participation are voluntary and participants may choose to conclude the interview at any time without consequence.

6. **Potential Benefits**

Participants may benefit from the opportunity to express and discuss their incarceration experiences since the opportunity to do is rare. In addition,

participants may benefit from knowing that their experiences have the potential to change or at the very least influence what type of future educational programs are implemented in female prison facilities.

7. **Protection of Confidentiality**

Participant's name, correctional facility, and any other identifiable information will be kept confidential at all times. Participants will be identified with pseudonyms and in some cases numbers in this project. The co-investigator will transcribe the interview tapes.

Consent forms, audiotapes, interview transcripts, field notes and any other data associated with this project will be kept in a safe and secure place for three years.

After three years, all data associated with this project will be destroyed.

8. **Compensation**

Participants will not be paid for participating in this study, nor will your participation in any way affect your sentence, parole, or probation status.

9. **Alternative Procedures**

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw your consent and terminate participation at any time without explanation or consequence.

10. **Your Rights as a Participant**

For questions about your rights as a participant in this research project or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, Dr. Ann O'Hanlon at the University of New Orleans at (504) 280-6531.

Your signature indicates that you have been fully informed about the possible risks and benefits of your participation in this study and that you give your full consent to participate with the understanding that you can withdraw your participation at any time without explanation or consequence.

Signature of Participant

Name of Participant (print) Date

Signature of Co-investigator

Tanisca M. Wilson
Name of Co-investigator (print) Date



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Appendix D

Research Questions

1. Describe your life prior to incarceration.
2. Have you ever been labeled as the “Black sheep” or the “Bad one” by a family member or friend?
3. What led you to incarceration?
4. Describe a typical day for you.
5. How is your college experience used in your incarceration?
6. What does it mean to you have a college education and be incarcerated?
7. What type of opportunities did your education afford you or prevent you from obtaining while incarcerated?
8. Describe how this experience has affected you.
9. How do your peers perceive you? Why do think this is so?
10. How does prison administration perceive you? Why do you think this is so?
11. What type of educational advancement have you made while incarcerated?
12. Describe any events or experiences that positively affected you while incarcerated.
13. Describe any events or experiences that had a negative effect on you while incarcerated.
14. How do you imagine your life once released?
15. Describe your plans for employment and housing when you are released.
16. Why did you participate in this study?

Appendix E

**University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans**

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Andre M. Perry
Co-Investigator: Tanisca Monique Wilson
Date: September 1, 2010
Protocol Title: "An exploration of College Educated Females'
Incarceration Experiences"
IRB#: 04Jul10

Your proposal was reviewed by the full IRB. The group voted to approve your proposal pending that you adequately address several issues. Your responses to those issues have been received and you have adequately addressed all of the issues raised by the committee. Your project is now in compliance with UNO and Federal regulations and you may begin conducting your research.

Please remember that approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Use the IRB number listed on this letter in all future correspondence regarding this proposal.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best of luck with your project!
Sincerely,

Robert Laird, Ph.D., Chair
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Vita

Taniska Monique Halley-Wilson is a product of the New Orleans Public School System. She has a B.A. in English from Southern University at New Orleans, a Master of Education degree from the University of New Orleans, and a certificate in women's ministry from the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. While pursuing her doctoral degree, Taniska did not negate her roles as a full-time employee, mother, wife, and community contributor. She is married to Terrence A. Wilson and has two sons, Earl and Jedidiah.