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# Between Somewhere and Nowhere: Navigating the Liminal Space of Prisoner Reentry

Shatira Woods

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Between Somewhere and Nowhere: Navigating the Liminal Space of Prisoner Reentry

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

Shatira Woods

Candidate for Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with Distinction  
and Renée Crown University Honors  
Spring 2019

Honors Capstone Project in Sociology

Capstone Project Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Gretchen Purser

Capstone Project Reader: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Michael Kalish

Honors Director: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Danielle Smith, Director

Between Somewhere and Nowhere:  
Navigating the Liminal Space of Prisoner Reentry

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## **Abstract**

Prisoner reentry has been an ever-increasing topic of investigation as communities work to reduce recidivism and mitigate the negative consequences that mass incarceration and release from incarceration has on individuals and communities. This qualitative, interview-based study of a reentry program in a Northeastern City centers the experiences of formerly incarcerated persons who are currently in various stages of the reentry process over those of program staff. I use these experiences as well as existing literature on prisoner reentry, reentry programming, and labor to evaluate and understand the shortcomings of such programs from the perspective of those directly involved in and impacted by them. I found that there is an ambivalence towards Safe Haven, other reentry programs, community supervision, and clients of these services, which manifests itself most saliently when interviewees are discussing their peers. My research indicates that the clients of reentry programs experience ambivalence towards these programs and other post-carceral institutions. This ambivalence is often coupled with social distancing, which typically occurs when clients discuss other clients as well as when they discuss their community. Drawing primarily upon the work of Merton and Barber, Comfort, Miller, and Mijs, I argue that the liminal space of reentry produces sociological ambivalence and social distancing.

Keywords: prisoner reentry, sociological ambivalence, reentry organizations

## Executive Summary

Prisoner reentry has been an ever-increasing topic of investigation as communities work to combat mass incarceration and recidivism. The term *prisoner reentry*, which I will use interchangeably with prisoner reintegration refers to a rehabilitative process through which formerly incarcerated persons are eased back into community life through the provision of services such as job-readiness workshops, housing assistance, and substance abuse recovery groups (Koschmann and Peterson, 2013). The purpose of the present research is to elucidate the ways in which reentry programs are experienced by program clients. My guiding research questions for the present study are: (1) Do formerly incarcerated citizens who are going through reentry programming or who are affiliated with reentry organizations experience sociological ambivalence? (2) What role do reentry organizations play in the presence of ambivalence or lack thereof?

This study centers the experiences of formerly incarcerated persons who are currently in various stages of the reentry process over those of organization staff. Focusing on the experiences of program clients allows for an increased understanding of the ways in which clients internalize the messages that permeate reintegration programs, such as those of personal responsibility and the ways in which this internalization manifests itself. This internalization may have implications for the reentry process.

While scholars have argued that sociological ambivalence exists in the context of the criminal justice system (Comfort 2008), very little of the existing literature applies this concept to the realm of prisoner reentry. In addition, there exists a body of literature that details the ways in which formerly incarcerated citizens create narratives of a ‘future clean self’ (Harris 2001).

This paper attempts to link these ideas together in order to understand the ways in which the space of reentry encourages ambivalence through the production of a new identity.

This qualitative study draws upon interview data from formerly incarcerated persons affiliated with Safe Haven, a community-based organization that offers reintegration services in a city in the Northeast. I conducted ten semi-structured, individual interviews in either the conference room or intake room at Safe Haven. All participants were given the option to be interviewed elsewhere if they were uncomfortable with the setting. The interviews ranged in length from about twenty-five minutes to as long as one hour and forty-five minutes, with most interviews taking somewhere between one hour and one hour and a half. All of the interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants.

My research indicates that the clients of reentry programs experience ambivalence towards these programs and other post-carceral institutions. This ambivalence is often coupled with social distancing, which typically occurs when clients discuss other clients as well as when they discuss their community. Despite this ambivalence and social distancing, many interviewees want to get peer specialist certifications and work in the peer recovery field, the clients of which are likely not that different from those that the interviewees distance themselves from. Social distancing has implications for the ability of Safe Haven's clients to build meaningful social ties while in the liminal space that is reentry, while the clients' seemingly narrow career interests and goals have implications for how they have internalized what 'successful reintegration' and employability entails, and for how reentry programs may reproduce themselves through the labor of their clients. I argue that the liminal space of prisoner reentry is at least partially responsible for producing the ambivalence that is illustrated in this study.

This research is significant because, as JoJo, a 61-year-old black male client of Safe Haven who had been incarcerated for 15 years put it in his interview, “All this stuff I’m telling you is not unique. I’m just one of thousands...” Because of the expansiveness of mass incarceration and the increasing focus on community corrections and reentry programming, studying the ways in which reentry programs affect clients’ experience of reentry is crucial for helping to stem the effects the criminal justice system has on individuals and on communities. The ambivalence and social distancing that occur within and without reintegration programs have implications for the ways in which clients and volunteers internalize the messages they receive and disseminate. While espousing views of personal responsibility, some participants, through their ambivalence, in some ways absolve themselves from personal responsibility, meaning that the message may only be partially internalized. Because of this rhetoric and that of the avoidance of ‘people, places and things,’ sociological ambivalence and social distancing are in some ways inherent to the road of reentry. The ‘people’ they are instructed to avoid and hold accountable for their actions are like them in many ways, and the avoidance of people who otherwise would be their peers creates a space for ambivalence and social distancing to develop.

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## **Advice to Future Honors Students**

“Start early” is an extremely common piece of advice given to future honors students. To that advice, I would add a qualifier: “Start early, but make sure you are happy with your project.” It is great if you know what you would like to research by your sophomore year but is equally great to take the time to find a topic that you are passionate about. During my four years in the honors program, I have heard countless stories of students being unhappy with their thesis, or not completing honors due to the fear of being unhappy with their thesis. I know that some majors are less amenable to starting the thesis a bit later than others, but I would urge students to take their time when joining labs and/or choosing advisors. Research interests can and most likely will change – try to look for ways to address your changing research interests in your current project, or if time permits, switch topics or disciplines. The thesis will feel like significantly less work if you make the most of it and try to study something you enjoy!



## Chapter 1

JoJo, a 61-year-old black male, has been with Safe Haven<sup>1</sup> since 2004. Because he was incarcerated after the Attica Riots of 1971, he became one of the youngest ‘lifers’ in New York at the tender age of 17. Because of his good behavior, he was released after 15 years of his 15-to-life sentence. Here, JoJo reflects on how he felt when he was released from prison after losing most of his young adulthood to incarceration and the ways in which prison had made simple things seem complicated:

After 15 years, and I went in as a kid, fearful, afraid, definitely uncomfortable. I think my biggest fear was crossing the street. I didn’t know how to cross the street. The biggest problem that I had was not turning off the water. I could not remember to turn off the faucet. And me and my family and my partner used to go through it to whereas she would say things to me...and I would get offended. Until one day, the question she said was, ‘well JoJo, didn’t you turn off water in prison?’ and I was like ‘no.’ and that became the answer. So it was things like that that was a transition that was difficult.

