

THE FAMILY REENTRY EXPERIENCES OF PREVIOUSLY INCARCERATED
MOTHERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my mother whose love, sacrifices, and commitment have helped me achieve my dreams.

Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all of the women who participated in my study, which would not have been possible without their courage and willingness to share their journey with me.

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to use a phenomenological approach to gain an informed perspective on the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers. An additional focus was given to what these mothers found to be strengths during this transition. Utilizing a family systems framework, semi-structured interviews were completed with 14 mothers experiencing reentry. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcriptions were then categorized and analyzed for emerging themes.

Findings included four themes and subsequent subthemes: (1) Reentry is Challenging: *Preparation Before Release; Walking on Eggshells; Reentry Obligations; Financial Strain, Rebuilding Trust*; (2) Motherhood is a Hindrance to Reentry: *Reentry Obligations Versus Children's Needs; Key Conversations With Children; Impact of Reentry on Children; and Maternal Guilt*; (3) Motherhood is a Motivator for Reentry: *Breaking The Chain; Children As Encouragement; and Not Giving Up*; and (4) Strengths For Successful Reentry: *Inner Strengths; Spirituality; Support Networks; and Reentry Services*. Implications for policy are discussed and recommendations are offered for family therapists and other professionals working with this population and their families.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Enns (2014) noted that following a rise in mass incarceration over the last 30 years, the United States has a higher number of persons imprisoned than any other country in the world. In particular, the imprisonment rate for women has increased proportionately more than men during this time (Heimer, Johnson, Lang, Rengifo, & Stemen, 2012). The US Department of Justice estimates that a little over 800,000 of the more than 1.5 million prisoners held in US prisons were parents of minor children in 2007. Of the parents held in the nation's prisons, 52% of state inmates and 63% of federal inmates reported having a little over 1,700,000 minor children. This accounts for 2.3% of the U.S. population who are under the age of 18 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010).

Kjellstrand, Cearley, Eddy, Foney, and Martinez (2012) further discussed how the rise in incarceration has not only caused a significant increase in the number of incarcerated adults, but has left an emotional impact on the nearly two million children that they leave behind. In addition, the majority of these parents will be released back into the community and households with their children (Kjellstrand et al., 2012). Since the majority of these children were living with their mother at the time of the arrest, it is important to understand the impact that a mother's reentry into the community after prison has on the parent-child relationship. Travis, McBride, and Solomon (2005) noted that children can feel abandoned after a parent is sent to prison which can have detrimental effects on their psychological, emotional, developmental, and financial well-

being. Parental incarceration can severely alter the dynamic of the family. After a parent is imprisoned, many of the dimensions of family functioning experience significant changes. These include the family's structure, financial relationships, emotional support systems, and living arrangements.

From the parent's perspective, reentry back into the community can be just as stressful as being incarcerated. Transitioning from prison back into their previous neighborhoods and families can cause many stressors for ex-offenders including minimal access to services, barriers to reunification with children, and possible homelessness (Johnston, 1995). Upon release, women in general can be faced with financial strain, finding stable housing, and meeting requirements of probation or parole. This can be even more difficult if they are parents. The majority of mothers lived with their children before they were incarcerated and most expect to assume the role upon release. However, this relationship can be strained through the separation caused by imprisonment and can lead to strained reunification as well as economic and emotional distress (O'Brien, 2001).

When looking at the systemic effects of maternal incarceration, reentry can have a significant impact on the family system. Maternal imprisonment can lead to emotional and behavioral risks for young children because it disrupts the attachment bond (O'Brien, 2001). Hale (1988) noted that incarceration in general can cause many stressors in the offender's family system including financial strain, role changes, isolation, and problems with child rearing. In particular, children are at an increased behavioral and emotional risk of repeating the same cycle of incarceration. Additionally, this weakened family system can be a barrier to successful reentry upon the offender's

release and contributes to subsequent recidivism. Therefore, it would be beneficial to understand the experiences of mothers experiencing reentry to gain a better understanding of the factors that can decrease these stressors and help reduce rates of recidivism.

Statement of the Problem

While there has been much research on the topic of parental incarceration, there are a limited number of studies that focus on the experiences of the incarcerated mother upon her release back into the community. In particular, there have been a limited number of studies that focus on the strengths; factors identified by formerly incarcerated mothers that have been helpful to their reintegration back into the community. This information is useful in informing family practitioners and policy makers working with this population of successful reentry methods and interventions that can be useful to these mothers. Lumar (2011) noted that while successful reintegration is the ultimate goal, this is often impaired by the strains and stress that accompany trying to support the ex-offender and reorganizing the family in the process.

Studies have shown that the majority of mothers were living with their child before being incarcerated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Therefore, their incarceration and subsequent reentry will have an impact upon the child and the larger system including caregiver and other support networks. This study focused on those reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers in their own words. This is important for a number of reasons including the improvement of reentry services serving this population.

Johnston (1995) observed that effective reentry programs can help address needed services such as mentoring, placement services, drug treatment, mental health services,

job training, child custody advocacy, support groups, and self-help instructions. This, in turn, could help with the reduction in perceived stress, drug use, failing to meet child reunification requirements and recidivism (1995). O'Brien (2001) suggested that by focusing on what people have found to help them grow and change their life, they can tap into otherwise undiscovered potential that can be significant to successful reintegration.

Purpose of the Study

Guided by a family systems perspective, the purpose of this qualitative study was to offer an informed perspective on the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers, with a particular focus on what these mothers have found to be strengths during this transition. Using a phenomenological approach, 14 mothers with at least one minor child at the time of reentry were interviewed for the study. The study sought to gain a holistic perspective of how one disruption in the system, the mother's incarceration, impacts their functioning and dynamics of other systems upon their release including the family system, criminal justice system, and the community as a whole. Studying the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers is important because of their impact on the parent-child relationship, family support networks, and state and governmental resources serving this population. By gaining a more informed understanding of these mothers' reentry through their own words, family practitioners working with this population can better be informed of strengths and resources needed to help limit possible risk factors during this time of transition and adjustment.

A phenomenological approach was used in an effort to capture the meaning of the participants' experiences in their own words. Recruitment techniques included hanging

flyers at agencies that served the reentry population, including parole offices, as well as agencies offering reentry services. In addition, snowball sampling was also employed where participants referred other women who had similar experiences and fit the requirements of the study. All participant interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed for similar themes.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1: What are the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers?

RQ2: What are sources of strengths for formerly incarcerated mothers experiencing reentry?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding the study was family systems theory (Broderick, 1993). Through a family systems lens, this study seeks to gain a holistic perspective of how one disruption in the system, the mother's incarceration, impacts the functioning and dynamics of the entire system such as the parent-child relationship. Bowen (1976) saw families as emotional systems. A main characteristic of the system is how the successful introduction of a member back into the family has the ability to modify the behavior and relationships of that system. In addition, the emotional system can extend to work groups or social settings. This current study seeks to understand how formerly incarcerated mothers returning back into their community environment perceive their experiences within the parent-child subsystem, the larger family system as well as larger systems such as the criminal justice system.

Bateson (1967) was interested in self-correcting systems. Communication maintains in these systems through positive and negative feedback loops. Positive feedback loops help information flow back into the system helping to foster change and meet new goals. Negative feedback loops maintain homeostasis and keeps systems stable and avoidant of change. By assessing the reentry experiences of mothers and their identified strengths, an opportunity exists to understand how information flowing into the system has influenced reentry and the ability to find supportive resources.

Buckley (1967) described a system as a complexity of elements that are directly or indirectly related in a common network with many of the elements influencing one another at one time or another. These social systems must be able to change their basic structure, reorganize, and reassess values in order to survive. As it relates to a family, a system must constantly self-organize and change behaviors based on stimuli from the external environment and the mandates of its family members.

Methodological Approach

According to Creswell (2014), phenomenological research employs philosophy and psychology to understand the lived experiences of a sample experiencing a common phenomenon. One of the most common methods of conducting this type of research is through interviews. For this current study, in-depth interviews were conducted with formerly incarcerated mothers as way of understanding their experiences of reentry within their roles as mothers. Using semi-structured, in-depth interviews provided a way to capture voices, meanings, details, and emotion associated with the experience. Babbie (2010) noted that the use of qualitative interviews can provide a way of examining the

depth and range of the participants' experience that may not be captured through the use of standardized questionnaires.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout the study and defined here for clarification purposes:

1. Mother-A woman who has one or more children under 18 related to her by blood, marriage, adoption, or guardianship.
2. Formerly Incarcerated-Individuals who have been released from jail or prison (Richie, 2001).
3. Reentry-Reintegration back in the community after being released from jail or prison (Travis, 2005).
4. Strengths-Factors the participants identified as contributing to a successful reentry.

Delimitations

The following were the delimitations of the study:

1. Participants included in the study were all formerly incarcerated mothers.
2. Participants in the study were all 18 years of age or older.
3. Participants had at least one child under the age of 18.
4. Participants resided in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

Assumptions

The assumptions for the study are as follows:

1. The participants freely volunteered for the study.

2. The participants were honest and forthcoming about their reentry experiences.
3. The participants had reentry experiences that were unique to their roles as mothers.
4. The researcher did not attempt to influence participants in any way.

The Researcher as Person

I am an African-American female doctoral candidate at Texas Woman's University and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist-Associate. I chose this research topic because of my previous experiences working with incarcerated individuals. As part of a research project for another graduate program, I interviewed male prisoners about the neighborhoods they lived in before coming to prison. Many of those prisoners were fathers and expressed not wanting their children to follow in their footsteps. In addition, I completed a family therapy internship at a juvenile detention center where I provided counseling services to the residents and their families. Again, it was evident how parental incarceration can disrupt the family system as the majority of those children had a parent who had experienced jail time. Through these experiences and other research, I found a need for more studies on the subject of parental incarceration, with the particular focus on the experiences of the incarcerated parent upon release. This information can aid clinicians who are working with these family systems during this particularly stressful and disruptive event.

Summary

The rising rate of incarceration, including mothers, is of particular interest to clinicians working with the families impacted by this phenomenon in some way. While

several studies have explored the experiences of parental incarceration, there is a need for further observations of these parents upon their release. In particular, there is a need for more studies on the reentry experiences of mothers as they were more likely to live with the child before their incarceration and will have some type of involvement with them upon their release.

The purpose of this research study was to understand the experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers as they return back to the community. There was also a focus on what the mothers identified to be strengths for them during that time as a way of gaining a better perspective on what can contribute to successful reentry. The guiding framework for the study was family system theory. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted and then transcribed verbatim and analyzed for themes. The findings from the study can be useful for policy makers and practitioners working with this population to help gain a greater understanding on what is useful for combating the barriers and limitations to successful reentry.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women represent the fastest growing segment of the rising prison population as approximately four out of five are mothers. The following review of literature will introduce past studies on incarcerated mothers, their risk factors, and what has been identified as areas of strength and support. Hayes (2009) noted that reentry into the community, in general, can be difficult for all prisoners; for formerly incarcerated women resuming the mothering role during this time adds to the complexity of the transition.

The following section outlines the review of literature regarding the reentry experiences of previously incarcerated mothers. This chapter will give a review of studies on parental incarceration, reentry experiences, reentry experiences specific to motherhood, competence of current reentry services, and identified resources of support for this population.

Parental Incarceration

Dallaire (2007) discussed the differences in mother and father incarceration as it relates to the risk presented for children. The authors using a sample of 6,146 inmate mothers and fathers examined their reported rates of incarceration for family members, adult children, predictors of adult children's incarceration, and living situations of minor children. Participants were derived from those who participated in the US Department of Justice Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities. The author

found that mothers were 2.5 times more likely to have adult children who were incarcerated than fathers. In addition, mothers' regular drug use predicted adult child incarceration. Incarcerated mothers also reported greater familial incarceration and more minor children in foster care and other nonfamilial care situations. While the results of this study indicated that children of incarcerated mothers are at an increased risk of being incarcerated themselves, preventative, early intervention programs should be employed to help decrease this risk (Dallaire, 2007). Overall, this study offered a look into the major differences in mother and father incarceration as well as the need to put preventive efforts in place to negate the risk factors of children of incarcerated mothers.

Foster and Hagan (2009) discussed the mass incarceration of parents in America. More than 600,000 of the 2 million U.S. prison inmates are parents. With so many parents going into prison, many will be coming out and reentering the community, while resuming their roles as parents. In terms of policy, the issue of prisoner reentry is important because of the impact a former imprisoned parent can have on a child's well-being. This is more impactful for mothers because the majority of them were living with their children before they were incarcerated and more likely to return to the same residence of the child (Foster & Hagan, 2009).

Brown and Bloom (2009) discussed the challenges mothers face while on parole. In addition to the general aspects such as finding safe housing, employment, and meeting conditions of parole, they have to reassume their roles as mothers. While there are several programs dealing with parenting and cognitive skills for mothers who are about to be released from prison, they are still vastly unprepared for the rigorous process of reentry.

This is partly due to the fact that these programs do not address important themes such as lack of social capital, feelings of deprivation, and challenges with substance abuse.

Using a mixed methods approach on a sample of 25 women on parole, Brown and Bloom (2009) discovered complex narratives of maternal identity that encompass the dual struggle of reentry and assuming their roles of mothers. In addition, feeling marginalized by economic and education limitations, there were many obstacles with the criminal justice system and child welfare. Brown and Bloom (2009) called for the development of a support system specifically addressing the needs of mothers transitioning back into the community such as housing, childcare, and family reunification. In addition, these services should begin as soon as they start serving their sentence, not in the last one or two months before release.

Reentry

Richie (2001) discussed the need for gender-specific and culturally specific needs when addressing reentry services. The challenges associated with successful reentry are often gender specific and addressing those challenges should also be as intentional. For example, parenting classes taught by women from the same cultural and economic background as the incarcerated mothers has been identified as most helpful. Brown and Bloom (2009) noted that released mothers not only have to navigate the reentry process, but also renegotiate their conditions and relationships with their children which can make the transition process even more difficult. Often rehabilitation programs aimed at helping the reentry process fail to take into account the past abuse, poverty conditions, and

experiences of inequality that influenced the pathway to criminal behavior in the first place (Brown & Bloom, 2009).

Other studies have specifically examined the reentry experiences of female offenders. Berman (2005) noted that gender does make a difference when examining the reentry needs of ex-offenders. One significant difference is that a woman more than likely is returning to their role as primary caretaker of children upon their release. Because of this, reentry needs include finding stable childcare, housing, transportation, and remaining sober. Healthy relationships have been found instrumental to women's success. In addition, their reentry experience contributes to the well-being of their children. Berman (2005) called for institutions to reduce the number of barriers, when possible, between incarcerated women and their social networks, especially their children. In addition, preparation for the challenges of reassuming the motherhood role will also be helpful. These can include counseling programs dealing with family reunification, parenting education classes, and identifying child welfare liaisons.

Bahr, Harris, Fisher, and Armstrong (2010) discussed the factors that contribute to successful and unsuccessful reentry. The authors noted the role of drug treatment programs, relationships with social networks, and age in successful reentry. Using a sample of 51 parolees, successful reentry was defined as being discharged from parole after a period of 3 years. Bahr et al. (2010) found that success depended mostly on whether the parolee had taken drug treatment classes before release and spent more time with friends in positive activities. If they were employed, a full work schedule also contributed to success. Being close to a parent, having a partner, or having a child was

not associated with success. Bahr et al. (2010) advocated for aftercare programs for newly released ex-offenders that helped build self-efficacy and positive social support networks.

Reentry and Motherhood

Greene, Haney, and Hurtado (2000) studied incarcerated mothers to understand the criminal risk factors including poverty, sexual and physical abuse, substance use, and witnessing violence in the lives of their children. The authors identified criminogenic conditions as those that are conditions and experiences in their environment that could increase the mothers' participation in criminal behavior. Vulnerabilities such as witnessing violence, being a victim of abuse, and past criminal behaviors can increase these risks. A sample of 102 incarcerated mothers in three jails throughout central California were interviewed regarding their past experiences. In addition, they identified the potential risk factors for their children of repeating the same cycle of incarceration.

Greene et al. (2000) noted the importance of these mothers recognizing their own histories and risk factors as a means to break the cycle of criminal behavior in their families. Substance abuse was a risk factor and used as a coping mechanism by participants to deal with stressful and violent environments. The participants identified a desire to not repeat their own past traumas, to be reunited with their children, and provide stable and caring homes. Therefore, while recognizing that past victimization cycles and risk factors are important, there should also be a focus on strengths. Making space for and listening to stories of incarcerated mothers can help identify needed resources that are essential to successful transition to the community. These resources have the ability to

create alternatives to risk factors which can lead to a better management of the mothers' lives and that of their children (Greene et al., 2000).

Petersilia (2001) noted that while only half of the minor children with a mother in prison got to see them while they were incarcerated, the majority of mothers still expected to resume their mothering role and live with their children after their release even if they did not have visitation with them while incarcerated. Therefore, there are a number of mothers returning to the home who have not seen their child for a significant amount of time and possibly unaware of current situations and factors impacting the children. Many barriers exist for mothers following reentry which include finding adequate services and programs for things such as housing, employment and childcare. In addition, children may also be experiencing low self-esteem, feelings of isolation, social stigma, and behavior difficulties. All of these factors can exacerbate the stress of the already difficult transition experience.

Richie (2001) used life history interviews of 18 formerly incarcerated women to examine the obstacles they encountered upon their reentry to the community. Many of the challenges derived from returning to the same neighborhood conditions, lack of access to community resources, and finding legal employment with a criminal background. The most pressing needs were substance abuse treatment, unmet mental health needs, educational and employment services, and safe and affordable housing. All of these factors contributed to one of the most compelling concerns, which was the concern for children's well-being and family reunification. Issues related to child custody, repairing

broken relationships, assuming the parenting role, and providing family stability are often urgent, yet stressful experiences.

