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Engaging Prisioner Re-entry: Identities, Masculinity, and Positionality of Ex-offenders

Engajando a reinserção do prisioneiro: identidades, masculinidade e posicionalidade ex-infratores

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Resumo

Este artigo explora as surpreendentes disparidades raciais no encarceramento e as dificuldades de reentrada para jovens adultos afro-americanos e latinos nos Estados Unidos. Quinze ex-criminosos afro-americanos e latinos foram entrevistados no estado de Connecticut em 2005-2006; a maioria foi encarcerada na adolescência e todos em algum momento entre as idades de 16-25. O artigo defende um repensar mais amplo da reentrada, além da prevenção da reincidência e minimizando o estigma de ser um ex-infrator por meio do foco nas identidades, masculinidades e posicionalidade. As ideias de masculinidade podem ajudar a mitigar o estigma extremo que os homens latinos e afro-americanos encontram como ex-infratores.
Palavras-chave: Reinserção, Masculinidade, Prisão, Disparidades Raciais, Encarceramento em massa

Abstract

This article explores the startling the racial disparities in incarceration and the difficulties in reentry for African American and Latino young adults within the United States. Fifteen African American and Latino male ex-offenders were interviewed in the state of Connecticut in 2005-2006; most were incarcerated in their teens and all at some point between the ages of 16-25. The article argues for a broader rethinking of

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reentry beyond the prevention of recidivism and minimizing the stigma of being an ex-offender through a focus on identities, masculinities and positionality. Ideas of masculinity can help mitigate the extreme stigma that Latino and African American men encounter as ex-offenders.

Keywords: *Reentry, Masculinity, Prison, Racial Disparities, Mass Incarceration*

Introduction: Incarceration and Reentry

The mass incarceration of African Americans is a continuation of past practices white supremacy and racial exclusion. Similar to the slavery, Jim Crow, forced labor convict leasing, denials of the right to vote, equal education and justice in the courts, the mass incarceration of African Americans is more recent form of racial control. Today, racial exclusion is accomplished through 'legal' means, through labeling African Americans, particularly males, as criminals, and imprisoning and disenfranchising them (Alexander 2010, Coates 2015, Wacquant 2002).

In the 1980s and 1990s African Americans were imprisoned through increasingly harsh 'get tough on crime,' 'truth in sentencing,' and 'mandatory minimums' policies, which led to rise in the number of individuals in the nations local jails and prisons from a little over 500,000 in 1980 to over 2 million in 2003. Concomitant with the tremendous growth of the prison populations has been an incredible growth nationally to over 630,000 offenders returning home each year. With the growth of the populations, with longer stays in prison, the model of prison turned heavily towards punishment rather than reformation; education

and training programs were cut back and prisons expanded. Ex-offenders returned to their poor, stressed communities largely facing enormous barriers to employment.

Understanding the pathways and circumstances under which young adults come to be incarcerated helps inform planning for their eventual reentry, as well at elucidate the multiple levels at which change has to occur for successful reentry. These changes include: increases in education, vocational training, and substance use treatment while incarcerated: removal of employment barriers and other restrictions: removal of barriers to community and civic involvement for ex-offenders: changes in policies that encourage incarceration and inhibit successful reentry (Kleis 2010; Petersilia 2003; Seiter & Kadela 2003; Solomon et al. 2004; Travis, Crayton, & Mukamal 2009; Travis 2000; Visher & Travis 2003, 2005, 2011). In addition to these changes, the support for the formation of new identities for individuals, in addition to reconnections with families when possible, is critical, particularly given the difficulty of removing employment barriers.