Bruce is a 57-year-old black male who was released from prison less than two months before I had the opportunity to interview him. He has been incarcerated four times, with his last sentence being 25-to-life, which was subsequently reduced to 14 years. He had only been at Safe Haven for about two and half weeks at the time of interview. Bruce discusses some of the difficulty he has had with navigating new technology after his release.

I just got released in December [2018] and I’m trying to pace myself because leaving prison after a certain amount of time – most people, they do a couple months, a couple weeks. But when you come from state prison after doing, let’s say a decade or more, things are a little different to a degree because things have changed over a period of time and once you come back out here, simple things like a cell phone, you don’t know how to operate. You know, things have changed where now you just can’t walk into companies and temp job agencies and fill out an application; now you gotta do it online. For a person such as myself, online is like a foreign language, you know.

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<sup>1</sup> All names, including those of people and organizations, have been changed in accordance with my IRB protocol in an effort to ensure the confidentiality of the study’s participants.

Both of these men and many other people experiencing reentry struggled and/or still struggle with tasks that most people take for granted. Reentry organizations and reentry programming can help to mitigate some of the hardships associated with leaving jail or prison.

Prisoner reentry has been an ever-increasing topic of investigation as communities work to reduce recidivism and mitigate the negative consequences that mass incarceration has on individuals and communities. The term *prisoner reentry*, which I will use interchangeably with prisoner reintegration, refers to a rehabilitative process through which formerly incarcerated persons are eased back into community life through the provision of services such as job-readiness workshops, housing assistance, and substance abuse recovery groups (Koschmann and Peterson, 2013).

Over 95% of prisoners are eventually released from custody (De Giorgi 2017). In addition, in 2015, about 1700 people were released from state or federal prisons, with many more being released from local jails (De Giorgi 2017). The cycle between incarceration and reentry reproduces racial and class inequalities by placing formerly incarcerated people back into the impoverished communities in which they lived. Reentry into the community from incarceration exacerbates inequalities through the addition the “mark” of a criminal history, which further excludes poor people and poor people of color from educational and vocational opportunities (Pager 2003).

While much of the extant literature on prisoner reentry programs focuses on ethnographic methods and interviews with program staff (Miller 2014; Halushka 2016; Mijs 2016), my research privileges the experiences of the clients of reintegration programs over those of program staff. Focusing on the experiences of program clients allows for an increased understanding of the ways in which clients internalize the messages that permeate reentry programs, such as those

of personal responsibility, and the ways in which this internalization manifests itself. This internalization may have implications for the reentry process.

The purpose of the present research is to elucidate the ways in which reentry programs are experienced by program clients. While scholars have argued that sociological ambivalence exists in the context of the criminal justice system (Comfort 2008), very little of the existing literature applies this concept to the realm of prisoner reentry. In addition, there exists a body of literature that details the ways in which formerly incarcerated citizens create narratives of a ‘future clean self’ (Harris 2011). This paper attempts to link these ideas together in order to understand the ways in which the space of reentry encourages ambivalence through the production of a new identity. My guiding research questions for the present study are: (1) Do formerly incarcerated citizens who are going through reentry programming or who are affiliated with reentry organizations experience sociological ambivalence? (2) What role does reentry organizations play in the production of ambivalence or lack thereof? I attempt to answer these questions using data collected through one-on-one interviews with the clients of Safe Haven, a community-based reentry and alternative-to-incarceration organization in a Northeastern city.

My research indicates that the clients of reentry programs experience ambivalence towards these programs and other post-carceral institutions. This ambivalence is often coupled with social distancing, which typically occurs when clients discuss other clients as well as when they discuss their community. Despite this ambivalence and social distancing, many interviewees want to get peer specialist certifications and work in the peer recovery field, the clients of which are likely not that different from those that the interviewees distance themselves from. Social distancing has implications for the ability of Safe Haven’s clients to build meaningful social ties while in the liminal space that is reentry, while the clients’ seemingly narrow career interests and

goals have implications for how they have internalized what ‘successful reintegration’ and employability entails, and for how reentry programs may reproduce themselves through the labor of their clients. I argue that the liminal space of prisoner reentry is at least partially responsible for producing the ambivalence that is illustrated in this study.

I conclude this paper by detailing the implications and significance of this research. I also suggest ways in which social bonds among clients and between clients and community members could potentially be improved, building a heightened sense of community and increased community ties beyond the reentry organization. Finally, I address this study’s limitations, and the future research questions that it raises.

In the subsequent section, I detail the rise of reentry programs, the goals and teachings of such programs, and the ways in which these programs guide the ‘road to reentry’ (Mijs 2016). I then go on to discuss the ways in which reentry programs shape ideologies surrounding identity and social relationships, and the implications that these concepts have for understanding the experiences of the clients of reentry programs.

## Chapter 2

### BACKGROUND

#### *Rise of Reentry Services*

De Giorgi's data suggests that there is a 'neoliberal neglect' of the realm of reentry that is characterized by the "low-cost management not only of formerly incarcerated people, but also...people on parole and probation, homeless individuals, persons suffering from severe physical disabilities or mental illnesses, drug addicts, and other marginalized and disenfranchised populations" (2017:92-93). The low cost of penal/community supervision has become an increasingly more common and integral component of policing marginalized communities (De Giorgi 2017). He argues that due to the Great Recession of 2008, "tough on crime" rhetoric and began to give way to fiscal concerns over mass incarceration, spurring the defunding and devolution of the penal system at the federal and state level (De Giorgi 2017).

Senate Bill S.756, commonly referred to as the First Step Act of 2018, was first introduced in the Senate in March 2017. The bill, which had bipartisan support, was passed into law by the Trump administration. During the State of the Union Address, Donald Trump said of the act "This legislation reformed sentencing laws that have wrongly and disproportionately harmed the African American community. The FIRST STEP Act gives non-violent offenders the chance to reenter society as productive, law-abiding citizens" (Trump, 5 Feb 2019). In addition to allowing for the retroactive application of the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 and mitigating the severity of mandatory minimums through the expansion of the justice 'safety valve,' the First Step Act also expands reentry programs and education both within prisons and beyond the prison walls among other provisions (U.S. Congress 2018). Studying prisoner reentry programs is incredibly relevant as we may continue to see an increase in reentry programming and



organizations as federal prison sentences are shortened and increased attention is given to reentry efforts.

The First Step Act of 2018, amended and renewed funding for the Second Chance Act, which was first signed into law by President Bush in 2008. The Second Chance Act (SCA) provided federal funding from community-based reentry organizations, which, as alluded to by De Giorgi, may have been a result of the impending recession. The SCA marked a transition from the appropriation of federal funds for the building and maintenance of jails and prisons to the use of these funds to develop rehabilitative programming (Miller 2014). Despite this rehabilitative appearance, community-based organizations extend the reach of the criminal justice system into the lives of impoverished communities, particularly those which have high populations of people of color (Miller 2014). The extension of the reach of these organizations and the fact that these organizations often provide resources that are unavailable elsewhere in these communities means that for many of the community members and the organizations' clients, there is no clear line demarcating where the organization begins and ends. Because of this, reentry providers handle populations that are outside of the realm of reentry (De Giorgi 2017). This creates a space in which whole communities are subject to 'reentry,' making reentry in some ways a transitional yet omnipresent state.