Richie (2001) found that when incarcerated women gain sufficient support for their parenting role, their relationship with their child, even noncustodial, can be instrumental in successful reintegration. The relationship a mother maintains with the child during incarceration often influences how the relationship will continue to develop after she is released. However, there were a few programs to address this setback. Four approaches were identified for addressing the reentry needs of women. These include (1) comprehensive programming that holistically addresses their culture and gender specific needs; (2) links to community based organizations that are in their neighborhoods and improve their quality of community life; (3) an empowerment approach that identifies an individual's capacity for change and making positive choices; and (4) community mentoring which can help to help provide stability and proximity with other women who have had similar experiences and have had successful reintegration.

Frye and Dawe (2008) noted that female offenders and their children represent a severely disadvantaged and vulnerable population. Many of the same risk factors such as abuse, poverty, and poor education that were present in the mothers' lives were repeating themselves in the children's current experiences. The authors observed the impact of the parenting program (Parents Under Pressure) on the family functioning of eight formerly incarcerated mothers and their children who completed the treatment. The authors found an improvement in the mental health of the mothers and on the positive outcomes in the parent-child relationship as well as a decrease in child abuse risk factors and child

behavior problems. The authors highlighted the potential for intensive parenting programs for formerly incarcerated mothers as a starting point to more emerging interventions needed for them and their families to make reentry successful (Frye & Dawe, 2008).

Arditti and Few (2008) conducted interviews with 10 women were conducted to explore the stress linked with incarcerated mothers' reentry to the family and their communities, which included the concept of the triple threat. The triple threat encompasses depression, domestic violence, and suicide, which were the biggest obstacles to successful reentry. A particular focus was given to how this triple threat relates to maternal distress. Maternal distress was influenced by perceptions of negative parenting as well as social and economic status (Arditti & Few, 2008). Maternal distress was identified as health problems, dysfunctional intimate partner relationships, trauma, worry and guilt over child's well-being, and obstacles to economic security. Maternal distress was not only associated with emotional and psychological states, but with also their relationships and environment. Friends and family were seen as vital resources of support during reentry in the way of providing childcare, finances, housing, and job opportunities. The authors concluded with the need for clinicians working with incarcerated mothers to find ways to reduce maternal stress and attend to their emotional and psychological concerns during incarceration and upon reentry (Arditti & Few, 2008).

Perceptions of the mothering experience for previously incarcerated mothers was observed through in-depth interviews conducted with six women over the course of a year after their release (Hayes, 2009). The participants expressed that mothering after

prison was far more difficult than they anticipated. The major themes that emerged were doing mothering right; navigating barriers within the family such as custody battles and lack of support; dealing with responsibilities they were unfamiliar with; facing the adversity; and finally being able to assume their role as mothers.

Hayes (2009) suggested that there are a variety of complex factors that impact the reentry of these mothers which included substance abuse, financial limitations, and mental health issues. Better preparation for these women regarding anticipated custody battles, family barriers, and issues of fear and trust from the children can help aide them during this difficult time. Family therapy could also be useful for caretakers to help in the reunification process, rebuilding trust, and improving parenting skills.

Shortt, Eddy, Sheeber, and Davis (2014) examined the impact of an emotion-focused intervention (Emotions Program) for formerly incarcerated mothers attempting to reunite with their children. The program focused on providing emotional regulation and emotional coaching skills to incarcerated mothers to better help families navigate the stress that derives from the transition from prison to back into the home. A sample of 29 participants was assigned to the treatment group and 18 were in the control group. The authors concluded that the mothers that participated in the program showed increased positive outcomes related to emotional regulation, a decrease in their dismissal of their child's emotions, and a decrease in their criminal behavior over time.

Robbins, Martin, and Surratt (2009) analyzed the reentry experiences of mothers with a history of substance abuse. Women have been seen to be disproportionately affected by the war on drugs which has led to the significant increase in their

incarceration rates. The majority of these women had unique treatment needs in comparison to men in that the women were more likely to have grown up with family violence and parental substance abuse, they had increased histories of physical and sexual abuse, and they were more likely to have been the custodial parent of their child(ren) before being imprisoned. While many women plan to resume that mother role upon release, it does not always happen due to substance related issues.

Substance use has often been prevalent among the previously incarcerated population to cope with past trauma and abuse (Robbins et al., 2009). However, there is limited information on the effectiveness of substance abuse treatment programs for female offenders reintegrating back into the community. Some see their mothering roles as motivation for wanting to become clean and stay sober; however, maintaining that sobriety and going through substance abuse recovery can often be demanding and can rival the motherhood role. Outcomes were compared for 276 female offenders 18 months after their release and made up of those who completed substance abuse treatment, those who did not complete, and those who did not receive any treatment at all. In addition, women who expected to live with their children upon their release were compared with those who did not expect to live with children upon release.

Robbins et al. (2009) found that women who completed the treatment program were more likely to remain arrest free and use drugs less often. Women who anticipated living with their minor children were more likely to enter a treatment program. However, once treatment experience and background were controlled for, expectations for motherhood roles did not directly affect reentry outcomes. While motherhood can

enhance the motivation to stay sober, children can foster successful reentry in other ways. For example, meeting the children's physical and emotional needs helps the mothers stay in contact with supportive networks like churches, schools, or healthcare services which can all promote resources for successful integration.

Barnes and Stringer (2014) assessed the importance of motherhood to the reentry process for formerly incarcerated women. While there has been research on the challenge of maternal incarceration, there is still a gap regarding the attitudes and behaviors that make up the maternal identity of mothers in prison. More specifically, it is important to understand how these identities influence their expectations upon release. The authors noted that even though imprisoned, these mothers did maintain a salient maternal identity through alternative mothering models such as giving up primary caregiving tasks to family members. Using multivariate analysis on the data from a sample of 210 imprisoned mothers, the researchers found that regardless of demographics, imprisoned mothers' maternal identities were impacted most by a close relationship with their child's caregiver, maintaining contact with their family while imprisoned, and having the expectation of attaining custody of their child upon release (Barnes & Stringer, 2014).

Beichner and Rabe-Hemp (2014) explored the experiences of 43 incarcerated mothers who were returning to rural communities. While the increased incarceration rates of women have been shown as an inner city problem, many women in rural areas have been impacted by the same phenomena. Contributing to this are the lack of socioeconomic opportunities, isolation, and the stigma associated with living in rural

America. All these factors can increase the vulnerabilities of these women which impact their experiences of mothering, incarceration rates, and experiences upon reentry.

A vulnerability conceptual model was employed to understand the vulnerabilities of incarcerated mothers and the concept that those with greater vulnerabilities would be less successful with integration upon their release. A particular focus was given to how the situational vulnerabilities, such as socioeconomic disadvantage and lack of social services in a rural setting, can impact incarcerated mothers' plans for returning home (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014). The authors concluded that the women experienced significant relational and situational vulnerabilities including inability to find a job, lack of substance abuse treatment services, and returning to unhealthy relationships. These vulnerabilities can significantly impact the motherhood role where women often feel guilt, self-blame, and helplessness regarding their parenting skills and their children's well-being. Along with a lengthy sentence, this can make it difficult to reengage the motherhood role even though the majority of women plan to reclaim their roles as the primary caregiver upon their release. Through better policies and programs that are more suited to unique experiences of rural women, their reentry can become more successful, including their confidence in their role as mothers (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014).

Family System

Naser and Visser (2006) explored the impact that reentry can have on the family system. One of the most challenging aspects of reentry for prisoners is reunification with their families. Often these relationships have been marred by past negative experiences

and unrealistic expectations placed on both the family and the former prisoner. The majority of family members are highly supportive of the recently released prisoner and support them through housing, financial, and emotional support.

However, family members reported significant hardships and stresses related to anxiety about the activities of the released prisoner, such as substance use or following the conditions of parole. In addition, the financial support provided often led to a financial strain in other areas of the family. Support resources and coping mechanisms were also examined. Spirituality and reliance on religious organizations comprised the majority of the support services sought by participants. Family members discussed the need for more financial support, training programs and counseling programs that could help the family with the transition of the prisoner coming home (Naser & Visser, 2006).

Arditti and Few (2006) examined mothers' experiences upon reentry into family life after incarceration to understand how incarceration and eventual reentry affects their family relationships. The authors argued that the stigma associated with incarceration might contribute to a reduction in social support and a threat to the parent-child relationship. Twenty-eight women were interviewed regarding family relationships, risk factors, and prevention measures. The authors found that of the many risk factors for this population, mental health issues were among the biggest in the forms of depression, exposure to family violence, and substance abuse and use. In terms of family relationships, the custodial arrangements for the children were diverse. Women that reported a strong relationship with the child prior to incarceration reported the relationship to still be strong upon their release from prison.

Regarding the experience with reentry, the participants discussed the importance of resources, community organization, and economic security. The participants reported strong support from family in terms of childcare, transportation and financial assistance. The relationship with their probation officer was also deemed important and salient to their reentry. Social support was seen as a protective factor. Arditti and Few (2006) concluded that further explanation is needed on the connection between adequate resources for these mothers and parental distress.

Co-parenting arrangements with caregivers after being released are also a significant factor for mothers during the reentry process. The co-parenting arrangements of mothers and grandmothers following the mothers' release from jail were observed in a study on 13 families. During times of separation from the caregiver, such as incarceration, the nature of the relationship between the child's parent and caregiver can have a strong impact on the child's ability to cope and their sense of stress and disorganization. McHale, Salman, Strozier, and Cecil (2013) found that there was no one way of co-parenting that proved more successful. For example, collaborating with a caregiver on parenting the child was found to be just as successful as deferring the majority of the decisions to just one parent. The authors concluded that successful reentry for these women and their child's adjustment is often contingent on maintaining an adequate relationship with the co-parents and the child during their incarceration.

Reentry Services

Scroggins and Malley (2010) examined 155 reentry programs in the 10 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. to understand the efficacy of current programs to meet the needs of women. The number of women under some type of correctional supervision is at the highest level ever. Many of these women have been incarcerated more than once. Therefore, factors contributing to recidivism are an important issue for female offenders returning to the community. The life experience of these women often influences their criminal behavior as the majority of them are young, poor, often mothers, with minimal education and lack of job skills and stable employment. Upon their release, they are often still in these same circumstances with no employment, substance abuse problems, and still mothers (Scroggins & Malley, 2010).

The five broad areas of need for women experiencing reentry are (1) child care; (2) healthcare, counseling, and substance abuse treatment programs; (3) housing and transportation assistance; (4) education, employment, and job training services; and (5) social support. After conducting content analysis on the reentry programs of these areas, the authors found that childcare was the least frequently provided program for every area in the study except one. Since 80% of the mothers were the primary caregiver before their imprisonment, the lack of availability for this type of reentry service is significant (Scroggins & Malley, 2010).

The difficulty that these women may face attaining these services could impact their ability to adequately assume the motherhood role and experience successful reintegration. Social support services were the most frequently provided reentry services

and came in the form of life skills training, friendship development, and relationship assistance. Overall, the programs reviewed in the study were found to not sufficiently serve the needs of women after release from prison. However, because of the high incarceration rate and ensuing reintegration, it is imperative that these programs are continually developed and evaluated as a means of reducing an extremely high recidivism rate among women who by majority; are mothers (Scroggins & Malley, 2010).

Faith-based reentry services can also be considered. Camp, Klein-Saffran, Kwon, Daggett, and Joseph (2006) suggested that participants in faith-based prison programs are encouraged to make life changes and want to understand those changes in a religious sense. On a study on 92 participants, Roman, Wolff, Correra, and Buck (2007) found that clients who had not experienced positive spiritual changes in prison were 34 times more likely to drop out of a faith-based reentry program than those who had experienced positive changes. Stansfield, Mowen, and O'Connor (2017) examined a sample of 1,627 released individuals and found that having some type of religious or spiritual support had a strong effect on their decrease in substance use, however it did not have a significant impact on high risk criminal behavior. The authors concluded that faith-based reentry programs can be significant in building trust with formerly incarcerated individuals who have experienced setbacks by helping them rebuild relationships and instilling hope.

Support Resources

O'Brien (2001) conducted interviews with 18 ex-female offenders to understand how they identified the strengths and resources maintained to reintegrate back into the

community. Individuals with experiences in the criminal justice system often view their self-hood as defined by the crimes they have committed. This can lead to feelings of stigma where they often fall right back into the pattern of behaviors and associations that led to their imprisonment in the first place. However, there are many stories of resilience in which individuals experience successful reentry despite their negative labels. The findings indicated that the main factors to success were finding a stable home, securing and maintaining employment, having a connection with others, community membership, and developing the confidence that they could be successful. The study concluded that while the majority of literature has focused on the barriers to successful reentry, focusing on strengths has the ability to provide needed insights into both the individualistic and community wide needs of formerly incarcerated women (O'Brien, 2001).

The factors contributing to successful reentry were examined for a group of women participating in a faith-based program for formerly incarcerated women. A sample of 27 women, who had been released for at least 6 months, were interviewed regarding transition factors. There were several emerging themes including a belief in a higher power, the importance of sobriety and rehabilitation, role of support networks, role of children, employment, and dealing with feelings from the past (Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2002).

The study suggested that the two strongest themes, spiritual beliefs and freedom from addiction, constituted a need for interventions that attend to the holistic health needs of formerly incarcerated women. By addressing the mind, body, and spirit, they may have more successful reentry into the community. In addition, the authors pointed to the larger

percentage of incarcerated women who are mothers as a reason to develop more intervening strategies that support their release and disrupt the cycle of family incarceration (Parsons and Warner-Robbins, 2002).

Another study examined the role of support networks in the success of reentry for formerly incarcerated women. On a study of 104 formerly incarcerated women, regression analyses and interviews were completed to understand how social support from friends, family and those deemed as “Others” predicted life satisfaction (Heidemann, Cederbaum, & Martinez, 2014). Findings showed that support from “Others” such as other formerly incarcerated women, staff at social service agencies, and fellow members of 12-step programs positively predicted life satisfaction whereas friends and family did not. Romantic partners were found to be supportive and a source of conflict for the women. The authors called for the necessity of places such as sober living facilities and 12-step programs that may be the only places this population can gain mutual support. In addition, agency providers who provide emotional support should work towards helping the women establish healthy, lasting bonds with friends, family, and romantic partners who may have a longer presence in the lives of the women than the agency staff. (Heidemann et al., 2014).

A mixed methods approach used the observations of official prison records, surveys, and in-depth interviews with 50 current and previously incarcerated women to understand factors impacting successful reintegration (Cobbina, 2010). Family support was found to be significant for successful reentry by providing financial and emotional stability as well as childcare. In addition, supportive parole officers and community based

post release services were also helpful. However, negative support networks were found in family members involved in criminal behavior, poor communication with unsupportive parole officers, and the competing demands of fulfilling their parole obligations, while trying to find a job and take care of their children. Cobbina (2010) suggested policy enhancements that provide post-release services specific to women's needs such as childcare, temporary housing, assistance with job placement, and referrals for mental health treatment.

Bui and Morash (2010) discussed the impact of network relationships for formerly incarcerated women. The authors noted that while these women face a myriad of obstacles upon release, their relationships with social networks can be a significant factor in successful community integration and reducing recidivism. These networks may provide financial security, reinforce the mothers' confidence, and increase emotional support. From retrospective interviews on a sample of 20 women, relationships were examined before, during, and after incarceration.

Bui and Morash (2010) found that some of the relationships were terminated in order to align with parole requirements and prevent further engagement in criminal behavior. Some of the women noted that the shift from negative to more positive relationships resulted in an increased access to resources such as housing assistance or childcare. The majority of these women also formed new relationships with co-workers, friends, and church members who provided mentoring and material assistance. The authors concluded that as a means of promoting more positive support networks for

women after release, prison and parole programing efforts should help identify the needs of parolees and help in the access and availability of these networks.

Summary

The incarceration and subsequent reentry rates for women are steadily increasing. A large majority of this population are mothers. Therefore, this experience is not only impactful to their individual life, but influences their children, caregivers, and the community resources serving this population. While there is a vast amount of literature on the hardships experienced during reentry, there are very few findings on what is actually working well. In particular, there are a very few studies understanding what previously incarcerated mothers have found to be strengths during the reentry process. This dissertation seeks to fill that gap by exploring these experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Using a family systems perspective, the purpose of this qualitative study was to offer an informed perspective on the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers. A particular focus was given to what these mothers found to be strengths during their transition from incarceration to being back in the community. A phenomenological approach was used which allowed for an exploration of the participants' lived experience as previously incarcerated mothers (Creswell, 2014). In-depth, face-to-face interviews were completed with 14 participants. A family systems perspective allowed an opportunity to observe how the mothers perceived their current circumstances and relationships within various systems. This chapter outlines the research design of the study including the theoretical perspective, researcher as a person, recruitment procedures, interview process, ethical considerations, and data analysis.

Understanding the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers and their families is important for family practitioners who are working with this population as a means of gaining information about needed resources and forms of support. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of the mothers' experiences and what they identified as strengths (Patton, 2002). All interviews were audio-recorded, listened to, transcribed verbatim by the researcher, and then coded and analyzed for emerging themes by the researcher, her adviser, and an additional research assistant.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical perspective guiding this research was family systems theory through a phenomenological lens (Broderick, 1993). Family systems theory is an essential framework for studying incarcerated mothers' reentry because it offers a perspective on how a significant disruption in one part of the family system impacts many others parts of the system, such as the parent-child relationship, relationship with criminal justice system, caregivers, and social and economic resources.

Buckley (1967) described a system as a complexity of elements that are directly or indirectly related in a common network with many of the elements influencing one another at one time or another. He viewed a system as comprised of the overlapping processes of the system itself, its members, and the system's environment. These social systems must be able to change their basic structure, reorganize, and reassess values in order to survive. As it relates to a family, they must constantly self-organize and change behaviors based on stimuli from the external environment and the mandates of its family members.

When considering parental incarceration and subsequent reentry, having a parent out of the home due to imprisonment presents a huge crisis to the family, from the initial arrest to the community reintegration (Hayes, 2009). In particular, mothers' incarceration presents a more vulnerable situation as these women were usually the primary caretakers of the children upon their imprisonment. Families facing these phenomena are left with

feelings of loss, stress, financial strain, and child placement and rearing difficulties (Hayes, 2009).