Changes in the prison system, including alternatives like drug treatment for drug incarceration for users, the end of mandatory minimum sentences, increased education and training within prisons, as well as greater resources dedicated to planning and insuring successful reentry (Alexander 2010, Petersilia 2004, Solomon et al. 2004, Travis, Crayton and Mukamal 2009). Caution must be taken so that reentry does not become another expansion of the prison industrial complex by increased surveillance post incarceration. The probation and parole system can serve as a barrier to employment, with its frequent mandatory meetings, drug testing, substance abuse treatment and frequent interruptions to the workday (Kleis 2010). Greater portions of the local, state and federal corrections budgets need to be redirected toward reentry in order to lower rates of recidivism (Holzer, Raphael, and

Stoll 2001, 2006; Petersilia 2004; Solomon et al. 2004; Travis, Crayton and Mukamal. 2009; Travis 2000; Visher & O'Connell 2012; Visher and Travis 2003, 2005, 2011).

Policy changes dramatically increased the prison population and disproportionately affected black and Latino youth. The highest incarceration rates were for Black and Latino young adult males. For decades, Connecticut prosecuted all juveniles over 16 years old as adults. The result was the dramatic increase and disparity in the rates for incarceration among young adults of color. In 2000, while non-whites represented only 20% of Connecticut's population, they represented 64% of the prison population. In Connecticut, blacks were over ten times more likely to be incarcerated than whites, and Latinos were over five times more likely to be incarcerated than whites (Prison Policy Initiative 2004a, 2004b, 2004c).

Almost fifty percent of Connecticut's prison population came from three cities: Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport (Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System 2004, 1). Connecticut annually ranked either first or second in terms of per capita income, making it one of the wealthiest states in the nation. The state's population is over eighty per cent white, while its poorer cities like Hartford are majority Latino and black, marking racial disparities in income and wealth. Moreover, within those cities, the majority of ex-offenders return to a few high poverty neighborhoods; the Connecticut Department of Corrections spent over seven million dollars annually to incarcerate residents from a few particular neighborhoods (Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System 2004).

Changes in public perception of incarceration in Connecticut, high state budget

deficits, and activism by various activists and advocacy groups led to a passage of a law to decrease the number of people sent back to prison for minor parole violations, to increase in money available for treatment programs, and to increase in the number of people released early from their sentences. The result is that a larger number of people are returning to their communities, many to the same particular, high poverty neighborhoods.

The passage of the Second Chance Act earmarked money from the federal Department of Corrections/Justice Department budget specifically for reentry programs and placed a greater emphasis on 'evidenced-based' reentry programs that reduce recidivism (Petersilia 2004). Growing literature on incarceration focused on the evaluation of particular treatment programs and their effects on people after incarceration (Lo & Stephens 2000; Pelissier, Jones, & Cadigan 2007; Petersilia 2004), the effects of incarceration on families (Myers et al. 1999; Phillips & Dettlaff 2009; Phillips et al. 2006), substance use during incarceration (Seal et al. 2004) the challenges facing people and communities with reentry (Freudenberg 2006, Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll 2001, 2006; Travis and Waul 2003, Visher & Travis 2003, 2005, 2011). Meanwhile, qualitative research has focused on the cultural context of the lives of returnees in their communities remain (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman 2005; Karp 2010; Immarigeon and Maruna 2004; Maruna 2001; Pogrebin et al. 2020; Seal et al. 2004; Trimbur 2009).

Maruna (2001) in qualitative interviews with offenders, emphasized the importance of redemptive storytelling that reaffirmed the essential good of the offender despite outside circumstances that led to the commission of crimes. This turned the focus towards storytelling and life histories for the identities of ex-offenders. A large focus in the U.S has been on whether or not reentry programs reduce recidivism rates, neglecting the critical role that identity plays in reentry—in

the face of deep, ongoing structural barriers—in the development and strengthening of positive subjectivities, as fathers, sons, boyfriends and volunteers, etc. (Petersilia 2004).

Racial Profiling and intense surveillance by police of African American young males meant that African Americans were brought into the criminal justice system at a faster rate than anyone else. The inadequate defense from poorly funded and staffed public defenders meant that African Americans were more likely to be sentenced to prison instead of treatment for drug abuse. The increase in mandatory minimums and truth in sentencing under the 'war on drugs' meant that those convicted were serving longer sentences. And the racial bias in sentence policies, like crack versus powder cocaine or school zones, meant that African Americans faced longer, mandatory sentences.