Wacquant (2010) conceptualizes the criminal justice system as a kind of revolving door, with "many former convicts experiencing ongoing circulation between the two poles of a continuum of forced confinement by the prison and the dilapidated districts of the metropolis that are the latter's recruiting grounds..." (Wacquant 2010:611). This statement can be read in two different ways. One meaning is that many of the people who exit jails and prisons are rearrested and/or reincarcerated. These rearrests and reincarcerations are at least partially due to the fact

that there is often a lack of true *integration* (e.g., employment, education, family/social ties) prior to incarceration (Wacquant 2010; Thompkins 2010). According to Wacquant (2010:612):

...fewer than half of them [jail detainees in America] held a full-time job at the time of their arraignment; two-thirds come from households living under half of the official “poverty line;” 87% have no postsecondary education; and four in ten suffer from serious physical and mental disabilities...six in ten were previously incarcerated themselves.

This lack of prior integration means that *reintegration* is often unrealistic and unobtainable. The other, related meaning is that even those who somehow manage not to recidivate live in low-income communities, which tend to have higher crime rates, more surveillance, and less economic and educational opportunities (Wacquant 2010). Reentry organizations are often placed in “decrepit facilities located in dangerous and dilapidated inner-city districts rife with crime and vice,” making successful reintegration, however it is conceptualized, difficult to attain even for those who may have been integrated prior to their incarceration (Wacquant 2010:614). This means that formerly incarcerated citizens are being placed into communities that are largely devoid of resources save for those provided by reentry organizations, their programs, and their partners. This can serve to build dependence on such programs and organizations. Bruce Western (2008) discusses further the lack of prior integration that many formerly incarcerated citizens have experienced and government responses to this issue.

According to Western (2008), many people who ‘reenter’ their communities from prison have never held a stable job, meaning that many of these newly released citizens struggle with establishing daily work habits and routines beyond the prison walls. This prior lack of work experience coupled with a criminal record makes gaining steady employment extremely difficult, not just because of a lack of an ability to maintain a job, but also because employers are often hesitant to hire formerly incarcerated citizens. Western (2008) argues for the full restoration of

citizenship upon release from prison, which should be justified not only in terms of reducing recidivism, but also in terms of the ‘social goods’ that lower recidivism such as increasing family relationships, gaining steady employment, and having a solid education. These social goods, according to Western, should be addressed through social policy and funding. A common argument against this idea is that it would be difficult to find funds to implement these programs. In response to this argument, Western says “Our political choice..., was not how much we spent on the poor, but what to spend it on.” Here, he is referring to ‘correctional investment,’ in which state, federal, and local funds are used to support police departments and build jails and prisons. Miller (2014) elaborates on the arguments that are advanced by Wacquant (2010) and Western (2008).

Miller coined the term *carceral devolution* to describe “a set of interrelated policies that transfer carceral authority from federal and state-based institutions to local ones.” This transfer is the result of the convergence of several key factors: (1) the privatization of rehabilitation and its move from prison walls into the community, and (2) a conceptual shift in the goal of reentry programs to “producing citizens” (Miller 2014:308). Prisoner reentry, according to Miller, is a part of what he calls the ‘welfare state-criminal justice hybrid institution,’ which aims to ease the transition of formerly incarcerated citizens back into their communities (Miller 2014:307). Miller argues that reentry organizations are ‘people changing institutions’ concerned with altering individual psychology and behaviors rather than changing the circumstances of the individuals (Miller 2014:317). Miller uses the distinction between employment and employability to illustrate this point. While reentry organizations cannot change whether employers are willing to hire formerly incarcerated citizens, they can change the ways in which formerly incarcerated citizens view work and how they present themselves.

### *Approaches to Reentry*

Mijs (2016) conceptualizes the reentry process by studying what he calls ‘the road to reentry.’ The road to reentry “is a metaphor that describes the totality of the organizational discourses and practices intended to rehabilitate the former prisoner and highlights the fact that reentry is understood to be a sequence of steps toward a positive end” (2016:295). This end is reintegration into social life. The organizational discourses that characterize the *road to reentry* include: “personal responsibility, structural pasts and agentic futures, avoiding negative people, places and things, the deemphasizing of family relationships, and relational reconfiguration” (Mijs 2016:297-302). Personal responsibility, which is related to agentic futures, refers to the idea that organizational clients are in control of their futures. There is double tension between agentic futures/personal responsibility, as program clients are said to be in control of their future while being unable to control their past, while there is also the issue of organizational dependence. It is this kind of tension, I suggest, that lies at the heart of the sociological ambivalence that is visible in my data, which is discussed in more detail later in this paper. A structural past is a past which *excuses* are given for past behaviors, which serves to reduce personal responsibility in favor of environmental circumstances (Scott & Lyman, 1968).

Mijs finds that the so-called road to reentry can serve to deemphasize social relationships. According to Western, *social integration* refers to community ties and economic stability (Western 2015). For the present study, I focus on social and community reintegration, which I conceptualize as positive interpersonal relations both within and without the reentry organization. My findings suggest that even within reentry organizations where ‘people, places, and things,’ are not necessarily present, social reintegration within these organizations are still lacking. Mijs concludes that increased engagement with reentry programs can build dependence

on the organization's services. I add to this conclusion that dependence on the organization can serve to distance individuals from their community through the physical space of the organization as well as through organizational teachings. A solution to a lack of social reintegration may lie in peer mentoring to help facilitate positive relationships within reentry organizations.

Peer mentoring is becoming increasingly common in prisoner reintegration and rehabilitation settings. Koschmann and Peterson (2013) argue that prisoner reentry is, at its most basic level, an issue concerning communication and social connections. By this, they are referring to "a communication breakdown of being cut off from networks and meaningful relationships that provide the necessary social capital needed for social reintegration" (Koschmann & Peterson 2013:188). According to the authors, peer mentorship helps to alleviate some of the communication problems that underlie reentry and recidivism. Peer mentors can serve as conduits between reentry agencies and clients, keeping clients in contact with the agencies. They can also ensure that clients receive the resources they need through their role as conduits (Koschmann & Peterson 2013). While these findings are compelling, peer mentors likely only have a relationship with their mentees through face-to-face interactions within walls of the reentry organization or through phone calls. This means that clients may struggle form meaningful relationships in their communities since their primary interactions occur within an organizational setting.