Kantor and Lehr (1975) explored the importance of observing families within a systemic framework to support a common model that researchers, therapists, and other practitioners working with families can follow. Having a common vocabulary and language to describe family-system events helps better explain these family processes and future interventions.

Hale (1988) discussed the outcome of a mothers' incarceration and subsequent reentry on the family system. The author noted that focusing on the impact of mothers' incarceration and reentry is not only helpful to her own rehabilitation, but the future behavioral and emotional adjustment of her child. Hale (1988) further noted a particular concern which is the maintenance of the mother's family system while she is incarcerated. If her reentry is to be deemed successful, she will need to return to a family system that can provide stability and support for rehabilitation.

Research Design

A phenomenological approach was used in the study. Creswell (2014) noted that phenomenological research employs philosophy and psychology to understand the lived experiences of an individual based on specific phenomena. For this study, formerly incarcerated mothers were asked open-ended interview questions relating to their experiences upon reentry. A particular focus was given to what the mothers identified to be strengths during this time. Exploring the meaning the participants' placed on their

reentry experiences allowed for the opportunity for the voices of the mothers to be heard and gave them a choice in how they told their story (Creswell, 2014).

The following research questions were used for the study:

Research Question One: What are the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers?

Research Question Two: What are sources of strengths for formerly incarcerated mothers experiencing reentry?

Procedures

This section details the procedures of the study including participant recruitment and triangulation of the data collection. A qualitative approach employing in-depth interviews was used for the study (Creswell, 2014). Babbie (2010) noted that use of qualitative interviews can provide a way of examining the depth and range of the participants' experience that may not be captured through the use of standardized questionnaires.

The study commenced once approval for a full review study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Texas Woman's University and the Graduate School. Recruitment of participants took place in a variety of ways. First, the researcher made initial contact with organizations that served reentry populations including churches, places of business, and non-profit agencies. The initial contact included an email and follow up phone call with information about the researcher, the purpose of the study, and a request for permission to pursue recruitment. The researcher also attended monthly reentry coalition meetings and spoke briefly about the study and requested potential

referrals. If permission was granted, flyers (see Appendix A) about the study were posted by the researcher or emailed to the agencies so they could post them and/or disseminate them to potential participants. Flyers were also disseminated to colleagues of the researcher who worked with the reentry population including parole officers and mental health counselors. All flyers contained details regarding the purpose of the study, eligibility to participate, incentives for participating, and the researcher's contact information.

Snowball sampling was also employed as a means of reaching additional participants who were not accessible through traditional methods. Goodman (1961) discussed snowball sampling to include a sample of individuals in a population to help provide access to potential participants who they frequently associate with on a regular basis. Snowball sampling for this research study was employed by utilizing the participants who completed an interview. The researcher requested permission to give them flyers to pass on to other mothers that they knew who would possibly be interested and fit the criteria for the study.

Researcher as Person

The researcher is an African-American female doctoral candidate at Texas Woman's University and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist-Associate. Mays and Pope (1995) noted that no matter the methodological approach, all research is selective as it is impossible to capture the complete truth of any event. The quality of the data will depend two factors: (1) the skill and interpretations of the researcher and (2) the appropriateness of the questions to the phenomenon being observed. Creswell (2014)

observed the importance of clarifying the biases that researchers bring with them to a study. For this current study, I addressed these researcher biases in several ways. First, I underwent self-reflection and acknowledgement regarding how my gender, background, and experience impacted the interpretation of the findings. As the researcher for this study, I recognize that my background, age, culture, gender, and past experiences have an influence on the outcome of the findings.

In addition, I, as a participant-observer, am a part of the study and had an influence on the participants' responses. For example, the researcher had a bias that the mothers' reentry would disrupt the family system. This bias was addressed by using open-ended questions as a way of allowing the participants to respond without limitations or influence from the researcher. The researcher also made journal entries before starting the first interviews and then after each interview as a way of clarifying any covert thoughts or impressions that could influence the outcome of the results (Chenail, 2011). Additionally, my faculty advisor and one other research assistant helped with coding to ensure reliability and validity of the data.

This research topic was chosen because of my previous experiences working with incarcerated individuals. As part of a research project for another graduate program, I interviewed male prisoners about the neighborhoods they lived in before coming to prison. Many of those prisoners were fathers and expressed not wanting their children to follow in their footsteps. In addition, I completed a Family Therapy internship at a juvenile detention center where I provided therapy services to the residents and their

families. Again, it was evident how parental incarceration can disrupt the family system as the majority of those kids had a parent who had experienced jail time.

Through these experiences and other research, I found a need for more studies on the subject of parental incarceration. With the growing rate of female incarceration, particularly mothers, there is a needed interest of understanding the experiences of these women as they transition back to the community and resume their roles as mothers. This type of research can lead to more information on how clinicians can assist a family system during this particularly stressful and disruptive event.

Trustworthiness

Patton (2002) noted that trustworthiness relates to the level that the research findings are valid and reliable. Trustworthiness in this study was demonstrated through intellectual rigor, triangulation of resources, and transferability. Intellectual rigor for this study involved attending to the data several times over to determine if the explanations make sense and reflect the event being studied (Patton, 2002). The interviews were audio- recorded, listened to several times, and then transcribed for accuracy. Creativity, insight, and past knowledge were also employed to explore the participants' interviews and then organize, construct, and analyze the data as it authentically relates to the experiences of the formerly incarcerated mothers. Member checking was also employed by doing brief follow-up interviews with the participants to determine if the findings in the study aligned with what they were trying to convey about their reentry experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Transferability

Transferability is concerned with transferring the results of a study to other situations that involve the same type of phenomena being studied (Shenton, 2003). For the current study, this required a rich and meaningful description of the experiences and identified strengths that arise for formerly incarcerated mothers returning back to their communities. This also included thorough details regarding the number of participants and setting, data collection methods used, and the time period that the data were collected. Shenton (2003) suggested that while results of one qualitative study are not always consistent with another, the advantage of transferable results is the ability to offer another reality for a specific life event. Therefore, the results from this current study may not be applicable to all formerly incarcerated mothers experiencing reentry, but it can add to the knowledge already established regarding the interventions and resources needed to best help this population.

Protection of Participants

The protection of the participants was considered in a variety of ways. First, the study did not commence until approval was given by the TWU Institutional Review Board to uphold the safety and integrity of the participants. Secondly, confidentiality was adhered to by assigning numerical codes to protect the participants' identity. The numerical codes started with 1001 and ended with 1014. The codes appear on the demographic forms, transcripts, and audio-recordings. The participants' names only appear on the consent forms, which were kept in a locked cabinet. No one, but the researcher, had access to the cabinet. All identifying data, demographic forms, audio-

recordings, and transcripts will be destroyed within two years after the study has been completed.

The researcher maintained patience and sensitivity regarding the impact that the interviews might have had on the participants as they recalled their experiences with reentry and motherhood. A list of counseling resources (see Appendix F) was provided to the participants during the interview if they felt the need to process the interview experience with a therapeutic professional. The participants were also reminded that their participation was voluntary, they could take breaks during the interview as needed, and could withdraw from the study at any time. All participants completed the entire interview. The participants' time and financial limitations were also considered as the researcher met them at times and locations that were convenient to them and provided a gift card for their participation.

Participants

The participants for the study were 14 formerly incarcerated mothers who had minor children at the time of their release. Creswell (2014) noted that in phenomenological studies, the number of participants averages between six and ten and should conclude once saturation is reached. After completing interviews with ten women, the required number of participants was met. Data collection was ended after four more interviews because no new information was being obtained and saturation had been reached. This study included participants from a variety of ethnic, educational, and religious backgrounds. The participants had varied incarceration histories that ranged from three months to six and a half years. The average number of children for the

participants was 2.92 children. The participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling methods. All participation was voluntary and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, how the data would be used, protection of confidentiality, and the emotional stress that might evolve from discussing the topic.

Interview Procedures

The researcher contacted potential participants by phone (see Appendix B) who were screened to ensure they met the qualifications of the study. At the end of the telephone conversation, interested individuals who met the needs of the study were scheduled for an interview. The time and location of the meeting was determined by the preferences and time considerations of both the participants and the researcher.

Interviews took place in a variety of settings, including libraries, conference rooms, restaurants, and home settings. The researcher sent out a reminder text or phone call to each participant a day before the interview to confirm the meeting place and time. All participant phone numbers were deleted after the completion of the interviews. The researcher arrived to each interview in a timely manner and was prepared with needed paperwork, pens, digital recorder, extra batteries, and gift cards. The researcher was dressed in business casual attire for each interview.

At the start of each interview, the researcher greeted the participant and asked again if they were comfortable with being audio-recorded. Participants were reminded that all participation was voluntary, they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, and their participation did not influence any parole or probation proceedings or outcomes. The researcher then went over in detail the specifics of the study and the

anticipated duration. If the participant agreed to continue, the researcher then went over the consent form (see Appendix C).

The consent form highlighted the specifics of the study, risks, benefits, compensation, ethics, confidentiality; participants were informed that participation is voluntary, and that they could stop at any time. A copy of the signed consent form was provided to the participant at the interview, and one copy was kept by the researcher. After signing the forms, the researcher administered a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D) highlighting age, ethnicity, education, religion, length of prison time, and number of children. Based on the preferences of the participant, they read and answered the questionnaire for themselves or the researcher read it to them and recorded their responses on paper. After completing the demographic questionnaire, researcher asked the participant if they had any questions at this point and if they were ready to proceed with the interview. Any clarification needed regarding the process, purpose of research, or questions from the interview guide was provided by the researcher.

Before starting each interview the researcher turned on the mini voice recorder, which was used to assist the researcher with ensuring that all words used were conveyed accurately and depicted the depth of emotion used by the participant. The voice recording also assisted in the transcription of the data. An interview guide (see Appendix E) with open- ended questions was followed during the interview as a means of gaining a particular focus on how these women see their experiences upon reentry and what they identified as strengths. Prompts were used as needed and clarification of the questions were given at

the request of the participants. It was assumed that all the participants spoke openly and honestly about their experiences.

The duration of each interview varied with the shortest interview lasting 27 minutes and the longest interview lasting 90 minutes. At the end of the interview, all participants were given a \$20.00 gift card to Wal-Mart for their participation. In addition, they were informed how their participation adds to the field of research about the reentry experiences of incarcerated mothers. Participants were also given a list of counseling resources (see Appendix F) if they felt the need to speak to a professional to process what they shared in the interview. The researcher thanked each participant for their time and the willingness to share their story.

Brief follow-up calls (see Appendix G) were made to the participants who indicated on the consent form that they were interested in being contacted. Follow-up calls were able to be completed with eight participants. The purpose of the calls was to gather additional information the participants wanted to share about their experiences. As well, the researcher shared the initial results to ensure that the findings aligned with what the participants wanted to convey about their experiences in an effort to complete member checking (Creswell, 2014). The follow-up calls started with a brief reminder of who the researcher was and the interview. The researcher also checked in with miscellaneous things the participants had shared such as finding housing, enrolling in school, and starting a business. The researcher then briefly shared initial themes and findings and inquired if the participants had any questions. None of the participants requested any

changes or shared any new information. The researcher thanked the participants for their time.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers as they return to the community. The following section details the data analysis that was used for the study. To promote trustworthiness for the data and research process, the analyses were triangulated through field notes, using research assistants to help with transcription analysis, coding, and member checking. Patton (2002) noted that triangulation can strengthen a study through combining different methods of data analysis.

All audiotapes were listened to at least twice by the researcher before transcribing. Transcription was completed verbatim by the researcher. After completion of transcription, the researcher organized and categorized the data for similar themes. The researcher's adviser and a graduate assistant assisted with the identification of themes in order to ensure accuracy and reliability of the research findings. They were each given at least two transcribed interviews with a request to read the transcripts and mark them for similar topics and meanings. The researcher then met with both of them separately, face-to-face to compare transcripts and examine for similar or conflicting themes. No new or conflicting themes emerged from either meeting.

Field notes are notes the researcher makes based on observations of the activities happening in the field (Patton, 2003). Creswell (2104) discussed that the more time the researcher spends in the field, the more they gain an in-depth understanding of the

phenomenon being studied. This strengthens the credibility of the study and adds depth and validity to the findings. For this study, the researcher made handwritten notes in a field notebook based on observations made during the interviews with participants, attending reentry coalition meetings, and meeting with parole officers and reentry counselors. The notes were later transferred into a word file and used for further in-depth descriptions and narratives about the participants and their experiences.

Coding involved gathering text from the transcribed interviews and organizing it into categories based on terms and language used by the participants (Creswell, 2014). The interviews were transcribed verbatim into a Word Document by the researcher. Next, each transcription was read along with the audio-recording at least twice to ensure accuracy and obtain a sense of the emerging ideas from the interviews as a whole. Next, the researcher randomly selected four interviews and made a list of emerging topics. These topics were clustered together based on similarity and marked with different colors.

Saldaña (2013) stated that placing similarly coded data into categories is based on similar characteristics and could be the emergence of a pattern. These similar topics were then organized and abbreviated by codes and then noted in corresponding segments of the transcripts. Focused coding methods were used to give descriptive wording to the topics and then turn them into categories. The categories were then abbreviated and coded (Saldaña, 2013). These concepts were copied onto pieces of paper and sorted into piles with similar ideas. Each pile was named, which became a theme. Themes were decided upon by identifying which concepts were repeated over and over again by the

participants. Connections between family systems theory and the emerging themes were then developed and synthesized.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers. A particular focus was given to what these mothers identified as being strengths during this time. Recruitment methods included placing flyers in agencies serving the reentry population throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex, as well as snowball sampling.

In depth, face-to-face interviews were completed with 14 mothers who had been previously incarcerated. All interviews were audio-recorded and followed a semi-structured format and included open-ended questions. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and then analyzed for emerging themes. The identified themes were structured and organized in a narrative format that highlighted specific details and quotes from the participants. The findings of this research have the potential to add to the knowledge regarding the experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers and needed resources of support.

The protection of the participants was maintained by adhering to ethical guidelines and using codes to uphold confidentiality. The researcher upheld professionalism and sensitivity while interviewing the mothers on a topic that carried potential emotional risks. As a safeguard, the participants were reminded they could withdraw from the interview at any time, a list of counseling resources were provided, and debriefing occurred. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim by the researcher

and analyzed for similar categories and themes. To assure validity of the findings, triangulation of the data occurred through transcription, using research assistants to help identify similar topics, and member checking.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of a phenomenological study on the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers. The researcher conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with a total of 14 women. Participants were interviewed in various locations throughout the DFW area. Confidentiality of the participants was protected by assigning a number for each participant. Triangulation of the data included verbatim transcription of the interviews, field notes, using research assistants, and member checking. A discussion on the description of the participants is offered along with the themes and subsequent subthemes that emerged from the interviews.

Sample Description

The sample size for the study was 14 and each woman had at least one minor child at the time of her release from incarceration back into the community. The participants' ages ranged from 24 to 62. The number of children for each woman ranged from one child to one participant who had 12 children. The average number of children for the women in the study was 2.92 children. The length of incarceration for the participants ranged from six months to six and a half years. There were nine Black/African-American participants, three participants who identified as White, and two participants who identified as Hispanic.

Six of the participants (42%) had some high school or less, one participant had a high school diploma (7%) and seven participants had some college (50%). As for work

status, four of the participants had a full-time job (28%), three participants were working part-time jobs (21%), five were receiving disability (35%), and two were currently unemployed (14%). The majority of the sample identified with a religious affiliation. Eight of the participants identified as non-denominational Christian (57%), two were Baptist (14%), one identified as Catholic, one identified as spiritual, and one did not have a religious affiliation. Six of the participants were married, engaged, or dating (42%). Six of the participants were single (42%) and two were divorced or separated (14%).

Table 1

Children of Participants

Participant	Number of Children	Children Reside With You Before Incarceration	Children Reside With You After Incarceration	Children Visit While Incarcerated
1001	4	Yes	Yes	Yes
1002	12	Yes	No	No
1003	4	Yes	Yes	Yes
1004	2	Yes	Yes	Yes
1005	2	Yes	Yes	No
1006	1	Yes	No	No
1007	1	Yes	No	No
1008	3	Yes	No	Yes
1009	1	Yes	Yes	Yes
1010	2	Yes	No	No
1011	1	No	No	No
1012	2	Yes	Yes	Yes
1013	3	Yes	No	No
1014	3	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2

Participants' Years of Incarceration and Residence of Children

Participants	Number of years incarcerated	Participants	Children reside while Incarcerated
4	Less than one year	5	With Other Parent
6	1 to 2.5 years	6	With Maternal family
1	2.5 to 4 years	2	With Paternal family
3	4 years +	1	Foster Care

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers. The study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers?

Research Question 2: What are sources of strengths for formerly incarcerated mothers experiencing reentry?

Each participant was asked the following interview questions:

- 1). Please tell me your story of what reentry has been like for you?
- 2). How do you see your role as a mother impacting this experience?
- 3). Please tell me what you identified as strengths during this experience?

The responses from the interview questions were analyzed for emerging themes.

A response was categorized as a theme if it was identified by at least nine of the participants. Four themes emerged: Reentry is Challenging; Motherhood is a Hindrance to Reentry; Motherhood is a Motivator for Reentry; Strengths For Successful Reentry (See Appendix H).

Theme One: Reentry is Challenging

Each of the participants described her journey of reentry in great detail. For each of the women, the journey was wrought with many challenges in one way or another. These challenges included financial strain, meeting reentry obligations, and rebuilding relationships with family. Many of the women were also working to maintain sobriety upon release, and often returning to the same neighborhoods and homes where they

engaged in substance use. The following subthemes emerged regarding the setback and obstacles related to the reentry experience: Preparation Before Release; Walking On Eggshells; Reentry Obligations; Financial Strain; Rebuilding Trust.