As Marc Mauer of the Sentencing Project wrote:

> In 2005, African Americans represented 14 percent of current drug users, yet they constituted 33.9 percent of persons arrested for a drug offense and 53 percent of persons sentenced to prison for a drug offense (Mauer 2010)

African Americans were six times more likely to be incarcerated than white Americans. Latino Americas were twice as likely to be incarcerated as whites, and their rate of incarceration has been increasing (Mauer & King 2007). While the numbers are particularly stark for African American males, they are also increasingly significant for African American females (Mauer & King 2007). Nationally 2.3% of all African Americans were incarcerated.

The combination of greater scrutiny and hyper-vigilance by police of poor African American and Latino young males, as well as the lack of availability of alternative treatment

programs instead of incarceration, combined with mandatory minimums, like school zones, increased the likelihood that poor, black and Latino youth would end up in the criminal justice system. Additionally, African American and Latino Youth also had fewer economic and social resources to serve as protective factors, as opposed to white middle-class youths who have greater access to drug treatment versus incarceration, private as opposed to public legal counsel, better education and economic opportunities, as well as reduced surveillance by police (Schensul & Burkholder 2005).

The prison population is predominantly male, with the majority being black and Latino males. They are generally less educated and less skilled in terms of work experience (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll 2001, 2006; Solomon et al. 2004). The negative impact of incarceration for young adults has been severe in affecting educational and employment opportunities, leaving fewer alternatives to drug selling/use (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2001, 2006).

Methods

Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted in the state of Connecticut in 2005-2006 with African American and Latino ex-offenders; most were incarcerated in their teens, and all had been incarcerated at some point between the ages of 16-25. Most of the young adults interviewed were incarcerated for drug possession and drug selling. A few others were incarcerated for assaults or robbery. Most had been suspended, dropped or pushed out of high school before getting their GED or high school diploma. Three had been diagnosed with learning disabilities—ADHD—and had been in special education programs. After being incarcerated the majority were often re-incarcerated for minor parole violations: missed appointments, loitering, public consumption of alcohol, and dirty urine. All were

incarcerated for at least a year.

The interviews were conducted as part of a supplement to another study, entitled Urban Lifestyles, at Institute for Community Research in Hartford, Connecticut. Urban Lifestyles focused primarily on substance abuse, particularly the socio-cultural context of ecstasy use, among young adults. In a sample of 547 young adults, the study found that 50% (N=273) had been arrested, and 26% (N=142) of the total sample had been arrested for drug possession. Additionally, 15% (N=84) of young adults were incarcerated for drug possession, 8.4% (N=46) were incarcerated for drug selling, and 34% (N=188) were incarcerated for other reasons (Eiserman, Diamond, & Schensul 2005; Schensul & Burkholder 2005; Schensul et al. 2005). These young adults were not doing more drugs than their suburban middle- class mostly white counterparts; however, they had fewer protective resources and were subject to greater scrutiny and prosecution, longer sentencing and mandatory minimums, inadequate counsel and a lack of access to diversion programs.

The 15 semi-structured interviews focused on the impacts of incarceration. Study participants were recruited through contacts in the Urban Lifestyles project, researchers at the Institute for Community Research, and community organizations in Hartford, CT. Interviews were conducted at the Institute for Community Research, participant homes or community organizations. Interview questions centered on participants' life and educational experiences before incarceration, experiences within prisons, and finally the processes of reentry.

Results

Masculinity and Money

Common themes emerge from the different pathways of young minority adults interviewed. The first was the common desire to earn money in communities with high rates of poverty and unemployment. Secondly, drugs offenses played major role in their incarceration, either through charges possession, intent to sell, other crimes committed while under the influence of drugs, or minor parole violations that led to their re-incarceration. Lastly, Masculinity, what it means to be a man, intersected with the desire to earn money and be self-sufficient through the drug economy.