In addition to the fact that peer mentoring may increase dependence on reentry organizations (Mijs 2016), my research suggests that peer mentoring may not be as effective as previously thought at helping to build and maintain positive relationships. Part of the reason for this could lie in the fact that parolees are legally prohibited from associating with anyone with a

criminal record. Because Safe Haven's reentry programs often involve clients and volunteers who are on parole, it is difficult to find people who are not on parole to befriend. Further, peer mentors typically represent the 'people' that formerly incarcerated citizens are instructed to avoid in any setting, so friendships would go against institutional teachings.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Sociological ambivalence is a concept elaborated upon by Robert Merton and Elinor Barber (1976). In their essay, *Sociological Ambivalence*, Merton and Barber define sociological ambivalence and distinguish it from the phenomenon of psychological ambivalence. There are three types of psychological ambivalence: affective, voluntary, and intellectual. Affective ambivalence occurs when a person holds contradictory emotions about towards an object, voluntary ambivalence manifests as an inability to make decisions due to conflicting desires, and intellectual ambivalence occurs when a person holds contradictory ideas. According to Merton and Barber, while psychological ambivalence takes social relations into account, social relations are taken as "facts of historical circumstance rather than examined in terms of the dynamics of social structure to see how and to what extent ambivalence comes to be built into the very structure of social relations (1976:4)." The sociological orientation towards ambivalence is a compliment to, rather than replacement for psychological ambivalence. They go on to elaborate:

It [the sociological orientation] directs us to examine the processes in the social structure that affect the probability of ambivalence turning up in particular kinds of role-relations. And finally, it directs us to the social consequences of ambivalence for the workings of social structures (1976:5).

According to Merton and Barber, sociological ambivalence is an innate characteristic of occupied social roles rather than evolving out of personality or other external factors.

In her book *Doing Time Together: Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*, Megan Comfort (2008) applies Merton and Barber's (1976) conception of sociological ambiguity to the

criminal justice system and the ambivalence it elicits in the female partners of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated men. Comfort (2008) found:

...seemingly incongruous behaviors and sentiments of women as they at once denounced and commended the criminal justice system for its intercession in their personal lives, and both rebelled against and joined with the correctional authorities charged with monitoring, restraining, and sanctioning their partners.

I extend her use of the concept of sociological ambivalence to encompass the experiences of individuals who are affiliated with reentry programs and/or parole or drug court. My data suggest that formerly incarcerated men experiencing reentry and/or parole or drug court have contradictory views of these programs and institutions, simultaneously believing that people who 'fail' are at personally at fault while also believing that some of the programs and institutions are flawed.

Possible selves, according to Markus and Nurius (1986), "derive from representations of the self in the past and they include representations of the self in the future" (1986:954). These selves are social, arising from individuality as well as from social comparisons. While 'possible selves' are distinct from the 'current' self, the two types of selves are linked due to the possible selves' origin in individuality and individual experience. Possible selves are susceptible to alteration due to changes in environment and circumstance, such as a shift from incarceration to reentry (Markus & Nurius 1986). An *account* is a "linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to evaluative inquiry," which serves to "bridge the gap between action and expectation" (Scott & Lyman 1968:46). These accounts are used when either a person or the people around a person engage in culturally unexpected or inappropriate ways. Alexis Harris links the concepts of 'possible selves' and 'accounts' in her research.

Drawing upon Scott and Lyman (1968) and Markus and Nurius (1986), Alexis Harris (2011) attempts to understand the ways in which ex-offenders narrate their past criminal activity,

their idea of rehabilitated future selves, and the role of their environment and external structural conditions. Through analyzing and linking these narratives, she found that her interviewees distanced themselves from their past by using *excuses* (see Scott & Lyman 1986) based on past circumstances such as being surrounded by crime as a child (Harris, 2011). My research elaborates on the work done by Harris by examining the ways in which formerly incarcerated people discuss their narrative in relation to organizations and institutions. In addition to a distancing from their past selves, my research also suggests that there is a distancing from peers.

### *Work and Reentry*

Many formerly incarcerated citizens struggle to find employment after prison due to the pervasiveness of criminal background checks and the stigma that a criminal history carries for employers. Halushka (2015) discusses the ways in which reentry organizations attempt to combat the issues of employment and employability. Halushka conceptualizes the teachings of these organizations as *work wisdom*. In this framework, work wisdom entails short-term behavioral and psychological changes to meet long-term ends. The teachings of work wisdom involve instructing formerly incarcerated citizens in disclosing and explaining criminal history, carrying themselves to avoid evoking stereotypes in the workplace, staying confident when the job search fails to be fruitful, and learning how to behave in a professional workplace (Halushka 2015:72).

Even when program clients perform the role of ‘rehabilitated citizen,’ their criminal record still carries weight. Reentry programs can do little to change job markets, labor demand, and employer’s biases, but can change their client’s appearance of employability or lack thereof (Miller 2014; Halushka 2015). Because clients are often taught that employment and employability are the keys to successful reintegration, they are more susceptible to exploitation



and working low wage jobs (Hennigan & Purser 2017). The teachings of 'work wisdom' may account for why many of my study's participants are currently volunteers at Safe Haven or would like to work in the peer recovery field.

### Chapter 3

#### METHODOLOGY

##### *Research Site<sup>2</sup>*

Safe Haven is a community-based, non-profit organization located in a northeastern city in the United States. The organization was founded in 1981 to provide alternatives to incarceration and community supervision (i.e., parole or probation) associated with the criminal justice system. Safe Haven serves about 2500 youth and adults annually throughout its three locations. On average, approximately 200 adult and youth offenders are given an alternative to incarceration, reducing the consequences of incarceration on families, communities, and the clients.

Funding for Safe Haven comes from state agencies, local government agencies, the federal government, and from foundations and corporations. Public funding from the state comes from the Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives, the Office of Children and Family Services, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, and the Department of Health/AIDS institute among others. Federal funding originates from the Department of Justice – Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office of Drug Court Programs, and the Department of Education in addition to several others. Some of the corporations and foundations that provide funding for Safe Haven are American Express Foundation, J.M. McDonald Foundation, and the Lincoln Financial Group. The presence of funding from the Office of Drug Court Programs and other agencies directly affiliated with the criminal justice system indicate a “blurred line” between Safe Haven’s reentry and alternatives to incarceration programs and community supervision administered by the criminal justice system.

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<sup>2</sup> Information about ‘Safe Haven’ was gathered from the organization’s website. The citation was omitted to protect the confidentiality of the participants and of the organization.

This city's branch of Safe Haven serves about 500 people throughout its many programs. The organization provides alternatives to incarceration as well as reintegration services for previously incarcerated individuals. Safe Haven's services include substance abuse recovery groups, support groups, mental health services, peer mentoring, and job-readiness programs. Safe Haven also assists clients with finding affordable housing and registering for public assistance (PA). The majority of Safe Haven's clients are people of color from low-income communities. Safe Haven also centers advocacy as one of its core missions, providing services including presentencing and post-incarceration advocacy, the correction of often erroneous criminal history records and legal counseling. Safe Haven, unlike some of the reentry organizations addressed in the literature, is actively involved in politics, policy change, and advocacy on behalf of its clients and others who inhabit the spaces of reentry and community supervision (cf. Miller 2014).

The programs that specifically work with formerly incarcerated people serve about 100 people each year. Of these 100 clients, roughly 80% are people of color and 95% are male. About 75% of the program's clients gain employment and 50% retain their job for at least three months. Ten percent of the clients are rearrested while in these programs, and there is little to no data on the number of people who leave Safe Haven and go on to recidivate or violate parole. The programs administered through the Recovery Community and Outreach Center, which most of the volunteers are affiliated with, focus on helping its clients through social support services, civic restoration, and education and employment services. The center provides a free substance abuse evaluation and referrals to treatment facilities, access to case managers and peer mentors, educational/vocational training, and assists in restoring citizenship through voter registration, assisting with the obtainment of government identification and public assistance, and correcting criminal records.