Preparation before release. All of the women spoke about how preparation for reentry begins even before being released from incarceration. This preparation to return to the community took place in a variety of ways including both internal and external components. The following quotes highlight the mindset some of the women adapted in anticipation for the release back to the community:

But your mind has to be, if you got two years in jail, two years your mind got to stay on what you gonna do in there and what you gon' do out here. Cause if you ain't gon' do it inside them doors, you ain't gon' do it outside the doors. (Participant 1002, African American, 12 children)

[Reentry] It starts way before you released. I mean you wanna think of things that you need to change...Things that you need to, to modify or, you know...And you have to deal with the strength, and, your strengths and your weaknesses and try'na deal wit 'em. I mean coping with, you know. I mean you really change your whole lifestyle. (Participant 1004, African-American, 2 children).

God and I had already started. Restored my relationship with my family when I was in prison because I made amends to all my family while I was there. When I got home, God really did establish a good relationship with my family. (Participant 1009, African-American, 1 child).

Prepare properly, proceed positively and pursue persistently. Patiently being patient in the process. You just can't come out here without some and something to formulate in your head, wrote down. In other words, write it down so you can see it. That's the only thing that's been instilled in me, and has pushed me. When I write it down to see it, it's planning. (Participant 1011, African-American, 1 child).

You know, I had made my mind up when I was in jail there, I would never do drugs again. So, I stayed in the Bible; the whole time I was incarcerated, I was in the Bible. I started out reading *Faith to Faith* by Kenneth Copeland when I was in jail, and I continued to read the Bible to keep myself strong because I wanted my family. I had no idea that crack was so powerful because if it – if I knew it would separate me from my kids, I would never, in my entire life, ever touch that...[I] set my mind that I was going to stay clean, and I was going– I had made my goals to go see my kids and get all my kids back, and I would stick to the idea, so... (Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children).

Your mind, regardless of what, if you go to jail and you know you are here doing it wrong, prepare today for your tomorrow. Get your ducks in order, so that if you've got to go and sit that time down, make sure that when you come home, your affairs are still in order. (Participant 1014, African-American, 3 children).

Several of the women credited reentry programs as helping them prepare for returning back to their homes and communities as evidenced by the following quotes:

They think you just can't change. But the only benefit is, is we didn't only go to jail. We went in there for treatment. For a program that would teach us to be a better person. And then we have, um, this amazing aftercare system that teaches you how to reenter the world without. Like, it, it's taught us basically the reentry process. (Participant 1003, White, 4 children)

Yes, and [preparation] one of the main things we do a lot. Um, I thought it [reentry program] was going to be really hard. A lot of the girls make it seem like it's so hard and stuff, but it's really not. I mean, if it's something that you want to better yourself and if you take ... I mean I know it's not something that we all want to do, but given our situation that we put ourselves in, I mean, we are getting this chance instead of getting sent straight to prison to do two years, versus the little three months that we did. I am grateful, so I try to – I am not going to mess it up over something little. I mean they give us plenty of chances. They give us three times to mess up and give us three, four or five days. I don't even think that's worth it. I mean, I think it's easy on myself. I do. It could be a lot harder. I was seeing people go through re-entry court and they were all swift and stuff like that. Like they don't even get no chances at all. I

think it's pretty good. It keeps me on track. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

You know, I was really angry that I got put in IDT [Intensive Day Treatment] and this, that, and the other. And because I was like, just let me do my time. I don't want to have to deal with probation and stuff anymore, it's too stressful. But I'm grateful that that's what happened. You know, I had, I got a chance to really look at myself and change my thinking and coping skills. I mean, I learned a lot in there, I'm blessed that it happened. I'm glad that it happened. (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

Walking on eggshells. There were several discussions of the feeling of “walking on eggshells” where the participants worried that any little mistake or mishap might send them back to jail or prison. The following quotes emphasized the apprehension some of the women felt about retuning back to their old communities and trusting themselves to do the right thing.

I don't want to go back to jail. And I'm pretty sure a lot of the women say that, but [long sigh]. With all the things that they have us doing and any little slip up. So, basically walkin' on eggshells. (Participant 1004, African-American, 2 children).

Cause I'm really like trying...And really trying to do the right thing. And not live the life that I lived before and start. It makes it frustrating when

things don't go as smoothly as I think that they should. (Participant 1001, African-American, 4 children).

One participant discussed in great detail how her fear of making a misstep in her old neighborhood led her to feeling like a prisoner in her own home. The entire quote is presented to capture the immense anxiety related to making a mistake.

The hardest part was trying to fit back in...Trying to – like going to the grocery store since this. You know I'm used to somebody saying lights out at 10 o'clock. You know. You can't – if it's a lock-down you can't get up and go out of your bunk, unless you ask for permission. You know and I'm talking about it was like – I had really put myself in my own prison inside my own home...You know, because I, I would want to go to the store, and I would wait until somebody came home. You know, it's like, "Can you go to the store with me?" You know and it was – and it was like why are, "Why do I have to go to the store with you? Go and go to the store. You're not locked up anymore." You know...Yeah. It was. And it was like I was afraid of people....Because the people that I was around, you know, we had to walk in a straight line. They had a yellow line down the – like the street. They had a yellow like a – actually the streets out there, it was in prisons like that. There's a yellow line down the street. You had to walk straight up that yellow line. You couldn't get off of that yellow line. You get off of the yellow line, you can get a case...You know what I'm sayin'? So, it was like do I go to cross the street? Or do I

disappear? You know? Well there's no one there who's going to tell you you can go across the street. Ain't anybody gonna to tell you you can't go across the street. You know. So, I had to really – and actually to be honest, I think this is '17. I think I really just started being comfortable with going by myself now. You know my husband, I said, "Baby, I'm going to wait until you come home from work so we can go do such and such." And he will be like – "Why you got to wait on me? You got the car, go." I'm talking about it took me a minute to just actually get my kids and just go get in the car and go. You know I would say, "Baby, I'm going over here." It was like I always wanted to tell somebody where I was going... You know it was – I think it was maybe um, me going somewhere being like they say in the wrong place at the wrong time. (Participant 1012, African-American, 2 children).

Another challenge for many of the women was staying sober. This was especially difficult for those participants who had previously used drugs to cope with stressors or were returning to friends and family who continued to use substances around them. The following quotes feature the struggle many of the women had of maintaining sobriety or refraining from engaging in other criminal behaviors.

The biggest challenge was trying to stay clean and sober. That was the biggest challenge then, but I constantly prayed because I didn't want to use again because I didn't want to lose, you know what I'm saying? (Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children).

Like when I got out there was no food in the house. Okay these kids about to-I have four-I got out on a Tuesday. I had three days to get myself ready. Three days. No two days. Cause Friday they were coming. So, getting all that. It's stressful. And you do probably wanna go use. You do probably wanna give up and stuff. Cause I did...And nobody's gonna be sayin' that 'Oh, I got this.' No, cause I didn't have it. I didn't have nothing. (Participant 1005, Hispanic, 2 children).

I have a good relationship with my family. They support me, but I kind of stay away from them because they drink a lot. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

Um, I had a lot of struggles being back in the house with my mom. Because when I left, we were all getting drunk and getting high and you know. But when I come back, I was sober. And they were still doing everything they were doing. And that was a total struggle for me. (Participant 1009, African-American, 1 child).

For some of the participants, they worked to overcome the struggle with a determined mindset and help from different treatment programs.

I was going to the, uh, plasma place for a while. I was paying tithes, going to church out of plasma money. Cause I refuse to go prostitute. I refused to steal. And so, um, I am not telling nobody else to do that [laughs]....Yeah, but that was just my struggle, so I'm not gon' tell nobody else 'You have

to this.' No, no, no...And, um, drugs I just made up my mind that I wasn't going back to drugs, so that wasn't a struggle to me cause my mind was already made up. I'm not doing it. (Participant 1002, African-American, 12 children).

And trying to be able to maintain life without using drugs to solve everything, you know...I have so many more skills now that I've learned... And, and in IDT. I wasn't just in, um, you know just in jail I was in, like programs that taught me how to deal with these things way better. Than to run to drugs. (Participant 1003, White, 4 children).

Um, this time around it was better than the first time around because I chose to go to a sober living home...Um, you know I needed the support. I don't really have a big family and the family that I do have, my mom is the only one that really wants anything to do with me anymore. So I knew that I was not gonna be successful without a support system...So it's been, it's been okay. It's been stressful. This is the first time that I've gone through changes and all this stress sober. So... (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

I came out to like a very toxic, I was already in a toxic relationship. But I came back to that toxic relationship... Um, and he was still using and, like, it was just, it was hard....Um, and I was out in Abilene with, and living in a hotel with no car and no family, no friends. And, um, so when everything went, finally ended it with him. I came to rehab and am now in

a Sober Living home. I mean things have gotten better since then, but, um, it took a while to get there. (Participant 1007, White, 1 child).

In other words, I was determined and focused, and I was looking for ways and means to find what I needed. And if they say no, persisting – pursue – persistence is what I needed. See, because that energy I directed toward addiction – I directed toward keeping me from being distracted and keeping me quite at rest...And if I'm doing something constructive, I'm taking my meds today, I'm making means, I'm going to round people who are like-minded, and I can call on people. You know what I mean? I ain't intimidated by it because I'm an addict, and these people in recovery too; they're going through some things, well I got support. So, I used it. Well, that's what I tried to do because I'm committed. (Participant 1011, African-American, 1 child).

Reentry obligations. Meeting all of the requirements for successful reentry was also a significant challenge. These included attending substance abuse treatment, reentry classes, and unscheduled drug screenings. The following quotes focus on the difficulties the women encountered in trying to meet all of their reentry obligations, often with limited tools and resources.

Because I remember the days that I would get up, get on the bus stop, and you know this guy tried to rob me one morning on the bus stop. Nobody else around. Nobody out. But I had to be out there. I had to get out there. I had to go to work because I had fees. I had to go to them classes or else

my parole would be revoked, so you – you couldn't be playing. You had to have a made-up mind. And this was a constant, everyday thing. Two years straight. Two years solid. And I thank God, I – it made structure in my life. You've got to be dedicated. You've got to want to make yourself better. You've got to make, you gotta want it. If you don't want it, then nobody's going to help you. And you're not going to be able to help yourself. (Participant 1009, African-American, 1 child)

Um, it was extensive. Like it was pretty, it was pretty, um...It kept you busy a lot. My aftercare is just now slowing down because the first three months they keep you very, very busy. Like they make you have classes, you UA [urine analysis] twice a week, you have to go to meetings, you have to meet counselors ...very busy. (Participant 1003, White, 4 children).

Well, being back in the community is tough because I have a lot of classes that I have to go and do. (Participant 1004, African-American, 2 children).

[I] go to my NA [Narcotics Anonymous] classes. Go to my counselor every Monday. I have re-entry court every first and third Thursday of the month...I wake up in the morning. Mondays, usually, my class is at 10 o'clock in the morning...My one-on-ones. We have this group session. I go to those on Mondays, which are pretty good. It helps me start my week off good. And, um I usually call a hotline every day, a random drug test

every day and see if I was selected to go take a drug test. I do those twice a week. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, I work in Dallas. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

Financial strain. One of the most significant challenges that the majority of the participants discussed was the financial strain they faced trying to navigate the community with limited resources. The following quotes described the trials the women faced trying to meet basic needs, such as housing and clothing, in addition to legal fees and trying to contribute to their families.

Comin' back into the community was a struggle to me because as comin' back into the community, I didn't have anything. No clothes, no shoes, uh, no anything. Only clothes that I had on me was, was, um, what the lady, um, donated to me while I was in prison. (Participant 1002, African-American, 12 children).

Money. Um, I owe a lot of money to the state...Um, not having a vehicle. (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

So, it's kind of hard, because I am not financially on my feet like I was before I went to jail. Like, I got evicted and all kinds of stuff. Now having to start all over, it's just frustrating but ... (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children)

When I came home, I came home with nothin.' I ain't have no clothes, no shoes, no place to stay [tearing up]. And it's just been an uphill climb since then. And sometimes it's struggle, other times it's not. I've only had,

uh, I've only gained employment once outside of [restaurant], since I've been home. Like legal employment. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children).

When I first came home I ended up living with family. I just got tired of it. And so I made up my mind to take me and my children to a women's and children's shelter...And that is where we lived for three and a half months...Um, yeah. It was real difficult to do. I have never had to do anything like that before. But at the same time, it was real helpful. (Participant 1001, African-American, 4 children).

For most of the participants, landing a job to relieve their financial strain was difficult because of their criminal backgrounds. The following quotes describe the hardships the women faced as they navigated the employment process:

You go out there and you come home with these marks on your back and you get to fillin' out them applications. And they get, the main question, uh, 'Have you ever had a felony conviction?' And you see the yes and no and that yes is this big [makes hand gesture] and no is little, and you try to battle. And you wanna be truthful, and then you don't wanna be truthful and be like, if I put no, they gonna find out. If I put yes. And so, it's just, you have to juggle that. And, uh, you know, I went through the, uh, job search programs that said 'Well put yes and then you say "will explain during interview."' And, um, it works! (Participant 1002, African-American, 12 children)

That's the difficult part. That's the frustrating...Because you, um, like I go to places and they say, oh they're background friendly. And then when they do. It's like, oh well not that type of. You know what I'm saying? Like, it's certain things that they accept and certain things that they, they won't accept...And so it makes it a little. It makes it a little frustrating... (Participant 1001, African-American, 4 children).

Finding a job was kind of difficult at first... Um, I mean, but it took me awhile to find it. Like, cause everybody looks at my background and they're like 'I don't want to hire you.' So, um, cause I also have an assault charge and evading arrest and stuff like that [laughs]. So not just the, the possession charge either... It took me like three weeks to find a job. (Participant 1007, White, 1 child).

It's kind of hard with our jobs, because not all jobs want somebody who's had drug abuse. That's kind of hard to explain to somebody who wants to hire you. "Look, I've got to take two drug tests a week, but I am not going to know what day I am going to be selected." That's kind of hard...Lately, I haven't really tried to get a job, because it's kind of embarrassing. So, I am just trying to find like a part-time job. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

Employment was the biggest struggle. When I came home in June, I hit the ground running. I came home, I went and enrolled in college. I was, um... June 2009. I didn't get a job until May 2010. I looked for a job a

whole and year and some change. I didn't get a job until May of 2010. I had that job for a year. I was still going to school. That's how I was able to, I mean with my school money, that's how I was able to get me a place to stay. That's how I was able to get transportation. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children).

Two participants discussed the heartbreak of first securing a job they enjoyed but then later being terminated from the job because of their background:

...and I worked there for a couple of weeks, and they came to me, they told me – they told my parole officer first, and she came and called me in the office and told me that they had fired me because of the felony that I had. And I had it – I had already established a relationship with most of the patients and I loved doing what I do. I'm good at what I do. I'm good with people. I love people. And that – that was hard. All the while I was in prison I never cried, but that day I cried in the office, I was so hurt because of that. Because they knew – you know they had to do a background check on me, they knew that I – I – you know I had established that job. I'm going to get an apartment. I'm going to – you know me and my son are going to move out. We still – I went right back to my Mom's. You know. And that hurt. That hurt. (Participant 1009, African-American, 1 child).

I worked that job for a year. And I was fired, but they ain't even have grounds on firing me. Somebody told them that I was stealing money or whatever. They counted my till down. The till was, it was supposed to be

what it was. That's what it was and it was just a whole lot of stuff going on. But they fired a whole lot of people. I just caught in the middle...Cause by then I had straightened my act up...But I got fired...For something I had...I didn't do. I wasn't stealing them people money. Mind you, I'm still on parole at this point...Why would I steal your money? And I'm still on parole... so it was just like, one knock down [claps hands] after another one...After another one, after another one, after another one, after another one. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children).

Another participant who encountered the same experience described wanting to fight the termination, but struggled against inviting the court system back into her life:

Um, actually that was the reason I left [fast food restaurant]. Actually, it wasn't a problem getting the job, but, um, a position came available for assistant manager, and I had the qualifications. I had the skills for it. And I actually put on there, when I got the cashier job I put on there that I had a record. I was a felon. And I'm telling, they told me there's not going to be a problem because it's a drug case. It don't have anything to do with money. It don't have anything to do with murder or children, any of these, so you should be good. They called me on a Sunday and said because of your criminal record, we can't hire you as an assistant manager. And since you applied for the position, we can't even keep you on as a cashier. And they fired me. Because of my record, and I was like, 'Well why would you

fire me, you know? You hired me as a cashier you, it's in black and white. And your question was have you had a felony in the last seven years?' No, I have not. You know. I haven't had a felony. And my felony was in 2000. And I started to actually fight it and then I was like I don't want to be in the court system. I don't want to be a part of that. You know because I just got through with that. And I don't want to have nothing to do with the police. I'm telling you – that if I see them before they seen me, I would go the other way. And I – you know because I didn't want to have nothing to do with them. But you know that was the only job that, um, actually let me go, because of my background. (Participant 1012, African-American, 2 children).

For other participants, their job after being released was their first legal employment and became a symbol of pride and achievement. This is highlighted by the following quotes:

Yeah, and then trying to find a job. Um, a normal job because before, um, before aftercare I was dancing. So I didn't have, I haven't ever had a normal job that requires me to work. So I am just used to getting money handed to me...So that was different....Um, it was frustrating at first. Very frustrating. Um, but when I realized I couldn't really change anything that was happening. I just calmed down a little bit. Um, and it didn't take me long to find a job after that. (Participant 1003, White, 4 children).

So, I had never worked before. I had never had a job in my life and my husband at the time, he was doing some stuff, because like I said, he was a youth counselor. So, he would be at these school programs and he knew the guy that worked at [car wash]... This is around the time when the Hurricane Katrina victims and the people were hurt. So they were hiring people to wash the cars at [car wash]. So they were going and asking, "Do you know anybody that needs a job?" He said, "My wife." He was really joking. The man said, "Tell her to come in." I had no driver's license back then and so I went in and I did the interview, and I went and got my driver's license. I started then at that was my first job... That was my first job and I made a lot of money doing it. (Participant 1014, African-American, 3 children).

I talked to the lady in the interview, and she hired me at [fast food restaurant]. I stayed there for a whole year. I never kept a job for a whole year. Never. And I was so proud of myself for achieving that. Was it a battle? It was. But, um, I didn't, I don't have a, a mom or a dad or anyone that I can go lean, depend on. So I had to work. (Participant 1002, African-American, 12 children).