Most young adults reported watching others make money on their blocks through selling and then usually being recruited through friends or relatives to so the same. They then primarily sold drugs to earn money and become self-sufficient and independent. Bourgois (1995, 1996, 2003) previously noted the connection between economic concerns and masculinity among drug dealers, and found that drug selling offered a way to earn respect as men. Tim, a twenty-two-year-old African American male echoed that sentiment.

> Mother working…. I got older sisters whatever, they working…. And it's like, everybody doing them…. I am not going to keep depending on nobody else money. When I need something, I'm gone want it. I don't want to have to ask the next person, be like 'do you got this', so when they tell me nah, I got to go to somebody else, 'do you got this', they one tell me no, then I got to go to somebody else. You just tired of asking people. So if you know you can make that money in one day, why not.

Tim's comment is particularly insightful, as what motivated him to begin selling drugs was that he did want to 'keep on depending on nobody else for money.' More importantly, he did not want to be dependent on his mother and his sisters. His dependence on females in his family for money positioned him as a boy instead of a man, and drug selling became his path to independence, to being self-sufficient, in effect to being a man. Patricia Hill Collins (2005) noted that, in discussing black masculinity, '…Black men search for respect from marginal social locations' (190).

African American boys learn at early ages to define their masculinity in comparison with and oftentimes oppositions to with girls and women (Cole and Guy-Sheftall 2004, Lemons 2008). Financial dependence on women is oftentimes seen as infantilizing for men. However, even boys experience this infantilization. As Collins notes:

> Boys are also financially dependent on others—they do not hold jobs and are not expected to support dependents…. 'real men' are not financially dependent upon others, but instead support others. (2005, 191-193).

At an early age Tim's inability to earn income made him dependent on others, particularly his female significant caretakers—their mothers, grandmothers aunts, sisters, and girlfriends—which assaulted his masculinity. Being a man meant providing for others, not having others provide for you, and Tim grew tired of asking his mother or older sisters for money.

By engaging in the drug trade, Tim quickly moved from a boy to a man, from being dependent on women to providing for them. He received this message as an adolescent.

> But I been seeing that ever since I was little, not really, ever since I was like, like
>
> 11. That's when I really, like really, looked like. I see money moving, I see him giving him something but what the hell is that. And after a while, I started hanging around them. After that, I was like shit, you could buy a car with this money, and I'm 12. (Tim 20-year-old A-A Male).

Subsequently, Tim entered the drug trade and was arrested for the first time at age 16.

Like Tim, Carlos started out watching older males around his neighborhood and his block earn money through selling drugs. The route to independence and self- sufficiency, in effect to masculinity as a Latino male, was through the drug trade.

> Selling drugs, smoking weed…. I started doing, like I never had a job…. I was always like watching everybody, like people selling drugs on the block. I was always watching, like that would be me. I would stand on the corner and hang out with them. (Carlos A Latino Male)

High rates of unemployment, particularly for black and Latino youth, make the drug trade an attractive alternative. Low wage, service sector jobs are not a particularly attractive option; the lack of job experience and low educational levels—particularly for those who have pushed out of the educational system—make even those jobs difficult to attain (Bourgois 1995, 1996, 2003). Additionally, in low service sector employment, men are often submissive to women in the workplace and given the low wages, they are still cannot be entirely self-sufficient. Bourgois (1995, 1996, 2003) noted how attractive the drug trade is for young men, given the capitalistic nature of the work and emphasis on masculinity. Drug dealers gained self-sufficiency, independence, and respect through the drug trade, thereby validating masculinity.

Like Tim, Carlos was also arrested when he was sixteen years old. However,

Carlos's incarceration was longer than most. After being arrested at age sixteen while high on drugs for armed robbery, Carlos was charged as an adult at sixteen in Connecticut and sentenced to twelve years. Carlos was released at twenty-eight, and his twelve years of incarceration escalated and hardened these ideas of masculinity for Carlos.