### *Other Organizations and Programs*

In addition to Safe Haven, this study's participants were affiliated with several other organizations and/or institutions, the most common of which were parole, drug court, and Refuge Recovery.

*Parole and Drug Court*<sup>3</sup>. At the end of 2016, just over 4.5 million people in the United States, or 1 in 55 adults, were under probation or parole (DOJ 2018). Parole is a conditional release from prison, under which parolees serve the rest of their term. A common condition of parole is regular reporting in person, by phone, or via another mode at intervals determined by the individual's parole officer. Other conditions include obtaining permission before changing jobs, changing residences, or leaving the city, abstaining from all drugs and alcohol, prohibition from fraternizing with people who have a criminal record and from possessing weapons and firearms, submitting to drug tests, and maintaining employment (Jones 2018). Several of the participants of this study have life parole, while several more 'max out' sometime this year.

Drug court emerged as a way to treat people with chemical dependency disorders by diverting them from incarceration. Treatment plans for drug court may include inpatient or outpatient treatment, regular drug testing, counseling, employment, and residence in a halfway house. Case managers assist with connecting drug court participants to public assistance, employment and educational opportunities, and additional counseling services among other resources. Graduation from the program often leads to either having charges reduced or dismissed, or a re-sentencing in the event that charges cannot be changed. The requirements for drug court in Safe Haven's jurisdiction are: showing up for court and meetings, attendance at all

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<sup>3</sup> Information about drug court comes from this city's "Community Treatment Court" participant handbook. A full citation was omitted to avoid exposing the name of the city.

scheduled treatment sessions, the completion of required paperwork including an information release and contract, and the completion of the four phases of drug court.

*Refuge Recovery.* Refuge Recovery is a non-profit organization that uses the principles of Buddhism to aid in the recovery process of people who have a history of substance abuse. The ‘four truths of refuge recovery’ include: “(1) Addiction Creates Suffering, (2) The cause of addiction is repetitive craving, (3) Recovery is possible, and (4) the path to recovery is available” (Refuge Recovery 2019). In addition to these truths, the organization’s treatment program is based on the eight-fold path. The organization has physical locations as well as online meetings and resources such as podcasts and meditations (Refuge Recovery 2019).

#### *Sampling Method and Sample*

The participants for this study were recruited using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling methods with the help of Safe Haven employees. My selection criteria were that participants had to be currently affiliated with a reentry organization or affiliated with one in the near past. Initially, participants helped to recruit subsequent participants with the assistance of Safe Haven employees. Due to a lack of age range in the participants, I added additional criteria to restrict the age of half of the participants to between 18 and 30 years old. Because of the incompatibility between my schedule and the schedules of the female clients of Safe Haven, I was unable to interview women for the present project.

Three of the ten study participants identified as black, six identified as white, and one identified as Hispanic. The demographics of my sample were not representative of that of the Safe Haven’s clientele. This may be due to selection bias; because white people tend to be less disadvantaged than black people even when they have a criminal record (see Pager & Western, 2005), they may have been more comfortable discussing the progress they have made. The

participants range in age from 24 years old to 62 years old. Eight of the interviewees were volunteers at Safe Haven in addition to participating in the organization's programs, one was an employee, and one was relatively new to Safe Haven and was in the process of completing the steps necessary to become a client of the organization. Nine of the ten participants are either on parole or are on drug court, while one is out on bail. Many of the participants are at Safe Haven in order to fulfill work or volunteer requirements associated with public assistance and/or parole or drug court. None were mandated to work specifically with Safe Haven.

### *Interview Procedure*

This qualitative study draws upon ten semi-structured interviews of reentry program participants and/or volunteers at Safe Haven. The interviews took place in either the conference room or intake room at Safe Haven. All participants were given the option to be interviewed elsewhere if they were uncomfortable with the setting. The interviews ranged in length from about twenty-five minutes to as long as one hour and forty-five minutes, with most interviews taking somewhere between one hour and one hour and a half. All of the interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. Recordings were selectively transcribed, allowing me to focus only on the quotes and information that are most relevant to my research question.

All participants were asked questions about their daily life, family life, experiences after their release from jail or prison, housing, employment and education, and questions about Safe Haven and other post-carceral programs they may have been a part of. Before formally starting the interviews, I introduced myself, had a preliminary conversation with the participants to begin establishing a rapport, and gave the participants a chance to ask me any questions they may have had about me and/or my research. All participants were monetarily compensated for their time.

Interviewing as a research method is well suited for the present research as it allows for the direct questioning of Safe Haven clients in order to understand their experiences of the organization in their own words. Interviewing enabled me to hear the ways in which the teachings of reentry programs, some of which are detailed in the previous section, are internalized and reproduced by the clients. Although this study has a small sample size, effort was taken to create a diverse sample with varying preexisting community ties, lengths of incarceration, and amount of time at Safe Haven. In the coming sections of this paper, I present the findings of my research, and discuss the implications and significance of those findings.

## Chapter 4

### SOCIOLOGICAL AMBIVALENCE AND REENTRY

When asked what advice he would give to people who were recently released from carceral control, 24-year-old James said:

Have a social network, stay busy 'cause I really do feel like boredom – it's a huge trigger for depression or relapse or anything like that.

James is white male from a city in the vicinity of that which Safe Haven is located. He has a relatively strong and stable support network, having both of his parents as well as a girlfriend. He was incarcerated for the first time around the age of 20 for one year. Subsequently, he was rearrested and reincarcerated for eight months. Instead of being incarcerated after his third arrest, he opted to complete drug court. At the time of the interview, he had been on drug court for almost a year and a half with only three months remaining. While James' advice is sound and he himself has a strong social network, decent job, and stable housing, many of the other participants in this study have not quite been able to follow his advice.

My research identified sociological ambivalence within the clients of Safe Haven that came up when they were discussing Safe Haven and other reentry programs, as well as when they were discussing parole and/or drug court. This sociological ambivalence manifested itself most saliently when the interviewees talked about their peers and other people who have criminal records. The social distancing and ambivalence have implications for the formation of social bonds or lack thereof. In addition, despite the presence of ambivalence towards Safe Haven and social distancing within and without these institutions, many of the clients serve as volunteers for Safe Haven and express a desire to remain in the field of peer recovery.

*Sociological Ambivalence and Social Distancing*



Big R is a 56-year-old white male who is a peer leader and team captain at Safe Haven. He was planning on obtaining his Certified Recovery Peer Advocate (CRPA) certificate at the time of interview and was scheduled to take the exam the following week. Like many other interviewees, he expresses a kind of ambivalence when discussing different programs and institutions, including parole, that are utilized, either voluntarily or mandatorily by people who are released from prison. The following quote was given as a response to a question about his feelings upon his release from prison:

And then also with coming home, there's always, like with parole officers, guys have all these horror stories about how their parole officer treats them and what they do, and they get violated and stuff like that. And what I've come to learn is a lot of those guys, they don't tell you the whole story. They don't tell you how many breaks the PO [parole officer] already gave 'em. They don't say how many things they did wrong before the PO violated them, so I was always nervous and scared: 'what kind of PO am I gonna get? Is this guy gonna set me up, is he gonna send me back?' Even now, when I still go to do my regular reporting – it's really hard to describe but just walking in the door to go to parole to report, it's like I have this guilty feeling like I'm doing something wrong even though I'm living clean, I'm doing everything right – it's just going there, it's how it makes you feel. It's really uncomfortable. Not all parole officers are nice guys; they don't all play by the rules and they don't always give people breaks and they are not always friendly, and they lie and so you're always thinking about that stuff.