However, there were also participants that did not have difficulty finding a job as evidenced by the following quotes:

Honestly, I find jobs easily. Like they're, obviously coming out and not having a vehicle and not really, I had to work wherever I could find a job.

So, I, the day I moved in over here. The next day I went looking for a job and I got three interviews. And I got hired at [fast food restaurant] on the spot. But [current job] is paying me ten and [fast food restaurant] was paying me eight, so I left there. And then, um, a girl that I was incarcerated with that was in the IDT program. She works for [staffing company] and she's the one, she comes and picks me up, picks me up to take me to events. So that's how I got that job. I mean I've worked since I was fourteen. So to me, making my own money is extremely important. I want to be able to take care of myself. Yeah, I mean it's not, I mean I kinda had to swallow my pride a little bit on where I was working, but money is money right now. (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

But see, they will hire you at the VA no matter – See, when they hired me at [job], it was just temporarily because it was, like, Christmas time. But I was so good, the White lady took me on. She just slap-adopted me, and she said, “You’re not going anywhere,” because when [they] start calling names, you know, for them to let you go, they said, “You’re not going anywhere.” I would always break out in a sweat. But they said, no, we’re going to keep you. So, they kept me...I still have a picture of her.

(Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children).

Rebuilding trust. Rebuilding trust was another challenge the participants faced upon reentry. This included the need to be forgiven as some of their criminal behavior had a significant impact on their families. In addition, there was the expectation to prove

themselves to now be reliable and accountable for their actions. The following quotes depict the road the participants were or are still on to reestablish those bonds with their family and communities:

Um, my sister-in-law gave me a second chance for me and my kids. Um, it's just like, I got everybody's numbers. Like, you know, they never gave me their numbers. Like never. So I got all six of my brothers' numbers, all five of my sisters' numbers. Uh, I write on Facebook. They talk to me on Facebook. Like, my support and my family is good now. (Participant 1005, Hispanic, 2 children)

I don't have a lot of family members left...It's just like my kids, my, or my sister that just came home for 8 years that we're trying to rebuild our relationship. (Participant 1004, African American, 2 children).

But the rest of my family, I, they don't have anything to do with me. I mean I'm hoping as they see me do better and, you know. I'm hoping they come around. I have a sister, um, we don't talk. We're okay with each other right now, but we don't talk. (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

I mean in my case, I did mess up. So I am not gonna blame it on anybody else, but when you are trying to fix yourself and stuff, it's kind of hard trying to prove everybody wrong, whenever you've done so much bad things in the past. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

Yes, I apologized to everybody, especially my niece. I promised my oldest niece; I said, "Once I get out of here, I never – I won't ever use drugs

again.” And I stayed clean for my 15 years. (Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children).

The participants also discussed gaining back trust with their children in particular as evidenced by the following quotes:

And I haven’t really, like I wasn’t really a great mom the last couple of years, you know? Like I made sure she [daughter] had food and she went to sleep and she was bathed and stuff. But as far as like building a relationship with her, and being there, you know? Like I’ve, you know. There’s lots of things I need to work on as far as that goes... Just like spending quality time with her and making her feel comfortable again with me to be able to talk to me about stuff....Where she can trust me. Cause I have to get her trust back, yeah. (Participant 1007, White, 1 child).

I think the shelter is kind of where it all started because we were able, um, counseling together. I then I guess we, just, we didn't have a choice. We were in this together and so we kind of just, we talked more. Just, just bonded more. And I think that was because of us going to, I think the shelter helped our, helped all of our relationships out a lot. (Participant 1001, African-American, 4 children).

The other biggest struggle was to gain the trust back among my family. That, that was the biggest struggle because, um, when I left out I had to finish. Uh, when I left out I had my older kids. When I came back home, I had two other kids that had recently got out of foster care that I didn’t talk

to. And so, the biggest fight was to explain to them the why's and how.

And why it's still goin' on. When is it gon' stop. (Participant 1002, African-American, 12 children).

Probably the most difficult thing was trying to regain trust...That was probably the hardest thing for me...From family. Um, from my boyfriend.

Um, and from my kids. Trying to prove to them that I wasn't gonna go anywhere again. I mean, I had, my kids had no idea about anything that I was doing that caused me to get incarcerated. They were very blinded. So when I just up and disappeared they were just in shock...You know.

Cause I sheltered them a lot...So they just didn't understand. It wasn't like some kids who watch their parents get arrested several times. My kids have never seen anything bad come from. So they were just like what the heck. [Chuckles] What happened? (Participant 1003, White, 4 children).

The best thing for [my son] to see was me doing exactly what I was doing.

That made him proud to see me take care of my business. And – and not wavering away from what I said because my word didn't mean anything before I left here. I'll be back in a few. I'll be back in a couple of hours. A couple of hours would be three or four days. Or I'm going to bring you this. Uh, I'm going to cash my check and we're going to go shop. That meant nothing. But for me to say what I say and mean what I mean, it's everything to him. And I think that's what turned everything around. I

know it was. That's where the trust goes. Not saying nothing – just doing it. (Participant 1009, African-American, 1 child).

Well, getting my relationship back with my son...Building a relationship with him....Rebuilding that relationship. And this is the closest we have been since I brought him into the world....And I had never – not been around him since then, since I got home this time again...So, rebuilding a relationship with him. And him, he picking up some things, and learning in the process how to go about information or something. (Participant 1011, African-American, 1 child).

Theme Two: Motherhood is a Hindrance to Reentry

The second theme focuses on how the role of motherhood was a hindrance to successful reentry for the participants. The majority of the women in the study were living with their children before their incarceration and reintegrated back into their children's lives in some way after their release. Upholding the obligations they had to their children, as well as the criminal justice system, often presented a conflict for the women. The following subthemes, *Reentry Obligations Versus Children's Needs*; *Key Conversations with Children*; *Impact of Reentry on Children*; and *Maternal Guilt* feature the various obstacles that motherhood presented to the reentry process and the effect on the mothers as well as the children.

Reentry Obligations Versus Children's Needs

As noted earlier, there were many requirements the women had to meet to make their reentry successful. Often these requirements had to be put before meeting the needs

of their children. In some cases, the women recognized that putting their needs first would be better for the parent-child relationship in the long run. The following quotes offer how the women navigated this process with their children:

And from the day I came home, I always wanted to get my baby back, but I had to think about what was best for him and not what was best for me. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children).

Well when people tell you, well let your family raise 'em until you get yourself straight, you should let your family, you know...Like when you get out of jail. You, you just got your kids. You wanted your kids and they're thrown on you, you're like 'Whoa...Whoa, what's going on? Like, you know. It's because as much as time that you want, cause you're locked up and you want 'em, reunite with your kids. You know, you gotta think about, okay, baby-steps. You gotta go baby-steps, I'ma about to get out. I got no money. I got no ride. I got nowhere to take my, like, you know. Lucky for me I have a, I had income when I got out. (Participant 1005, Hispanic, 2 children).

It's almost like you've got to start all over. Supporting, being that support system for your kids ... I don't know how to explain it. It's kind of hard, because you have to be more selfish for yourself now. As before, where you had to be a mother, now it's almost like that's getting taken away from you, because of the decisions you've made. I am just being positive

and just trying to take care of myself so that down the line, I'll be a better parent for them. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

Um, they wanted me at home all the time. And the aftercare was so extensive that I had to leave all of the time. And I had to explain to them, 'I know this sucks right now, but we have six months of this for Mommy to not ever have to go back.' (Participant 1003, White, 4 children).

Right now I'm living and breathing this aftercare. I mean they have us so busy it's absolutely insane. You know, I just need to get through this six months, which I'm already almost on month two. So, once that's over and I go back on regular probation I will be able breathe a little bit and, you know, really try to focus on [son] more than...Cause right now if I don't focus on this, I will, I'll go back to jail....And that's not doing him any good either...So, I'm having to sacrifice. (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

Another participant described the frustration and confusion of meeting her reentry requirements, but still not being able see her children because they were in another state and her parole mandates prevented her from being able to visit them.

But when I would go report, I would get so angry at my counselor because I wanted to go see my kids to try and make amends, and I was paying my fees and everything, and she's going to tell me no. I said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I haven't done anything wrong. I haven't used. And my

probation fees, you know, they're caught up." I mean, why can't I? And I would start to cry. (Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children)

Key Conversations with Children

All of the women discussed how reentering their children's lives involved a specific conversation about the experience in some way regarding their criminal behaviors, their incarceration, and how to build a better future. The following quotes highlight the different ways each of the women handled the conversation:

I told them the truth. "I chose crack over you. I chose the streets over you." That, that was hard. Um, that was hard for me to say (tearing up). But I tell them the truth so I can get past it. (Participant 1002, African-American, 12 children)

I am honest with them... They know, and since they've been younger, my youngest son, he's seen everything from whenever I used to get beat and ... I mean, he's seen me. I mean, it's not good to say but he's seen me high before. He doesn't like it. I mean, I am just real honest with them. There are times when he wants me to spend the night, and I have to tell him, "I can't spend the night tonight, because I have to be in court in the morning." (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

Like my kids know. You know, I'm not, I'm not gonna sit there with my kids and sugar coat stuff. You know what I'm saying? Oh, I tell them that. They know that I did bad things. You know. They know, um, I was always stuck in a room or...they know things...So, but, they don't what kind of.

They, they think I just drank alcohol...Or, what. So, the beer. They say "You don't drink beer. No more beer." You know. Every time we go grocery shopping, 'No we're not gonna get no more, no more beer.' Or they think I went to jail for smoking cigarettes. And they be like 'You need to stop smoking cigarettes, Mommy' [chuckles]...So, yeah. My kids know. They know. They, they're not dumb. So they know. I sit there. I. I'd rather have them, me tell them the truth than when they get older to find out. "Oh well you did it, so why can't I do it?" (Participant 1005, Hispanic, 2 children).

What I do is just try to be a testimony. You know what I've been through, son. You know what your mom has been through. You know my struggles. You don't have to do that. You know you don't have to live like that. You see what God has done in my life. How he's turned me around, and what you're doing and what I did and you'll end up where I was. It's just no other way around it. So, I just want the inspiration and the testimony, and I have been. Because a lot of those things have fell off...You just got to make them understand, you know, that you know that you – that was not even you. That's not – that wasn't even you... No, it was the drugs that took over, you know. And they just took control. (Participant 1009, African-American, 1 child).

I don't hide nothin' from my kids. Even with my 3-year-old, I don't hide nothin' from him either and he just 3. Anytime my kid call me and ask me

anything regardless to if I don't want to tell him, I tell him because if I don't tell him, somebody else will. And I don't want him, I mean he already feelin' some type of way that I was gone the first eight years of his life. So, like, I don't feel like I should have to lie to him about anything or not tell him something he want to know because somebody else feels it's gone, it may be better not, not to tell him. Like me and his grandmother, we had our words out at the fact that I told him that I was incarcerated cause she felt as though he didn't need to know that. But I feel as though he did. This is the reason why I wasn't there. You know what I'm saying? Instead of, cause I don't never want my son to feel like it's okay to put your education before you put your kids. Cause, I mean, it wasn't like, it was by choice, but it was pretty much I was forced to stay away. So, I mean, after I had that conversation with him, our relationship opened up a little bit more. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children).

In our home, it's parents, it's adults and our kids. We need to be honest with them about life experiences, because if we are not honest with them about life experiences, they go out there and experience it, and then they – it's like a crash course to them. You can actually give them a roadmap and by me going to jail and explain it to my kids, and the parent that I am, I can't tell you about nobody else, but I know the parent that I am.

(Participant 1014, African-American, 3 children)

Other women discussed the difficulty of having the conversation about their past behavior with their children.

They still don't know that I've ever used drugs. They don't, they don't know that it was a treatment program like that. Um, at first I had told them I got a bunch of tickets [chuckles] and then I told them that I was going to classes, um, to help me become a better person. A better mom, so I could be a better mommy to them. And they were like, "But you already are the best mommy" [chuckles]. That's what they told me. And I was like, well I can get better. (Participant 1003, White, 4 children).

Yeah, I try to explain not to do it. But I don't go in the depths of why I was there. Because I don't really want them exposed to the truth. Aspects of it. I just deal with the incarcerated part. That I was gone, you know. That I was gone for a while and they couldn't hug me. They had to see me through a glass. That, you know, if you disobey or break the law, that's where you're gonna end up at. So, I don't know if I, um, makin' em think I was a bad person or if I just made some mistakes. Cause I kinda say mistakes and breakin' the law. Tryna make them equal? But breakin' the law a little more extent than...I think that's helpin'. I don't know. Like I said, I've never been in this situation. I'm doing the best I can with what I got. (Participant 1004, African-American, 2 children).

I've, uh, been telling myself for years that he's just too young. He doesn't need, I don't need to have serious conversations about this, that, and the

other with my son. He's extremely smart and time's flying. And he's old enough now to comprehend and understand, you know. So I do my best to try to talk to him about real things. You know, the serious stuff. And I hope that he understands it, but I still feel like, I don't know. I feel like I need to shelter him. I've always felt that way. Very, very protective over him. So I don't, it's hard for me have serious conversations about what's really going on even though he knows. So that's, I mean I struggle with that. (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

I just told them I was so sorry that I didn't know that crack had so much power, it could just take control where you don't want to go home. You didn't care, you know what I'm saying? And I lost my apartment and...just let him throw everything. I said, I don't care. I was just wanting that dope. (Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children).

Some women discussed the positive impact the conversations had on the relationships with their children.

I'm like, "Do you remember seeing that stuff?" And she said, "No." And I'm like, "[daughter's name], you know." And she's like, "Yeah." I'm like, "Well, you know this is what I was doin'. And I was so focused and lost in that, like I didn't spend the quality time with you." Like she'd ask me to play the Wii, or go outside, or let's go to the park. And I was just too, I wanted to smoke, you know? Um, you know like I'm really sorry. You know I, and like, we both cried. I took her to an NA meeting, and she went

to an NA meeting. Um, she had, she had to grow up really fast.

(Participant 1007, White, 1 child)

They understand, you know like, we talked about it. And, we kind of talked about it and let it go... You know what I'm saying? And we've just been moving on... Ever since then, yeah... I always just let them know, you know. Because of the choices I made - And the things that I decided to do is the reason why I was there. So I let them know that choice, you know, the choices you make have a big effect on their lives. Yeah. We always talked about it. And the people that you associate with. (Participant 1001, African-American, 4 children).

Impact of Reentry on Children

The impact that their criminal activities and subsequent incarceration had on their children's behavior was discussed by all the participants. One participant described her pre-release anticipation of how her children would perceive her return:

I had to put some, some fears behind me far as how are my kids gonna react. What am I going to expect outta my kids when I get there. And how am I gon' react to their questions. How am I gon', um, react to their, um, "I don't want to be bothered with you, Momma." Or "You weren't there for me when I needed you." And so, my mom told me something. And my Momma told me before I got locked up, and before she passed. She said to me "Your kids come home, you gon' have to be filled with the Holy Ghost

to deal with your children.” (Participant 1002, African-American, 12 children).

Some of the women described the distress of seeing the impact that their criminal involvement and absence had on their children’s subsequent behavior:

When I came back. They all kind of felt in a way. And maybe, maybe it was out of anger because now that you back I can really let you know how I felt. You know what I’m saying. Because everyone’s attitude was basically like you can’t tell me what to do. Or kind of standoffish... Yeah, It was just weird... But I know it all came from, like I said, from anger. Because I went to jail one day when they were in school. They get out of school and Mom's just gone.... And for a while my mom didn’t even allow them to come see me. You know what I’m saying. So you know. It was just... Confusion. Not knowing what’s going on and with me being so far away. I mean it was just a lot and I can totally understand, but I don’t understand because I had never been through anything like that, but just I know how they feel. (Participant 1001, African-American, 4 children).

Yeah, it’s very. I mean, cause, he never did get in trouble in school. He really, he likes school but he’s been acting out since I came home... He acts out in anger... So he kicks walls and he throws things and stuff.

Where my, where the girl. She wants to be good... And I’ve noticed that where she used to be not as timid as she is now. Nothing hardly ever hurt her feelings like it does now, so. I think me being incarcerated did that and

she's tryin' to be good to keep me home or maybe, so she won't have to go, I won't have to go. (Participant 1004, African-American, 2 children). He knew the first time that I went that I was in jail. And after that he was terrified of cops. Like I got pulled over for my registration being out and he started bawling, "Don't take my mom to jail. Don't take my mom to jail." It broke my heart. You know, I had never really been in trouble before then. I hadn't been. Couple tickets here and there, but... (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

I'm like, "You can't do that. You can't stay where I'm at right now"...like I was talking to her step-mom last night and she said that, you know, she mouths off and she's says she wants to come be with me. And, they won't let her call me. Like, um, his mom won't let her call me, so, it's just, it's very hard. Like I can't wait to get her back down here because, you know, I was always very nice and making sure she had a relationship with them when he [father] wasn't part of her life. And so it's just very frustrating for them then be doing this, so, it's just aggravating. (Participant 1007, White, 1 child).

I mean, it's hard for them, because I'll leave, I'll have to drop them off at my mom's house and they start crying and stuff. So, my two oldest ones, they know now and they are more comfortable with it. They know I am going to be back, but my youngest one, she has separation anxiety real bad and she hates it. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

And he's the only child, so there are lot of ways I can tell, by the anxiety attacks he'd have, and there's the temperament; in his tone and temperament, when he'd get upset with me about something now.

(Participant 1011, African-American, 1 child).

Yes, because, you know, I lost a lot because my baby – my oldest was 13, and my middle son was 11. And it's like, I know they miss me. They was so hurt, they was terrified. And I just told them, I'm so sorry, you know.

And I walked those 12 steps, and I told them how sorry I was. (Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children).

However, one participant discussed a situation at her daughter's school that showed her how her reentry has had a positive impact on her children:

Well I went to go pick up my kid one day from school and she was, she tugs on her teacher. She goes "Ms. [Teacher], my mom is drug free now." I just looked and I just said "Are you serious?" Like, I wanted to be so mad, but I wasn't. I was proud. I was proud. Like she told her teacher that my mom was drug-free now. My mom was the mommy I want her to be.