> I went through a lot of fights, disagreements. You know you get new roommates, not turning off TV, you know, telling him about the TV, and come out all hostile and get it on from there. Because you couldn't back down then. Back then, it was like 'oh I'm sorry, you know, my bad, I apologize, I didn't know it was yours or that was you, or that was the chair you was sitting in.' You couldn't walk away or you had to pack up and get the fuck out because they don't need bitches on the block. You got to hold your own.

For Carlos, compromise while incarcerated signified weakness, i.e. femininity. For Carlos, every day while incarcerated was predicated on proving masculinity and hardness. Certainly, Carlos held many of these same ideas before being incarcerated, but they became amplified within prison and further complicated Carlos's return.

Carlos was still highly motivated to lead a different life and not go back to prison. 'I ain't trying to go back for nobody. I'm trying to get my life back now', he said while distinguishing himself from others who were 'still living the street life' and 'haven't learned anything.' He was highly motivated to work a regular job, earn money and really begin his life. However, he faced significant obstacles. 'So I have been trying to look for a job, and it's hard because of my crime, my incarceration. No job history.' Even little

things irritated him and revealed his utterly dependent and emasculating status.

> These little kids got phones now, man. I'm like shit man, I can't even have a phone. I tried to get me a phone, they tell me I never had credit, I have to give them four hundred dollars. I said OK, I took to walking…. They tell me I never had credit before, so it's four hundred dollars to put down. Fuck, how the hell these little kids getting phones. I don't know, little things that get to you.

For Carlos, his situation was worse than those of little kids, with their phones, and meant that he himself was infantilized, actually ranking below the level of even children. For him, this small perception ran head long to his longstanding ideas about masculinity that solidified while incarcerated. He expressed utter exasperation at his situation: 'I need some freaking money. I can't keep taking my girl's money.'

Tim, Carlos and all the men interviewed found it difficult to attain employment after their incarceration. The barriers from their race, as well as the stigma associated with incarceration, were difficult to overcome. The inability to achieve the traditional male roles being a self-sufficient provider was situation they had to negotiate. They were all determined to not return to prison, which meant they were committed to abandoning their previous, illegal ways of earning income. However, with all of them being unemployed, the emergence of alternative identities became critically important to manage ongoing frustration.

Reentry and Employment

All of the ex-offenders interviewed were unemployed. The focus of many of the ex-offenders interviewed was on securing employment, and they found the search to be particularly frustrating. Many applied to temporary agencies, to service sector

jobs in fast food and retail, as well as some warehouse work. Many were initially honest their history of incarceration but found that they did not receive any call backs.

As David, a 20-year-old African American male put it:

> It's because I was convicted of for a felony. That's why they didn't call me back. I went to this Temp agency all the way out in Southington. The guy went straight to the back of the application. Didn't even look at the rest. Just went straight to the back and said he couldn't hire me...not with my charges. It made me angry.

David's experience was emblematic of the experiences of ex-offenders. All the rest of his history including the GED he achieved while incarcerated, the job preparation courses he attended, as well as his individual desire and qualities, meant nothing; it was all disregarded as the employer simply looked at one answer on the application before going any further. David was reduced to his ex-offender status.

Carlos, a 28-year-old Latino male, had a similar experience.

> So I have been trying to look for a job, and it's hard because of my crime, my incarceration. No job history. I go out; they give me Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays to look for a job. I go everywhere. I went from Burger King in Buckland Hills Mall; they said they would call…. Burger King here on Main St somewhere around here. I went in there too. They told me the same thing…. They asked me about it [The record]. I said 'Yeah, I been convicted of a felony, but willing to talk.' Um, I went to a deli, they said they would call

> me…. I went to West farms Mall, Foot Locker, I been everywhere man, you name it pretty much. I went to UPS at 6 o'clock in the morning; I had an interview at 7. They said they would give me a call.