Here, Big R begins by saying that people are dishonest about parole being unfair and how they are treated by parole officers. Towards the end of his explanation however, when he discusses his own experiences, there is a degree of both ambivalence and dissociation similar to the social psychological concept of the *fundamental attribution error*. This error occurs when people give too much weight to personal disposition when discussing others but give more attention to external factors when discussing themselves (Ross 1977). What distinguishes this and other instances of ambivalence in this study from the purely psychological concept of the fundamental attribution error, however, is the ways in which this ambivalence is tied to institutions (Merton & Barber 1976). Because the criminal justice system as a whole and

especially the domain of prisoner reentry as an extension of this system are riddled with messages of personal responsibility, the ambivalence is sociological rather than psychological in nature.

Raha, 54, is a black male who, similarly to Big R, displays ambivalence, although Raha focuses on Safe Haven. Raha was incarcerated for about eight years before his release from prison approximately eight months before I interviewed him. He has been at Safe Haven since 2000 and was incarcerated in 2010 before returning to Safe Haven as a volunteer. When describing the opportunities he has had and a perceived unwillingness of his peers to seek out and take advantage of the opportunities, he said the following:

I was hoping in here, they would get a blackboard [inaudible-1:14:01.07]...so they could take the GED...no, they wanna drink coffee all day. I brought all these posters [spreads out a stack of flyers he had placed on the table upon arrival], see – now see these right here? These are flyers that I bring; every time they have something going on down at LC – training to be a security [inaudible-1:14:23.19], they pay you. These are paid programs; some of them they pay you...

In response to me asking why he thinks people don't take advantage of opportunities, we had the following exchange:

R: Because of the system, I think. Now, this system – these systems – they are depending on like Medicaid, social security – doomed to fail. If these systems collapse that they're depending on – like the food stamps, they were doubled up last month [likely due to the government shutdown], there are no food stamps this month. That's why you see no people here now – they spent all of their food stamps just because they had them...

SW: Do you think Save Haven helps with instilling that independence/responsibility in the people enrolled in the programs?

R: "We put it out there, we do, yes we do...But then, if you make it too cushy for a person, why go? 'Why should I go when you're giving me the water intravenously?'"

SW: Is that what Safe Haven does?

R: At times, at times I do, I think so. At times I do. But you see I brought these posters here and you have an outreach specialist here. Why wouldn't the outreach specialist bring something like this here. That's paid staff, I'm not paid staff, I'm a volunteer.

Understand? This is paid staff's job right? You would think, correct? So, they do make it cushy, the staff does. The staff does *nothing* [emphasis his] half of the time. I do staff work. [Another Safe Haven volunteer] does staff work. He does staff work because he believes that this place needs to motivate the people even more.

Even as he says that Safe Haven is “cushy” and that the staff does nothing, he adds to this contradiction by explaining how much Safe Haven has helped him:

They helped me build my resume – in fact, they helped build me a resume because I didn't have one...I got a resume now, I have a portfolio now, I have all of these things thanks to the...Program as well as a program in the...Center; that's a reintegration program. And Safe Haven helped me to do a lot of things here. They pointed me toward LC, where I am now in college, so those programs helped me out tremendously... It's a safe haven for me. These are like my five pillars [gestures to words on the wall of the conference room], value, peace, faith, hope and love. I value myself today, because of the peace that I have, and I have faith in a higher power, I have hope, and I love myself.

Here, Raha is frustrated with both the clients of Safe Haven and the organization's employees. The clients, according to Raha, are not motivated enough. At the same time, however, he believes he is doing more than the paid employees to motivate Safe Haven's clients and to give them adequate resources. In this exchange, Raha also identifies with program staff, using “we” rather than “they.” This indicates a degree of dissociation and social distancing between Raha and his peers. Despite the fact that he believes the paid staff could and should be doing more and that Safe Haven in general ‘makes things too cushy,’ he continues to volunteer with the organization. In his identification with program staff, also illustrates Merton and Barber's (1976) second type of ambivalence, which occurs when there is a conflict between two different social statuses. As a volunteer and as someone who was incarcerated in the past, he both believes Safe Haven to be “tremendously helpful” when viewed from his status as a client and “too cushy” when viewed from his position as a peer mentor. Whereas Safe Haven helped him find his educational opportunity, which is relatively new to him, he also says Safe Haven is not doing enough to spread the word about such programs. Raha exhibits a level of ambivalence

and social distancing that exceeds that of the other interviewees, which likely stems from the fact that he first became affiliated with Safe Haven over a decade ago.

Even James, 24, who has been incarcerated multiple times, and who has social support outside of Safe Haven and other reentry programs experiences ambivalence towards particular institutions. At Safe Haven, James alternates between works front desk and facility. In his case, the program to which he is most closely tied is drug court. James says:

I do believe that drug court is a good program. A lot of people say it's a trap but if you really do want it and you do the right things, it's a lot better than being in prison for 3 years or anything. You're actually getting the help you need and they wanna see you succeed. It's just you have to want it. It's definitely self-motivated...

He goes on to explain:

[People say it is a trap] Because there's lots of things that you can mess up and end up in jail. They're very strict in how things need to be done. You need to be very dedicated to communication with them... So there's a lot of expectations from it and if you do mess up on drug court, you get your maximum sentence... So, I mean, it depends on your mindset and if you want it or not. Drug court is not just about staying clean, it's about changing your lifestyle. So, if you're not ready for that, I wouldn't recommend it for anybody.

Here, James simultaneously believes that there are many ways in which one can mess up on drug court while also implying that "you have to want it" in order to succeed. Another theme that is associated with ambivalence is personal responsibility, which provides further evidence for the sociological, rather than psychological nature of the ambivalence experienced by the interviewees.

JoJo, a 61-year-old black male who volunteers at Safe Haven discusses the challenges he has faced as a peer mentor at Safe Haven:

It's a double-edged sword. On one hand, I get the accolades of being the wise one, the old timer, the experienced, sometimes a clinician...but then I also get the part where, 'he don't need no services, you ain't got to check on him.' Then with my peers – because they are my peers, they aren't my clients – a jealousy thing, the envy thing, the fear that I'm trying to take something from them. That kind of stuff so. I don't come as much as I used to, and I have to use wisdom in different situations and be careful because

something not big can turn into something major only because of your perceptions. Matter of fact, Steve told me the other day, ‘they think you’re different. But you *are* different,’ and I’m like ‘how am I different?’ You understand what I’m saying? So, it’s confusing. You just gotta know where you’re at and in your rapport, who you deal with because it can backfire.