You know. So, yeah... (Participant 1005, Hispanic, 2 children).

Maternal Guilt

The feeling of guilt was discussed by 13 out of 14 of the mothers. The guilt derived from a variety of factors including how their criminal behaviors kept them from being effective parents, being out of their children's lives while incarcerated, and now

struggling with the concept of having the right to parent. The following quotes expand on how the mothers reconciled the guilty feelings as they reentered their children's lives:

And it's, and you know, that's it, it's the guilt... You know. It's hard to let go of because, you know, I kinda got stressed out and angry at him [son] for not listening and not calming down when I asked him to. And like really feel guilty for trying to parent because you feel like you owe them for being gone. You know, for putting them through it... You know, so that guilt just... Um, that guilt is hard to get past. And I know that to do better and to him, it, I, I can't change what's happened. I can only do better from here. (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

Um... I know I can say I felt like I let them down because of the things because of the different things that they had to go through. (Participant 1001, African-American, 4 children).

Because we don't know... How to help the children come back and, uh, you know. Try to at least take away the part that we been absent... And me, myself, I know I give a lot of my time to talking about the part. What did they, how did they feel when I was gone? And a child 8 and 6 really don't know how to explain that. (Participant 1004, African-American, 2 children).

I lost her [daughter] trust, you know. And just, not while I was in jail, but decisions that led me to jail... Um, and they've got to come first. Like I lost sight of that somewhere in my addiction and, and that sucks. Like it's,

like I hate that I missed out on that time, you know. (Participant 1007, White, 1 child).

...but for them to see me the first time in jail was really hard for them because ... it was hard. I started crying when I went out of the visitation and I was beating myself up, because I never thought I'd be in that position, seeing them from the other side of the glass and ... I would talk a lot about my baby's daddy about it, and there I was in the same position. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

Yeah, he [son] comes here and stays. And he helps me as he can...But other than that, I don't question him or anything. And it's from guilt over the years I didn't raise him properly. I wasn't no mother. And he got a lot of issues, you know? (Participant 1011, African-American, 1 child).

And I knew I had hurt them, you know, because I had a choice to either [have] drugs or my children and I chose drugs because I had no idea that crack was so powerful, you know what I'm saying? To separate me and my babies. (Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children).

Some participants discussed the guilt of witnessing their children repeat some of their same criminal behaviors and working to set a different example for the future:

And when I was locked up, he was into gangs and selling drugs and you know doing what angry young men do. And, um, when I came home, there was a lot of if you would have been here, and you left me and you

know. But I had to keep praying to God and keep showing him that I love him and I can't do anything about the past, but I can do something about the future. I can't change that. I can't change what I did or what I was or none of that, but I [can] starting today. (Participant 1009, African-American, 1 child).

You know I took blame for that. Because if I had been the mother that I know that I am, that I can be, my kids should have never went to prison. Never should have been there. You know. They should have never, I'm talking about they should have never experimented with drugs or anything. You know. And so, it was like I was, I feel guilty. I had to continue to apologize to her [daughter]. You know because I feel I was wrong. (Participant 1012, African-American, 2 children)

One participant described how she worked through a difficult situation with her son to stop the continued feelings of guilt, and it helped them move on to a better place:

And kids play parts. Now the kids play the part. You know, there was a, in some of my kids, they was still bitter. They was still angry...let me give you an instance. I had just [got] out and, um, we went to my reentry program. Got my boys, um, got one of them back in school...Well we go pick em' up they up there cuttin' up. Well I got on one of them. The other one, my youngest one ran out. And he was cussin' "F-ya'll" ... "Ya'll aint did nothin' for me." So, at that point, my ex-husband took me home. I was

in the house. I grabbed my purse and said 'I'm not finna [about to] do this. I'm just not gon' go through it.' And that was my first test and trial...And so as I sat there with my prayers on the side of me. I was sayin to myself "You got two things, you go out there and lose, or you can stick right here and win..." And so I stuck right there and win. I'm still here today. But I did let him know that's yo' last time cussin' me though...Because even though I, we went through this... You're not gonna make me feel bad because I already done paid for that...And all of them know it...We're not going through it...No, you're not gonna keep making me pay for something that I already repaid. And I'm still paying for. (Participant 1002, African-American, 12 children).

Another participant described how she avoided the tendency of some released parents to want to buy their children's affection because of their guilty feelings:

But every time I went and seen him [son], I didn't have no gift for him cause I wasn't trying to buy his friendship. I wasn't trying to buy his love. I wasn't trying to buy his respect. You gon' respect me as your parent and that's it. I mean, I respect my son feelings. I have, uh, I do have communication with my son. I don't, I'm not one of the parents that, my son don't have to be afraid to let me know that I done upset him...But I know a lot of parents that came out of jail buying they kids. So now they kid 16, only thing they kid do is call when they want something. My kid

don't call me when he want something. My kid call me when he want to talk. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children).

Theme Three: Motherhood is a Motivator for Reentry

The third theme found focuses on how the role of motherhood was a motivator for successful reentry for the participants. All of the women described in some way how their children had a positive impact on their behavior by motivating them to set a different example or being encouraged by their children's support of their success. This is outlined in the subthemes: Breaking the Chain; Children as Encouragement; and Not Giving Up.

Breaking the Chain

All of the participants noted in some way how important it was for their children to make different choices and not repeat their same mistakes. The following quotes depict the desire for the mothers to use their experiences to help break the cycle of incarceration with their children.

I'd rather have them, me tell them the truth than when they get older to find out. It's not good being in jail. You're going to, you're, if you do something bad you're going to jail. If you skip school, you're going to jail. If you steal, you're [sighs]. You know, I want them to be right so they won't. I want to break the chain. (Participant 1005, Hispanic, 2 children).

In the incarcerated mothers and, and mothers that's on drugs and they have to [parents] have to portray something totally different. We have to step out of the norm. Now really that's the abnormal, but we have to step

out of the abnormal to come back into the norm. (Participant 1002, African American, 12 children).

I went through this, so I am making sure that my kids are not (Participant 1014)

You know, I've raised [my son] very well. And, I mean I resent my dad and I do not speak to him and he was a drug addict, an alcoholic and he was in and out of jail my entire life. So, I don't want him to hold that resentment and stuff towards me like I do my dad. (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

I mean she's ten, but she's very smart. She's got street smarts like nothin' else and it scares me [laughs]. Um, but I've always tried to be honest with her about stuff. You know. Um, cause I want her to feel like she can do that with me. I don't feel like I can do that with my mom. Like, I, there's certain things that I just won't talk to my mom about. And I don't want that relationship with my daughter, so... (Participant 1007, White, 1 child)

The participants also explained how they used their past experiences and newly acquired coping skills to help their children. This is supported with the following quotes:

I was like "It will help me raise you better if anything you know?" The stuff that I learned will be stuff that I can use forever. That I didn't have those skills growing up. My mom didn't teach 'em to me. So hopefully me being able to teach all the skills I've learned to them. Will keep them, you know, on the right path. So that's the way I had to look at it the whole

time. Because I'm gonna get some benefit from it. It'll help me, you know, raise my children to be better people if anything. (Participant 1003, White, 4 children)

I had my son when I was 18 and I was about going to clubs and doing all this stuff, but when I turned 18, I was pregnant. So I was like, I couldn't even do anything. So, my biggest thing is for like not to get tattoos and enjoy life, be a kid. Play sports. Focus more on what's going to get them further in life....and not to be a follower. I was always a follower. Even if you are alone and you don't have that many friends, as long as you have one good friend that's all that really matters. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children)

My kid, my oldest, he know right from wrong. My youngest, he learning right from wrong. If you know something about to happen, that's against the law, leave. Not only leave, if they already in the act, call the police, man...Like don't, don't, don't do what yo' mama did. Like I do not want my kid to do what I did. I was never a follower, I was always the leader, so any trouble I got into, trust me, it was mine. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children).

Be aware of people; don't be so trusting—that. That's why I tell him to use your own head, you know? Or somebody else is going to use it for you because we have a tendency to say, "Well, my friend – my co-workers say

it, or my friends say it, and there is not” – I said, “No, you’re looking up for yourself.” (Participant 1011, African-American, 1 child).

I would say, “Baby, change your life.” What you’re doing is not good. And I’m not telling you from what I know, I’m telling you from experience. It ain’t what I heard. I live that life. I say and they sent me to prison. I say the life you’re living, you’re going to jail or you’re going to get to the graveyard. It’s one of the other, you know. I’m just blessed to go to jail. (Participant 1012, African-American, 2 children).

Children as Encouragement

The participants discussed how their children often encouraged their efforts and were helpful during their reentry process.

...and then my kids. Is another part of my life. Um, that keeps me pushin’. And then I have, I have a grandson that’s on his way soon. So I have nine grand-kids. Those are my motivators. And, uh, because I don’t want my grand-kids to grow up and they lookin’ for they grandma. “Well how is she? She locked up.” I don’t want them to think of me as that. I want them to know that they grandma has been in they life and our granny was fun or whatever. I just want them to know that, that they have a grandmother. (Participant 1002, African American, 12 children).

I’m doing it for them. I don’t know if I didn’t have my children that I would still be doing right to be honest. (Participant 1003, White, 4 children).

With my kids. They kinda, they know I love my grand-kids so they put the grand-kids on me a lot. They bring the grand-kids for me to keep a lot...Thinkin' that, okay that will help me...Not want to use cause I know I don't want to be separated from them again...So I, I keep my grand-kids a lot because of that... Cause I think that's the way my kids talkin to me and saying that, um, "We missed you, we don't want you to go down that road again." They figure if they placed the grand-kids there, I'll be more likely not to use....Yeah, they use my grand-kids for motivation. (Participant 1004, African-American, 2 children).

You know, but then I can only motivate and encourage myself so much. I need somebody to say you doin' good. Job well done. Keep at it. You know. And that's what I've got. With my kids, they finally came around. Yeah. (Participant 1012, African-American, 2 children).

I looked at my kids...When I look at them, I just can't ... No matter what phase I am in or whatever is going on, I look at my kids because my kids are looking at me. If they see me break, they are going to shatter, because they get their strength from me. (Participant 1014, African-American, 3 children).

One participant discussed a promise she made to her son as a motivation to stay clean:

I mean, and [oldest son] said, "I'll never talk to you again if you ever use drugs." But I promised them – I said, I promised, the crack, I would never ever in my entire life give nothing that power – that kind of power over

my life again. I mean, it took everything from me. It took – I mean, took everything. (Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children).

Not Giving Up

The women also noted the importance of not giving up during the more difficult times of the reentry process. Often, the relationship with their children kept them going as observed in the following quotes:

But I guess if you're, if you're headstrong, you know. And if you're doing it for your children, then. You know, you just do whatever possible to break those barriers. And just keep moving forward. Cause like I said, there's many a days where I just be wantin' to throw my hands up. But now I'm startin' to look at the longevity of things and it's just not worth it. You just got to keep pushin.' It, it's, it's gonna get better. (Participant 1001, African-American, 4 children).

Now kids gone try you. But they know what me and they daddy gone take, and what we're not gone take. Do I worry at the end of the day, is they gone love me? No, I don't know cause they do, they do. They don't, they don't. I still got to live my life. And still I got to keep it pushin because sooner or later, when they rocks fall down, they gotta come stand on mine. (Participant 1002, African American, 12 children)

It's never too late...To, to try and rebuild with them. I mean it's your kid. Well and I guess that's different for everybody. Because like my mom, I

have issues with my mom, but that she will always be my mom, you know... And so I think that, I instilled that in my daughter to an extent, but I realize that some people aren't that way, so. I mean, you know, just keep tryin'...They'll eventually come around. There were some ladies that I had, that I met in rehab that, you know they're like 50 and 60 in rehab. And they're trying to reconnect with their kids and, you know, one lady finally got her oldest son to be like 'Alright, I'll talk to you.' Um, but it kills, you know, it killed me...So, you gotta stop making bad choices and prove to, you got a lot of proving to do. Proving yourself to, not just them, but everybody that you're not that same person, so... (Participant 1007, White, 1 child)

It is such a gift to be a good mother. It is such a gift to have a place for your children to come and they be safe. It is such a good feeling to have your grandchildren and you know you can take care of them, and you won't desert them and you won't leave them. You know what I'm saying? It is such a good thing. A good feeling to know that everything you did didn't take you out. It didn't take you out, and you're still here. And it's possible to get out of what you're in. And it's possible to have a productive life. It's possible to be a good mother – a good grandmother. A good sister. A friend. And it's possible to live again. (Participant 1009, African-American, 1 child)

Several of the women also discussed the importance of society, in general, not giving up on them because of their motivation to be better for their children. This is highlighted in the following quotes:

If a mother, if a lady comes to you she just home from prison, if she come and say “Could you give me a job? Could you give me the chance? If you give me a chance, I’ll show you that I will be your hardest worker.” I’m talking about you even have one to come and say, “I’ll work just give me a try. Give me a week with no pay. Let me just show you what I can do.” Give that lady a chance. Give her a chance. Let her work. If she ain’t doing nothing but sweeping the parking lot. Because I’m talking about, there was a time I said let me put, pick up the trash. Just give me a job.

You know. I just needed a chance. And when she gave me that chance, I’m talking about boy, that was the chance that I, that was the job that I went and I said give me a job. You know what I’m sayin’? (Participant 1012, African-American, 2 children)

They think you just can’t change... I don’t know. It just, not to think that we’re hopeless. You know. Um, I saw. My family wasn’t like that. But I saw a lot of that while I was in there. That people just thought. Cause there were some people that are in there for their fourth and their fifth time...

You know? And they’re like “Oh, those people aren’t gonna change.”...It’s not true. They’re out there doing amazing now. You know? So just, you know, don’t count us out yet. Especially if you have

children. Cause there's always gonna be a reason...Like, if we have children. Then like you should definitely not count us out. That should, that's the reason for us to get out and go, you know, do the right thing. (Participant 1003, White, 4 children).

Theme Four: Strengths for Successful Reentry

The fourth theme highlights the various sources of strength that the participants identified to be helpful during the reentry process. These strengths ranged from internal elements they found within themselves to external resources such as reentry programs and counselors. The discussions illustrated the notion that that strengths for successful reentry can be found in a number of different places. The subthemes include *Inner Strengths; Spirituality; Support Networks; and Reentry Services*.

Inner Strengths

All of the woman discussed an inner strength that has helped them in some way during the reentry process. This is highlighted in the following quotes.

You know, like, I kind of always knew these things about myself, but, um, I'm a leader. You, know, I'm a good leader. I, I know that I'm a good listener. I'm a good friend. I'm just a good person all the way around. Like I've been voted in to be the president of our [Sober Living Facility], which means that I pretty much conduct everything and stuff like that. Which before I would have never done anything like that because I was using and I was being stupid. But these are traits that I've always had in me and I just never, I never used them. So, I'm determined. I'm a really nice

person. Um, I'm a hard worker. I'm dependable. I mean there is a lot of things about me that I'm learning that are really gonna work in my favor. (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

My background, me coming from a strong group of women. I was raised by a strong group of women. And havin' a lot of wisdom. (Participant 1004, African-American, 2 children).

Getting through ... Let's see, being able to get through this whole situation, before I would just turn to drugs or go back to the streets and just say, "I don't know what to do with this no more," and stuff... Yeah. Not running away from it, basically. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

I'ma push through regardless. Regardless to the situation, I'ma handle it. I never, I'm never intimidated with a situation. I'm a quick thinker. And I mean, problem solving. Like I think on my toes. I can pretty much, I can tell if the situation finna [about to] go bad cause I done been in so many bad situations. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children).

And that hope is my strength. I don't have to never use no more. I don't have to be the person I was in the past, and I'm— I'm a changed person today, and I like showing it. So, that's my strength. I like [Name] today. (Participant 1011, African-American, 1 child).

Yeah. That's [encouragement] what I basically needed. And I'm talking about just because I didn't have that when I very first came home. And I was trying to find it, you know. I was trying to find it. And that's why I did a lot of stuff within myself. And I had to, like I said, happiness to start within. You know what I'm sayin'? So, I said happiness starts within. The encouragement has to come from within. You know the motivation has got to come from within. (Participant 1012, African-American, 2 children).

So, so I may be different from everybody and having that confident and determine that I can do this and do right. And put into place and do it, then instead of saying it. That's where my self-esteem might can control myself. I can control what kind of person I am. I always used to be like, if somebody says I'm this kind of person, I would become that person. (Participant 1005, Hispanic, 2 children)

And learn how to be happy again. I forgot what being happy was like. Like I was unhappy for so long and I just tricked myself into believing I was happy. Um, and like finding me. Cause I defined myself as [boyfriend]'s girlfriend for so long. Like, I don't know. I was stupid. I was completely lost in him. Like wrapped up in him. And, like I have myself back. (Participant 1007, White, 1 child).

Cause I'm normally the type that I'll listen to what everybody has to say and take advice from everybody. And at the end of the day I'm still. I still don't have it together cause I, you know what I'm saying? Cause. But now

I just gotten to where I, I just have to figure it out on my own and I'm just gone go my own separate way and do what's, what works for me and my girls. (Participant 1001, African-American, 4 children)

One participant described in great detail a time when she almost gave up and relied on her inner strength to help her pull through:

What defines strength in me is that no matter what I go through, I am not going to fold. I'm not gonna bend...God didn't appoint me to be my kids' mama for me to give up. There were times, I am not going to lie to you, I wanted to give in. There were times I sat on my floor in my room and took 18 tramadol to try to commit suicide, just because of stuff that was going on and I didn't understand, but there was also in that moment, I had to ..This is after. There were times that I had to go through that moment just that pitiful moment and stand back up and say, look at you. This is dumb. Who does that? I knew self-talk. I talked to myself all the time. Who does that? That's so stupid. Why am I sitting here, taking these pills? Who'll get my kids to school in the morning? Who will cook for them? Who is going to wash their clothes? I had to go through that moment by myself, with myself to put me back on track, because every now and again, people go through stuff and they don't deal with it, and they break. Whereas for me, I'm up and I walk fast. (Participant 1014, African-American, 3 children).

Spirituality

Faith and spirituality was named by all but one of the participants as a strength that helped them navigate the reentry process as evidenced by the following quotes.

I can't say I have any strength of my own. My strength comes from The Lord. I don't make no decisions without him. You know I pray about everything. I don't want to do anything on my own anymore because I know what my own can do. (Participant 1009, African-American, 1 child).
You know it's like for me I'm, I'm real big with God. And I live by, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13. I live by that. That's my strength. You know. I stand on it. You know I'm talking about I have, you know strengths where I can, you know I can tell somebody something. You know some good advice here, and get some good advice there. You know but a lot of people don't always want to hear that. So, my strength for me is God. You know I'm talking about that's who I did it with. You know that's my support system. Everybody like that. That was my support system. (Participant 1012, African-American, 2 children).

Find you a higher power or your God, or, I'm not gon' say whatever God. But find your spirituality. Because spirituality to me, it worked for me. It played a major part in my life. Reading my word. Praying in the AM. Uh, talking to a sponsor. Uh, uh, going to a NA meeting or going to church. Or going to a function to see other womens that actually made it in life. That

plays a major part in your life as well. (Participant 1002, African American, 12 children).

You know, but I just prayed to my higher power and, and it got me to where I'm out right now, you know. And keep praying, you know. You don't want no drama in your life, don't bring drama in your life. (Participant 1005, Hispanic, 2 children).

I really want to get back into church. I just haven't, I haven't taken the step to. But it's important to me, so I really need to find a good church group where I can get involved in. (Participant 1006, White, 1 child).

I became closer to God, spiritually. I am not as negative as I was before. That's one of the main things that would just push me back to either going back to jail or not staying clean. It was, um, being negative about the whole situation that I was in. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

God saved me from myself...I was on the path of destruction out here. The only thing, it was only one or two ends for me anyway. And that was either the grave or the jail. So, I'm just grateful that I'm still alive. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children).

I pray to a higher power, which I choose to call God...So, and that's why I said it's a spiritual relationship. I'm developing this positive and constructive thought. Me being able to do the right thing for the right reason in the process of my 24 hours a day. I just got 24 hours. So, whatever I can do when I'm not doing things with, you know what I mean,

I keep it simple. I can't get overwhelmed because when life— when life turned show up since I've been clean and out here in society, that's when I call on people I know. But me— and my sponsor had taught me it's a habit. Breathe, pray first, and then seek the solution. (Participant 1011, African-American, 1 child).

One woman described how faith helped her prepare for the reentry process:

It was hard, because I am attached to my kids. That was the hardest part, because I cried every day and everybody said, "Stop crying, because quit worrying about the world" and my world is out there. So I am going to worry about it, because I am their mother, and my kids need me. Looking back on times back then to now, I thank God that it happened back then. I've got to worry about it now, because my kids really need me now. So just imagine now, my son got murdered and I was in jail, and couldn't do nothing about it. You know, so things happen for many different reasons. When I came home, I had already had a plan. (Participant 1014, African-American, 3 children).

Another woman discussed how she relied on faith to help her retain employment after being released and was inexperienced with working on computers.

I prayed about everything. And when I got the job at the hotel, it was like — Because when I started at the hotel, I was making — they started me out with \$8 an hour, and I didn't know anything about a computer. And it was God, and I said, "Lord Jesus, thank you." The supervisor told me, he said,

“If you don’t do any better, then we’re going to have to let you go.” I came home, I got my anointing oil. I opened it up, I prayed over it, I took it back, I put my— I took it to work, I put it on my hands, and anointed every computer there at the front desk, and I got good. (Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children).

Support networks

The participants spoke of support networks made up of various people as a part of their support system. Family was prominent for many of the participants:

But some families do take people’s kids away, you know...But, my family wasn’t taking my kids away...And, um, all they want is best for me and my kids. And so when I got my kids back, I had to go get their birth certificates, get their social security, get their shot records. Try to find a school where I want to put them in, a good school...Um, get their school supplies. Get, they didn’t get no, uh, get school year uniforms you know. I didn’t have money. I just got out. So with the resources I have, they all came to help me. (Participant 1005, Hispanic, 2 children).

Romantic partners were also a significant part of the support networks by offering encouragement and guidance during difficult times:

The first time [being released] I didn't need nothing. Because I already knew what I was doing. The second time I know I needed someone to accept me for me. To accept me for my good, my bad, my ugly and for whatever was to come. I needed someone to love me and say it's okay. We're going to get through this. We can do this together and that man [husband] in there is the one who did that.... You know what I'm sayin'? There's a lot of days I just want to give up. I don't want to do it no more. And he was like "man come on." He said "That ain't none of you. You a soldier. You are stronger than that. You know you can't give up."

(Participant 1012, African-American, 2 children).

I mean even my dude right now. The dude that I'm with right now, he that, that motivation right there, I can't get from nowhere. I ain't never got that motivation right there. Like... Like he just let me know regardless of what it is, I can handle it. Like, he always let me know regardless of how big my problem may seem, it ain't never bigger than me... And if I need some help figuring out a solution, he come sit down and hash it out with me, or find me some help puttin' my plan into motion. He gone sit down and help me do that. Like, I mean, just, he always tell me "Whatever you wanna do, you can do it. Whatever you wanna do, baby, you can do it. Just let me know what you wanna do so we can start workin' on it." Just, it's always the same, just every day. And then he always ask me, "What you, what

you learn today. Like, what new you learn today.” Like every day. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children).

The women also spoke about receiving support at the community-wide level with churches and women’s shelters.

My support system was basically spiritual. And I do give the credit to God, but I give God the credit for saving my auntie so that she could be able to minister to me. And I – my Pastor ministered to me, and then I had older women in the church that would tell me oh God is getting you ready to do this, and I would be smoking a cigarette blowing smoke in their face. You know and I’m like yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever. But they believed in me. And they prayed for me. Somebody prayed for me. (Participant 1009, African-American, 1 child).

They were a big help to me and my children...The shelter. Um like I said, and we just actually left there maybe about 3 and half weeks ago. [I am] in a program that is helping me pretty much get back on my feet. I also met [mentor], um, through um, the shelter program. And so that is how we have been corresponding. She has been giving me a lot of jobs. She’s been really, really helpful...She really has...Yeah so me and my kids went through this program and now they’re helping us with a place to live...Um, I’m with Transforming Lives. (Participant 1001, African-American, 4 children).

Reentry services

The women discussed reentry programs that were helpful for them as they returned to the community.

[Intensive Day Treatment] taught just how to be a normal person. Um, I was not. I didn't have all these skills. Like, um, I had no idea how to be assertive and communicate the way that I felt. Um, I had no idea how to set boundaries for myself which caused me to be very unhappy. Um, and this program teaches you all of that. (Participant 1003, White, 4 children). Pathfinders. And Cornerstone...Financial wise, helping me with my, I'm getting my glasses. My kids' clothes. Being supportive, talkin' to me, tellin' me you got that. Like I need that. I need somebody that says "You got this, you can do this. I'm so proud of you. Encouragement. Like I need that. If I don't have that...I, um, but I need to stop supporting on men when I know they're gonna be there. You know what I mean?

[Pathfinders] have so much faith in me. They wonder what, if I don't text or call them, they'll be like "Uh, what's going on. How you doing? Uh, we haven't heard from you." You know. So, just to hear from them. Feels good. (Participant 1005, Hispanic, 2 children).

The participants also discussed the importance of substance abuse treatment such as NA or other programs that were helpful towards their sobriety as evidenced by the following quotes:

But I went to Nexus rehab in Dallas. And I was there for 28 days. I recommend it to anybody. And it's an all-women's rehab and stuff like

that. I learned a lot there...Um, how to be happy by myself. Without using... Like my Pa Pa died while I was there. And so, like that was a big trigger for me. Like all I wanted to do was go get high. Um, and I, I learned how to feel stuff again. Like actually feel it, you know?

(Participant 1007, White, 1 child).

One woman who lacked those reentry services vocalized the need to have more of them available to mothers as they reenter back into the community and their families:

There need to be more resources than just put us back in the community, tell us we have to go to these classes. There needs to be counseling. I mean there needs to be counseling. There needs to be financial support because they just drop us in. They're no jobs, cause a lot of us with the background, it's hard to find jobs. Me, I know. (Participant 1004, African-American, 2 children)

The women identified various professionals, including counselors and parole officers, they worked with in the community who offered encouragement and went the extra mile to help them.

It was counseling because if I missed anything while I was incarcerated, I knew a good counselor could pick that out for me as far as me and her conversating and she tellin' me, uh, that how, the when, the where and the what to do. And by her by talking to me, um, she can help me with my strengths and my weaknesses where I needed to be, uh, rooted and

grounded in and counseling was good. (Participant 1002, African American, 12 children).

My parole officer, I mean she just kept me motivated. She kept me encouraged. She put me in classes that helped me. Even when times got hard, like, it was just the fact that I had, I had this support group. I could talk to my P.O. about anything. So, I mean, I in contact with her still to this day. So, like, that woman had, that woman saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. (Participant 1010, African-American, 2 children)

Ever since then, [parole officer] and I are friends. She encourages me and I encourage her. We don't go out and have tea time or nothing like that, but I can still pick up my phone right now and say, [parole officer], are you busy? I am having a moment today. She'll talk to me. Sometimes, it doesn't always end that way when you are in probation or parole. They don't care about what you are going through or nothing, but I found that in her (Participant 1013, African-American, 3 children).

For those women who were currently not seeing a counselor, they mentioned the desire to start counseling services to help them and their children.

Even for the children. There needs to be counseling, not only for us, there need to be counseling for the children. Because not only are we damaged, the children are the most damaged ones when the parents' reentry... You know like, therapy for the children... I think that, that if they could put some therapy for the children to learn how to handle the main source of

the family being gone. Cause, for me, I think the mother is the main source...That keeps the glue on the family...And, uh, there's not a lot of resources to help the mother or the children...and there's not a lot of knowledge about it. (Participant 1004, African-American, 2 children).

I've got to see if my kids will be open to doing it. Cause I know there is a lot of stuff that they do. They are probably curious about certain stuff and I need to tell them the whole thing. I mean, nobody wants to sit down and tell their children about drugs. I don't think I am really the right person to explain that to them, because I haven't had a good experience with that. So, I think having another person sit down with us and explain to them in a better way, like help me explain it, I think it would be healthy for us. (Participant 1008, Hispanic, 3 children).

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this phenomenological study that examined the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers. The sample size for the study was 14 formerly incarcerated mothers who had at least one minor child at the time of their reentry. Participants were interviewed face-to-face throughout the DFW area. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and analyzed for emerging themes. Confidentiality was maintained through assigning number codes for each participant and keeping all identifying information locked in a file cabinet that could only

be accessed by the researcher. Triangulation was adhered to through the utilization of field notes, research assistants, and member checking.

Four distinct themes emerged which included Reentry is Challenging: Preparation Before Release, Walking On Eggshells, Reentry Obligations, Financial Strain, and Rebuilding Trust; Motherhood is a Hindrance to Reentry: Reentry Obligations Versus Children's Needs, Key Conversations With Children, Impact of Reentry on Children, and Maternal Guilt; Motherhood is a Motivator for Reentry: Breaking The Chain; Children As Encouragement; and Not Giving Up; and Strengths For Successful Reentry: Inner Strengths, Spirituality, Support Networks, and Reentry Services. The participants' experiences were displayed with quotes in their own words that highlighted their lived experiences of navigating the reentry process with the unique impact of motherhood on their journey.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the reentry experiences of incarcerated mothers. A particular focus was given to what the mothers identified as strengths for them during this experience. A phenomenological approach guided the study as a way of capturing the participants' voices and the meanings they placed on their reentry experiences. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were completed with 14 participants throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth-Metroplex. There were four themes that emerged from the study: Reentry is Challenging; Motherhood is a Hindrance to Reentry; Motherhood is a Motivator for Reentry; and Strengths for Successful Reentry. The following chapter offers a discussion of the findings and conclusions for the study. As well, the study's limitations are highlighted in addition to implications and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Theoretical Framework

The findings connected to the family systems theoretical framework in several ways. This study examined how a disruption in the system, a formerly incarcerated mother's return to the community, impacted the behaviors and relationships of the entire system. The results of the study indicated that their return impacts the parent-child subsystem as they try to break the chain of incarceration with their children. The importance of the conversations they have with their children about their criminal

behavior, incarceration, and the declarations to do things differently are clearly evident in these conversations. In addition, each woman discussed in some way how their behavior, absence, and then return had some type of significant impact on the children's behavior. The mothers also discussed the need to rebuild trust with the larger family system, including family members and caregivers of their children.

Buckley (1967) noted that social systems are in a constant state of self-organization and behavioral changes based on the mandates of internal and external stimuli. After a mother is released from prison, the family as well as larger societal system grows and changes to accommodate her reentry. The majority of the women in the study discussed financial and job strain upon reentry. Some of the women noted that there were employers who admired their persistency and provided them employment when they otherwise would not. This is an example of the community system adjusting to accommodate the changes the newly released women presented to it. In addition, all of the mothers continued with their environment within the criminal justice system as many of them were on parole or in a mandated substance treatment program. Their obligations to those systems impacted the parent-child subsystem and family system as many of those requirements took time away from their families.

Theme One: Reentry is Challenging

The first theme was Reentry is Challenging. The women discussed many difficulties associated with being released from prison back into the community including financial strain, finding employment, staying away from illegal substances and bad influences, and rebuilding trust with their families and community. This aligns with

previous studies that discussed the challenges of reentry. Hayes (2009) noted the difficulties of reentry in general including finding jobs and housing with a criminal background. (Richie, 2001) also discussed the difficulties released inmates face including returning to poor neighborhoods, trying to find legal employment, and the needs for substance abuse treatment. As well, there are gender specific needs that should be met for formerly incarcerated including family reunification and violence prevention strategies.

Theme Two: Motherhood is a Hindrance to Reentry

There was also the finding of motherhood being a hindrance for successful reentry. These challenges included having to fulfill reentry obligations over parental duties at times, having difficult conversations with children about past criminal behavior, and witnessing the impact the experience had on the child. These findings are supported by several studies. Brown and Bloom (2009) noted the difficulties of newly released mothers can face while on parole. In addition to financial obligations and meeting parole requirements, they are also reassuming their roles as mothers.

Berman (2005) highlighted that gender does make a significant difference when understanding the needs of reentry. Women are more likely to return to their children and so aspects such as finding transportation, housing, and staying sober become even more vital. Petersilia (2001) discussed how mothers who have not seen their children while incarcerated can be unaware of the impact their absence has had on the child. These children could experience a variety of challenges including feeling abandoned, behavior problems, and low self-esteem. The finding of the mothers wanting to break the chain of incarceration was supported by Greene, Hanley, and Hurtado (2000) who observed the

importance of mothers breaking the cycle of incarceration in their families. They called for programs that help women recognize their own trauma histories and risk factors in order to do something different with their children.

Theme Three: Motherhood is a Motivator for Reentry

There was also the theme that motherhood can be a motivator for successful reentry. Berman (2005) noted that healthy relationships with children and family can be instrumental to a formerly incarcerated mother's success. It would be beneficial for more programs to address the challenges of reentry for mothers including counseling programs that address family reunification and child well-being.

Barnes and Stringer (2014) found that even when mothers are imprisoned, they maintain a strong motherhood identity. Upholding positive relationships with their children and caregivers while in prison, strengthens their post-release expectations and the desire to be reunified with their child.

Robbins, Martin, and Suratt (2009) suggested that children can be a significant motivator for formerly incarcerated mothers to initially seek substance abuse treatment. Women who completed a substance abuse program were more likely to not experience rearrests and remain drug free.

Theme Four: Strengths for Successful Reentry

The final theme was strengths for successful reentry. These were the various strengths the women identified that have been helpful for them during the reentry process. For example, the women discussed a reliance on internal strengths when facing difficult times. Richie (2001) noted that the challenges of reentry are often gender

specific and the policies and resources to address those needs should also be gender specific. Of the many approaches that would be beneficial to mothers facing reentry, Richie (2001) suggested an empowerment approach that addresses the mother's capacity for change and to make better choices is vital.

There was also the finding that a support network can consist of a variety of people including extended family, romantic partners, parole officers, and reentry counselors. Arditti and Few (2008) found friends and family to be vital resources to mothers during reentry by providing resources for child care, housing, and employment opportunities.

Treatment in the forms of reentry programing, counseling, and substance abuse treatment programs were also found to be a source of strength for the women in this study. Frye and Dawe (2008) observed how a parenting program that focused on strengthening the parent-child relationship for released mothers improved the mental health for the mothers and children.

Spirituality was also found to be a significant source of strength for the women in this study who were encouraged by prayer, religious intuitions, and pastors. This finding is supported by Roman et. al. (2007) who observed clients who participated in faith-based reentry program to be 34 times more likely to drop out than those who had positive spiritual changes while in prison. As for more implementation of these faith-based reentry programs to help curb recidivism, Camp et. al. (2006) found that those participants more likely to participant in these programs already have a higher motivation to make changes and are seeking religion as a pathway to achieve these changes. Therefore, more

spiritually-based reentry programs might have the potential be helpful if the clients are already motivated.

Conclusion

The following two research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What are the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers?

Research Question 2: What are sources of strengths for formerly incarcerated mothers experiencing reentry?

The findings from the research led to several conclusions. First, the reentry process is riddled with a variety of challenges including financial strain, finding employment, meeting reentry obligations, and staying away from potential pitfalls such as addiction or associating with the wrong crowd. There is also the familial challenge of reconnecting with family and rebuilding trust.

Another conclusion is that motherhood impacts reentry by adding additional challenges women face as they do or do not reunite with their children upon their release. These challenges include having a conversation with their children about their criminal behavior, reconciling guilt, dealing with the impact their experience has had on the child, and navigating their own reentry responsibilities while still trying to parent their child. These factors can have a variety of outcomes including bringing them closer to their children or creating stress because of the unknown outcome of how their children will respond. There is also the strong desire to break the cycle of incarceration and addiction by guiding their children to do something different than what their mothers did. In addition, there is the desire to provide guidance and wisdom to other mothers who have

had similar experiences. Therefore, children provide both motivation for successful reentry as well as challenges to meeting reentry obligations.