Here, rather than being stigmatized as a representation of ‘people, places, and things’ to avoid, he experiences a kind of outsider status due to his reputation for making positive changes in his life. This has implications for possible limitations of peer mentorship in reintegration programs. JoJo experiences the effects of sociological ambivalence, which likely arises from the dual nature of the relationships that peers have with each other. Peers are simultaneously teachers and students. This ambivalence also manifests itself as Merton and Barber’s (1976) second type. Although peers are presumed to be equals, there can still be a power dynamic between the pair if one has been in the space of reentry for a longer amount of time or if one has accomplished more than the other. The very nature of peer interactions, especially within the reentry context, produces the ambivalence and distancing experienced by JoJo.

When asked to describe a typical day, few if any participants mentioned social interactions or going to places apart from those associated with reintegration services or parole (e.g., mental health counseling, group meetings, parole meetings, etc.). Take for example, Bingo, 52, who details his average day. Although he does mention friends, he also goes on to say that there is not much of a reason for him to be out in the community:

Morning, from 9 to 12, I’m here if I’m not at an appointment or doctors or mental health or something, or I gotta go to parole every 90 days. When I leave from here, if I don’t go to meetings or my friend picks me up or something, I go home – I watch the news, I make something to eat, and I draw... Besides that, I just stay in the house. I don’t go anywhere because what is there to do? I live in the hood...that area is crazy. What am I doing in the streets anyway?

Bingo goes on to describe his housing situation:

I'm in the hood and I can't sleep. I haven't slept good since I been there, since day 1... ..right now they helping me try to get an apartment. I said the first place I find or something, that's where I'm going because I – I can't even sleep, I'm exhausted. You see me like this, I'm tired.

These quotes indicate a discontent with the city and his housing situation. This lack of identification with the city has a myriad of potential explanations including an internalization of organization messages of staying away from 'people, places, and things,' and a social dependence on Safe Haven, making it difficult to know which 'people, places and things' outside of the organization's walls are trustworthy.

Big R, 56, appears to have a conscious awareness of the difficulty of building strong, positive social bonds:

There's a lot of great people from my past. Not everybody had a screwed up life you know, but because I screwed my life up, they distanced themselves from me. So now, I'm like in the process of making new friends and what makes it harder is I'm tryna find people like myself to hang out with. And even a lot of people that come here still have a lot of stuff going on in their life that I don't need to be near or need to be part of. I mean, I'm glad they're here, and they're trying and stuff like that, but there's a bunch of different levels of accomplishment in success of people here. It wouldn't be in my best interest to go try to pal up with someone who just got out of jail yesterday. I can't anyways because you can't associate with somebody else on parole. In a work setting or treatment setting and stuff like that, obviously there's exceptions. But, like hang out, watch a ball game, PO shows up, we're both going to jail.

This quote is indicative of an inability to form true friendships, or at least a caution in attempting to do so due to limitations in how parole policies are written, which are in direct contradiction with the realities of reintegration programs. The experiences of Bingo and Big R can be understood using the concept of possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986). Social distancing from peers could be understood as distancing from a representation of a past self in order make clear that they and other participants were their "possible self," which has become the "current self" over time.

Despite the ambivalence that was displayed by many of the interviewees, several of them expressed an interest in working as a peer specialist, either as a transitory job or as a career.

Spark, 30, is a white male who is employed by Safe Haven. At the time of interview, Spark was out on bail waiting for his case to be resolved. He has been incarcerated in the county facility four times, with an average length of incarceration around 6 months and longest term of incarceration at one year. He initially got connected to Safe Haven through his lawyer, who contacted Safe Haven to write a presentencing report for him. He became a volunteer at Safe Haven and was hired within four months of his being there. His current role at Safe Haven includes working the front desk. When asked about his plans for full time employment and if is interested in staying with Safe Haven, he replied:

No, I'm looking for something outside. This is just a 10 hour a week position most of the time. I mean right now, I'm getting more because they're down a full-time employee, but um, I'm going to look around at some point here... Um, I just had a job interview at [a reentry organization] today... It would be a peer specialist position there too, but I would be working out in the community instead of being stuck in one place.

Spark is also considering pursuing an education in adventure counseling and working with people who have mental health or substance abuse issues, which further illustrates a desire to remain in the field of peer recovery.

Big R also expressed an interest in working in the peer recovery field:

I've taken the CRPA exam...CRPA is certified recovery peer advocate. So, because of my physical disability I can't do – I used to work construction, so that fall, I can't do that kind of work anymore. So, I've kinda settled out well, 'what else have I done and what else do I know in life' and I was a pretty drug addict, you know what I mean? So I kinda – I wanna give back so on any given day, I'm open to see a video, read a book, go to a presentation, go to a conference. Anything that's relative to addiction, recovery, mental health issues, um, because that's my new career path. I actually take the – I did the CRPA training and I take the exam on Monday to be certified and so after that I basically – it's kinda like being a counselor but you don't have all the acronym letters after your name. There's a big push for those of us who have been there and done that because I've always related to people who've been where I've been, you know, and I think I can be really effective doing that.

Despite his clear ambivalence and distancing from his peers, Big R's goal is to work in the peer recovery field, presumably at an organization like Safe Haven, with people who are on parole or who are otherwise out of prison. Both Spark and Big R have benefitted from substance abuse counseling and may be pursuing employment in this particular field because it is a field that they know well and is a relatively low risk endeavor in terms of navigating the job market with a criminal record. Thompkins (2010) suggests that this propensity towards working in the reentry field may be due to the fact that it is one of the few fields that actively recruits formerly incarcerated citizens. In a similar vein, the large majority of this study's participants are volunteers at Safe Haven due to volunteer or work requirements as a condition of parole, public assistance, or drug court. In addition, volunteering helps to fulfil the requirements of several types of certifications, which according to Spark, builds "recovery capital," which he describes as a way of "balancing out that [criminal record] on the other end with all the good things you've done since then." Here Spark suggests another explanation for why so many of the study's participants volunteer with, work for, or otherwise affiliate with reentry organizations. The language of "recovery capital" likely originates from a reentry program, providing evidence that the desire to remain in the reentry field originates within these organizations.



## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in the previous section, sociological ambivalence was a common theme throughout the interviews. Sociological ambivalence may occur for several reasons. Even without taking the demographics of Safe Haven into account, the ubiquity of mass incarceration and criminal records means that there is a relatively high probability of encountering people with past criminal history. The very fact that over seven million people the United States are under penal control and only 2.2 million of those people are actually incarcerated in prisons and jails means that a far from insignificant number of people have some kind of criminal history (De Giorgi 2017). To make matters worse, these statistics do not account for people who have a criminal history but who are not on parole or probation. The teachings of the ‘road to reentry,’ namely the avoidance of negative people, places and things, may emphasize this fact, creating a situation in which clients are hesitant to befriend anyone due to fear of getting into trouble (Mijs 2016). Because of this rhetoric of avoidance of ‘people, places and things,’ sociological ambivalence and social distancing are in some ways inherent to the road of reentry. The ‘people’ they are instructed to avoid and hold accountable for their actions are like them in many ways, and the avoidance of people who otherwise would be their peers creates a space for ambivalence and social distancing to develop.