A third conclusion is that the previously incarcerated mothers draw from a variety of strengths as they navigate the reentry process. Internal strengths were essential in helping the women draw on internal coping skills and self-reliance during particularly challenging moments of the reentry process. Children were also a source of strength by being a motivator for them not to give up and to participate in treatment. Spirituality was a significant source of strength through a variety of methods such as praying, attending religious institutions, or having spiritual figures in their support system such as a pastor. Support networks were made up of a variety of people including romantic partners, immediate family, or peers who had been through the same experiences. The most significant value of these networks was encouraging the women to keep going and forgiving them for their past behaviors.

Another conclusion is that motherhood can have an impact on curbing recidivism or the rate of reoffending. Previously incarcerated mothers are more likely to have a successful reentry by getting a chance to prove themselves through job opportunities, having access to reentry services, and sharing their experiences to help others not to repeat their mistakes. Mothers are worth the investment of these resources, in particular because they are motivated by their children to change and that change impacts the child. The more motivated that these women are to change, the less likely they may be to engage in criminal behavior again.

Limitations

There were a few limitations of the study. First, the findings were from the mothers' perspective only and did not include the children, birth father, or care givers. Perhaps those other perspectives might have offered additional insights that could have impacted the findings. As well, all participants were referred to the study by gatekeepers such as parole officers and reentry counselors and through snowball sampling. This perhaps limited the scope of available participants and subsequent findings.

Another limitation is that all participants were from one geographical location, therefore, the results of the study may not be applicable to other released women in different locations who do not have the same reentry mandates and resources.

Another limitation was that all of the women in the study were on some type of mandate after their release including being on parole, in a reentry program or attending substance abuse treatment. The study did not include any women who were released into the community without any formal controls. This mandated sample may have provided a perspective of challenges and strengths that may be different than women who are navigating the reentry process on their own. For example, some women in the study indicated that their parole officers were encouraging and helpful. A woman not on parole may have found that encouragement elsewhere and it would be beneficial to explore those experiences.

Implications

There were several implications derived from the study that might be of use to those working with the reentry population such as parole officers, reentry counselors, or

family scientists. First, there is the need to understand that preparation for reentry begins before even being released from prison. The women in the study discussed the internal as well as external factors for preparing for reentry. This is useful for policy makers developing programs that help curb recidivism. Possibly more funding for development of reentry programs that start working with the inmates before they are released would be useful. In addition, the women discussed the obstacles of trying to stay sober and the benefit of treatment programs such as Narcotics Anonymous or sober living facilities. More funding and development of these programs may also have a hand in successful reentry.

Family scientists, in particular, family therapists, should be aware of the unique needs of this population. As the women in the study indicated, the reentry process impacts the entire system the women return to after being released. For example, when providing counseling services to these women, it is important to also address the needs of others in their systems including the children they are returning to, as well as caregivers who looked after the children. Family sessions should be used to help communication efforts for the mothers to have those vital conversations with their children about their past behaviors and incarceration. Counseling techniques should also attend to the feelings of guilt, understand the impact the experience has had on the child, and explore ways that they can rebuild relationships with their children and families. In addition, the women discussed the inner strengths they relied on during the reentry process. It would be beneficial for therapists and counselors to work on building these strengths such as trusting one's voice, building up self-esteem, or developing healthy coping skills when a

set-back arises. In addition, professionals working with these women and their children in an educational setting would also benefit from gaining a more informed perspective of the challenges and needed resources for these families.

Another implication is the importance of strengthening the resources that the women found helpful. Many women indicated that someone such as a parole officer or reentry counselor was a main factor in them not giving up on themselves. They went the extra mile or provided encouragement during difficult times. It is important for these workers to know the value that their relationship can have with a previously incarcerated individual and what can be beneficial when they are facing a set-back. The women also discussed sharing their story with others as a strength and how their experience was not in vain if it could help someone avoid the same pitfalls. More opportunities should be developed to help previously incarcerated mothers share their stories with other mothers facing the same reentry experiences.

Recommendations

As the incarceration rates of women, and mothers in particular, continue to rise, the need for research about this phenomenon also increases. There are many avenues that could further extend the findings of the current study. Since no children were interviewed, it might be beneficial to study their experiences as a child of a formerly incarcerated mother. Their unique perspective might offer additional insights for policy makers and family therapists on additional needs for the family system. Another area to explore would be from the perspective of caregivers who looked after the child while the mother was incarcerated. Understanding their challenges of raising children of an

incarcerated family member and subsequent reunification might add to the knowledge of needed financial and therapeutic resources.

The fathers of the children were also not included in the current study. Another recommendation would be a comparison study on the reentry experiences of fathers versus the mothers. It would be interesting to understand the commonalities that each group experiences and well as the unique differences. Since the majority of incarcerated mothers were living with their children at the time of their arrest, that circumstance may impact their relationship with the child differently than the fathers upon release. A different study might examine the similarities and differences of the parental relationship for children living with their mothers after their release versus living with their fathers.

In addition, this study did not include women who have been released without any type of mandate such as parole, a reentry program, or substance abuse treatment. It might be interesting to understand the experiences of women who reenter their communities and navigate the reentry process on their own. Perhaps their perspective might highlight additional needs to be addressed when working with those mothers returning to their communities from jail or prison.

Another recommendation is a comparison study on released women with and without children. That has the possibility of adding an additional lens to the unique challenges of reentry. There are perhaps commonalities that all women face upon reentry, and some unique to motherhood as the current study outlined. A comparison study has the potential to offer a way of streamlining specific needs for newly released women who have children and those who do not.

The majority of the women of this current study alluded to drug and theft offenses. An additional study might take into account a comparison of the reentry challenges of women based on the type of their offenses. Perhaps higher level offenses, such as robbery or murder that lead to more years in prison, versus lower level offenses, impacts the mother-child relationship in different ways. A mother was in prison longer may have a more difficult time with reunification and may experience additional challenges versus a mother who was only gone for a few months. Additionally, offense types could also have an impact on the ability to obtain employment and number of years spent on parole after release.

This study could also benefit from a longitudinal approach. Future studies might examine the reentry experiences of the same group of mothers six months after their release, one year after their release, and again at the two year mark. Several women in the current study indicated the improvements they could make with their relationships with their child once they had fulfilled their reentry obligations. Perhaps a longitudinal study could highlight the unique changes over the years that could happen in the mothers' relationships with their children as well as employment, housing, and sobriety.

As this study only included women in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, a recommendation is to broaden the study to include additional geographical regions at the state and national level. Perhaps a comparison study might observe the similarities and differences of one region versus another.

This study might also be enhanced by a mixed-method approach. Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative measures to capture the experiences of formerly incarcerated

mothers has the ability to strengthen the generalizability of the finding and identify additional needs to be addressed by professionals working with the reentry population.

This study also suggests recommendations specific to family therapists working with the incarcerated population. First, family therapists could benefit from continuing educational training specifically dealing with formerly incarcerated mothers. This could include training on the challenges of fulfilling reentry obligations, reunification with family, and sobriety. Secondly, family therapy could be enhanced by building on strengths that could help with successful reentry. For example, therapy sessions could work on building up internal strengths, highlighting the benefits of forming strong support systems, and embracing spirituality.

Third, it would be an advantage for therapists to gain better training and experience for understanding the complexity of the mother-child relationship after a mother is released. As the current study showed, children can be both challenges and motivations for successful reentry. Therapists would need a sensitive and informed lens to provide effective treatment that both assuages the challenges while promoting the motivations.

It would also be beneficial for the community for family therapists and other family practitioners to provide local workshops and presentations related to formerly released mothers and their families. These workshops could focus on enhancing communication and ways to help the family system adjust and grow with the new change of the mothers' return.

Summary

This chapter included a discussion of the findings from this study that explored the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers. There have been a number of studies on parental incarceration and the challenges of reentry. This research study sought to add to the knowledge of what these women experience upon release by specifically examining the impact of motherhood on reentry and what the participants found to be strengths during this time. Additionally, this chapter offered conclusions based on the findings, implications for policy, and recommendations for family scientists working with this population. Limitations of the study were outlined and recommendations for future research were identified as a way of building on the findings from the study and continuing to enhance the knowledge about formerly incarcerated mothers experiencing reentry.

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APPENDIX A
Recruitment Flyer

I WANT TO HEAR YOUR STORY!

If you are a previously incarcerated mother with minor children and within 6 months to two years of your release, you are invited to participate in a research study with Grace Sherman of Texas Woman's University.

The purpose of the study is to understand the reentry experiences of previously incarcerated mothers in their own voice.

All interviews will be conducted by Grace at a location and time that is convenient for you. The maximum time commitment is 1 to 2 hours. All identifying information will be kept private. Information from the study can others understand the experiences of previously incarcerated mothers.

All participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to participate or need more information, please contact Grace Sherman at (614)-XXX-XXXX. You may also contact my advisor, Linda Brock at (940) 898-2713.

APPENDIX B

Telephone Call Script

Greetings

“Hello my name is Grace Sherman. Thank you for your interests in my study. I am a graduate student at Texas Woman’s University. My research study explores the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers. This is an opportunity to hear about these experiences in the mothers’ own words.”

Purpose

“The reason for the study is to conduct interviews with formerly incarcerated mothers and explore what these mothers identify as strengths and resources of support. This will help inform individuals working with this population and their families about what is helpful for successful reentry.”

The Interview

“If you agree to participate, I will meet you at a time and location that is convenient to you. At the start of the meeting I will provide a consent form going over the details of the study, risks, and protection of identity. If you sign the consent form, I will then collect some background information and begin the interview. I will be asking about your reentry experience and what you identify as strengths. The interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy.”

Closing

“All participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Please let me know of any questions you may have. (Discuss time and location if they agree to participate) I appreciate you taking the time to speak with me today.”

APPENDIX C
Consent Form

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: The Family Reentry Experiences of Previously Incarcerated Mothers: A Qualitative Study
Investigator: Grace Sherman 940/xxx-xxxx
Advisor: Linda Brock, PhD..... 940/898-2713

Explanation and Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation research study conducted by Grace Sherman, M.S., M.A., at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this research is to understand the reentry experiences of previously incarcerated mothers. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a previously incarcerated mother with a minor child.

Description of Procedures

As a participant in this study you will be asked to spend one to two hours of your time for an initial telephone call, one face-to-face interview, and a follow-up call with the researcher. Only the researcher will be conducting the phone calls and interviews. The researcher will ask you questions about your reentry experiences, relationships with family members, and what have been resources of support for you. The locations for the interviews will take place at convenient settings such as a university campus, public library, or agency meeting room. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed to ensure accuracy. The interview and demographic information will be assigned a code number to uphold confidentiality.

Potential Risks

The researcher will ask you questions about your reentry experiences as a previously incarcerated mother. Potential risks include emotional discomfort and embarrassment. If you become tired or upset you may take a break at any time. You may also stop answering questions at any time and end the interview. Counseling resources will be given during the time of consent in the event you feel you need to talk to a professional about any potential discomfort.

Another risk in this study is loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The interview will be held at a private location that you and the researcher have agreed upon. A code name, not your real name, will be used during the interview. No one but the researcher will know your real name. The tapes and the written interview will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Only the researcher, her advisor, and a research assistant will read the written interview. The tapes and the written interview will be shredded within two years after the study is finished. The results of the study will be reported in dissertation format and possibly scientific magazines or journals. Your name or any other identifying information will not be included.

Another risk is loss of time. Interviews will be conducted at times and locations that are convenient for you and the researcher to help reduce travel demands. Each interview will be conducted in the most efficient way possible to maximize time commitment. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Initials
Page 1 of 2

The researcher will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researcher know if there is a problem at any time and she will do her best to assist you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

Participation and Benefits

Your decision to participate or not has no relationship to parole or probation procedures of any kind. Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Upon completion of the interview, you will receive a \$20.00 Wal-Mart gift certificate. In addition, your participation may add to the field of knowledge regarding the experiences of previously incarcerated mothers. If you would like to know the summary of results of this study we will mail them to you upon request.*

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you may ask the researchers. Their phone numbers and emails have been provided at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

Signature of Participant

Date

*If you would like to know the summary of results of this study tell us where you want them to be sent:

Mailing Address:

APPENDIX D
Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire:

Please answer the following questions:

- 1). What is your current age? _____
- 2). What is your marital/relationship status? _____
- 3). What is your race/ethnicity?
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native ☐ Asian ☐ Black or African American
☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ☐ White ☐ Other _____
- 4). What is your highest level of education completed? _____
- 5). How many children do you have? _____ Ages? _____
- 6). Do you currently reside with your children? _____
- 7). What is the number of years that you were incarcerated? _____
- 8). What is your employment status? _____
- 9). What is your total household income?
☐ Less than \$20,000
☐ \$20,000 to \$39,999
☐ \$40,000 to \$59,999
☐ \$60,000 to \$89,999
☐ \$90,000 to \$120,000
☐ \$150,000 or more
- 10). May I contact you in the future if I have follow up questions? _____

If yes, what is the best phone number to contact you at? _____

APPENDIX E
Interview Guide

Participant's Code: _____
Date of Interview: _____

Introduction

"Hello, my name is Grace Sherman. Thank you so much for agreeing to be a part of my study. The reason for this research is to understand the reentry experiences of previously incarcerated mothers. I would also like to hear about what have been sources of strength for you. All participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time." Can I answer any questions you may have at this point? (answer any posed question)

"You are welcome to take as many breaks as needed. I will be using a recorder to audiotape our conversation for accuracy."

(Show recorder to participant)

"Let us start with the consent form. I will go over it in detail with you. If you agree to participate, you can sign the form and we can begin the interview. I will give you a copy to keep for your records" (go over consent form with participant. Answer questions and give clarification as needed).

(Continue if consent form is signed).

"Do you have any questions before we begin?"(answer any posed questions)

"I will turn on the recorder now and we can begin the interview."

"Let us start with filling out some information about your background. You do not have to answer any question you not comfortable with. Let me know if you have any questions."

(Turn on recorder and go over demographic questionnaire. Researcher will ask any questions posed. After questionnaire is finished, continue with interview).

"Thank you. Let us continue with the interview. I will pose a few questions as a guide, but I am mainly interested in hearing your voice about what reentry has been like for you. You are welcome to speak openly and freely. You can take a break or stop anytime. Do you have any questions at this point?"

(Researcher will answer any questions)

"Ok, let us begin. Please tell me your story of what reentry has been like for you."

(Next)

“How do you see your role as a mother impacting this experience”

(Next)

“Please tell me what you identify as strengths during this experience”

Prompts When Needed

How is your relationship with your children?

How is your relationship with other family?

Can you tell me more about that?

What is your support system like?

What do you see as strengths?

How do you define strengths?

Can you explain that?

Can you give me an example?

Let me see if I understand

Is there anything you want to add?

“Thank you so much for sharing your story with me. I will be making a follow-up call to see if there is anything else you would like to share. If you requested a summary of the results, they will be sent to the address you provided. Do you have any questions at this point?”

(Answer any questions posed)

“Again your time and information is greatly appreciated. Have a nice day.”

APPENDIX F
Counseling Resources

Counseling Resources

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

112 South Alfred Street Alexandria, VA 22314-3061

Phone: (703) 838-9808 | Fax: (703) 838-9805

<http://www.aamft.org/imis15/aamft/Core/ContactUs/ContactUs.aspx>

American Counseling Association

6101 Stevenson Ave, Suite 600. Alexandria, VA 22304

800-347-6647 | 800-473-2329 (fax)

<https://www.counseling.org/>

AAMFT Therapist Locator

https://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/Content/directories/locator_terms_of_use.aspx

Psychology Today Therapist Locator

<https://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/>

Denton County Friends of the Family

4845 S I-35 E, Suite 200

Corinth, TX 76210

Phone: 940-387-5131

Fax: 940-383-1816

<http://www.dcfof.org/>

The Women's Center

1723 Hemphill Fort Worth, TX 76110

817-927-4040

<http://womenscentertc.org/>

TWU Counseling and Family Therapy Clinic

Human Development Building, Room #114

940-898-2600 (appts. and msgs.)

twucounselingclinic@gmail.com

APPENDIX G
Telephone Follow-up Script

Follow-Up

- “Hello, this Grace Sherman from Texas Woman's University. How are you doing today? I just wanted to check in and see if you had any more questions about the research or wanted to add something that you did not get to say during the interview.”

Member Checking

- “I also wanted to share some initial results from the transcription to make sure that your words and experience were adequately captured. Would that be ok?”

Summary of Findings

- “Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. If you indicated interest, I will send you a summary of the results to the contact information you provided.”

APPENDIX H
Motherhood and Reentry: Research Questions, Interview Questions, Themes

Motherhood and Reentry: Research Questions, Interview Questions, Themes

Research Question	Interview Questions	Themes
What are the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers?	<p>Please tell me your story of what reentry has been like for you?</p> <p>How do you see your role as a mother impacting the reentry experience?</p>	<p>Reentry is Challenging <i>Preparation Before Release</i> <i>Walking on Eggshells</i> <i>Reentry Obligations</i> <i>Financial Strain</i> <i>Rebuilding Trust</i></p> <p>Motherhood is a Hindrance to Reentry <i>Reentry Obligations Versus Children's Needs</i> <i>Key Conversations with Children</i> <i>Impact of Reentry on Children</i> <i>Maternal Guilt</i></p> <p>Motherhood is a Motivator For Reentry <i>Breaking The Chain</i> <i>Children As Encouragement</i> <i>Not Giving Up</i></p>
What are sources of strengths for formerly incarcerated mothers experiencing reentry?	Please tell me what you identify as strengths during this experience?	<p>Strengths for Successful Reentry <i>Inner Strengths</i> <i>Spirituality</i> <i>Support Networks</i> <i>Reentry Services</i></p>