Sociological ambivalence towards and distancing from the larger community may be related to the ‘places,’ clients are instructed to avoid. Sociological ambivalence seems to be used in conjunction with social distancing to assert a ‘possible self’ (Markus & Nurius 1986). Social distancing, as noted above, may be a result of organizational teachings. When they appear together, ambivalence appears to exacerbate social distancing. This is likely because

ambivalence can lead to an inflated sense of status difference between people who are largely peers.

This research is significant because although there is a large body of literature on the objective realities of the placement and teachings of reentry organizations, less attention has been given to the subjective experiences of these realities and the ways in which they impact the organizations' clients. We have long known that reentry organizations are typically placed in locations that can serve to encourage, or at least increase the likelihood of recidivism and relapse and hinder desistance. Examining the ways in which clients experience the organizations, their communities, the formation of social bonds, and the ways in which sociological ambivalence and social distancing manifest allows for the development of more person-based and evidence-based approaches to reentry programs and organizations, and parole.

The ambivalence and social distancing that occur within and without reintegration programs have implications for the ways in which clients and volunteers internalize the messages they receive and disseminate. While espousing views of personal responsibility, some participants, through their ambivalence, in some ways absolve themselves from personal responsibility, meaning that the message may only be partially internalized.

The social distancing between individuals is also very likely a product of many of the teachings that permeate the 'road to reentry' (Mijs 2016). If clients internalize the rhetoric of personal responsibility and the avoidance of 'people, places, and things,' it follows that clients would distance themselves from the 'people,' they would normally be instructed (and/or required) to avoid. As noted in the previous section by James, social isolation, as much or even more so than boredom, can lead to an increased risk in criminal activity and recidivism. More emphasis should be placed on the building and strengthening social bonds in the community and

within reentry organizations, but before that can be effective, policy changes must be in place to allow parolees to interact outside of reentry and treatment contexts. By allowing people to interact within their communities, social bonds would be strengthened and there would be less risk of dependency on reentry organizations and their programs.

As JoJo put it in his interview, “All this stuff I’m telling you is not unique. I’m just one of thousands...” Because of the expansiveness of mass incarceration and the increasing focus on community corrections and reentry programming, studying the ways in which reentry programs affect clients’ experience of reentry is crucial for helping to stem the effects the criminal justice system has on individuals and on communities.

### *Research Process*

The most difficult part of the research process was the fact that I had complete outsider status with many of the participants. I had very little time to establish rapport with each interviewee due to my not being able to conduct ethnographic research in addition to interview research. Even so, most of the interviewees were seemingly open about their experiences of reentry and sharing anything they deemed relevant to their stories. Surprisingly, some of the younger participants were more reticent, whereas most of older the participants were able to answer my questions largely unprompted. I think this can be attributed to the fact that some of the older participants had more experience with incarceration and reentry, meaning they could have been asked to discuss their history and experiences more often inside and outside the context of reentry organizations.

### *Limitations*

The main limitation of this research is its small sample size and lack of female interviewees. Because of the small and all male sample of the present study, it is difficult

generalize the results. Further, because the individuals interviewed for the project were involved in several different programs and for varying lengths of time, it is difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint whether Safe Haven plays a large role in producing the findings, or whether the messages are central to other organizations. This concern, however, is minor when the interrelatedness of reentry organizations, parole, and other forms of community supervision such as parole and drug court is taken into account. As stated earlier, reentry organizations and community supervision are increasingly sharing the job of policing their clients.

### *Future Research*

In the future, it would be valuable to further investigate the ambivalence that occurs both with regards to peers and towards the organization itself. In particular, I am interested in better understanding the reasons why this ambivalence occurs, the mechanisms through which it develops, and the other ways it may manifest in daily life by conducting an ethnographic study of different reentry program sites. I would also like to expand the study to have a larger sample size so that my findings can be more generalizable. In expanding the sample size and scope of the research it would worthwhile to get women's experiences and perceptions in addition to those of men. Another interesting line of inquiry could be comparing the experiences of volunteers and employees of Safe Haven with people who are only clients of Safe Haven to help elucidate the degree to which ambivalence may be highlighted through increased and various engagement with the organization.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Question Guide

#### Preliminary Questions

- Tell me about yourself and your experiences, specifically those after your release from jail or prison.
- Take me through your typical day.

#### Personal History

- How old are you?
- What is your ethnic/racial identity?
- Where are you from originally?
- Where do you currently live?
- What is your level of education?
- Are you married or otherwise in a romantic relationship?
  - Is this the same or different relationship than the one you were in pre-incarceration?
- Do you have kids?
  - Do they live with you?
- What religion, if any, do you practice? Describe.

#### Incarceration History

- How many times have you been incarcerated?
- How long were you incarcerated?
- Where were you incarcerated (e.g., local, state, federal jail/prison)?
- Can you describe how you felt the day you were released?
- What did you come back to?



- In what ways would you say the world/the country/your hometown has changed since your incarceration?
- Do you think that, right after your release, you were ready to face these changes?
- Were you involved in any reintegration programs? [Explain reintegration]
  - Mandated or voluntary?
  - Would you say that the program or lack thereof has done much to ease or hurt the transition? Describe.
- Were you able to practice your religion while you were incarcerated? What did your practice consist of?

### **Employment and Housing**

- Do you have a job?
  - What job do you have? Please describe it.
  - How did you find your job?
  - What was the job search like? (e.g., did it take a long time, where did you apply, how many places did you apply to, how many interviews did you get)
  - Is your employer aware of your criminal history record and do you believe it affects how you are treated?
- If no job:
  - How are you getting by?
  - What kind of job do you want?
  - What are you doing to try to find a job?
- Where did you live?
  - How did you find housing?
  - Was the housing search difficult/were there any barriers to you obtaining housing?

### **Reintegration Program**

- Is this your first time participating in a reentry/reintegration programs?

- If no, what was your first experience like? If yes, what were you expecting it to be like and how has that expectation changed?
- What reintegration program are you involved in?
  - Describe what it is like.
  - How, overall, would you say your transition back into society is going?
- Are you on parole?
  - (If no) How did you get involved with CCA? Did a volunteer or employee reach out to you?
  - (If yes) What other requirements are there for parole?
- How often do you check in with program staff?
- What are the stipulations of your involvement in the program?
- What are you hoping to get out of the program?
  - What are your goals?
  - What do you consider to be a successful reentry?
- What is the program staff like? Do you believe they want to see you succeed or fail, or do you believe they are apathetic? Explain.

### **Reintegration and Religion**

- What role, if any, has religion played in your reentry process?
  - Do you attend church or other religious services?
  - Do you utilize church resources?
- How often do you practice your religion?

### **General Reintegration/Closing Questions**

- What have you been told the major challenges of reentry are?
- What do you see as the major challenges of reentry?
- What has been the hardest part of reentry for you?
- How do you cope with these hardships?
- What opportunities do you have access to (e.g., housing, education, social support, etc.)?

- What does it mean, to you, be an ex-offender?
- Do you believe that being an ex-offender affects how you are treated? By whom?
- What advice would you give someone else who was recently released from custody?
- Do you have any questions for me?