The non-responsiveness by employers led many to conclude that the mark of their incarceration was responsible for the lack of any response.

Terrance reflected that even when you make a good impression, there are other candidates without convictions with similar qualifications.

> Yeah, well he wanted to hire me, but he said, you know, I have to submit it to them. Because nowadays, if they ask for a background check, then you have to submit…. I went down for 2 interviews. The first one, they like me. And I told them about the convictions. And they were like 'alright, if we talk this over, as a team of hiring, then we'll call you back for a second interview.' So I got called back for a second interview. I was like, oh, I'm surprised. But I met with Human Resources, and the conviction was the one thing that was kind of borderline. Not that they wouldn't hire me, it's just that they found somebody who didn't have a conviction. You see what I mean?

Terrance understood the employer's perspective; given that another applicant possessed the same education and skill level, why would an employer choose someone with a criminal conviction over someone without one. As such, employment prospects dimmed for most men.

The oft-stated recommendation given to ex-offenders by job training programs was that they should admit to committing an offense on applications but wait until the interview to divulge and discuss the exact nature of the offense. One particular re-entry program that several had gone through recommended that they say on their applications 'yes,' in answer to questions of previous convictions, but when asked the nature of the offence to write 'will

explain upon interview.' But many found that this technique did not yield any better results.

The experiences of many lead them to take their chances that their misrepresentation on applications will perhaps at least get them a call back and possibly a job. The automatic disqualification because of ex-offender status leaves them no good choices. It seemed to be either the chance of actually getting a job and risking termination upon possible discovery or never getting a job at all.

> When you do that, I noticed, you know, when you put no, they look at it and don't worry about it. When those few times where I did put 'yes, will explain upon interview,' and I never got a phone call. When I filled out 'no' on the application, I would get a phone call. That kind of like proved my little theory, in a sense. It wasn't a guarantee for all companies, jobs whatever, but the ones I was working with, it was 'sure enough.' Like I was right. (Reynaldo)

Many felt the overwhelming need to find employment, yet the barriers remained particularly high.

The situation for young black and Latino young adult remains particularly dire. The employment rate for young adult black males, particularly those who have dropped out of high, reached staggering proportions, estimated as high 65 percent (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll 2001, 2006). Researchers noted that employers were more likely to hire white ex-offenders than African Americans without records. Additionally, employers who conducted background checks were more likely to hire African Americans than those who do not; employers who did not conduct background checks assumed criminality among

African American male applicants (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll 2001, 2006). Research on employer perspectives supported the conclusions of ex-offenders about the stigma of their incarceration.

Alternative Masculinities and Identities

Given the barriers to employment—the reluctance of employers to hire ex-offenders, the stigma of offender status, low education levels, significant gaps or no history of employment—the search for work remained particularly frustrating and alienating for ex-offenders; yet many of them remained quite positive. The men interviewed often said that being a father, husband, boyfriend, son, volunteer, or something other than an ex-offender kept them grounded and optimistic (Cain 1991). These roles for positive masculinity kept the men focused on positive aspects of their lives, counterbalancing their current unemployment and inability to be economically self-sufficient and a provider.

> Dave focused on being a father and being there for his kids; his girlfriend was expecting twins soon. 'I just want to stay out of trouble, live life, you know be happy, live with my kids, my girl and work.'

Similarly, for Reynaldo, he enjoyed being a father to his stepson. He walked him back and forth to school every day. Later, when his stepson began having problems in class, he often visited the school and sat in his classrooms. Soon, he came to volunteer at the school, and he talked of being a tutor or a para-professional, which gave him hope for the future, particularly given the dire employment prospects. 'Right now, I am full-time volunteer…I come to school every day' Reynaldo said. He added that a teacher told him 'you can get paid for what you do here. The teachers love you here.' This sense of validation or who he was as a father and a volunteer emboldened his optimism for the future, and even for his employment prospects.

These new identities were particularly valuable, inspired optimism, and counter-acted the pervasive permanency of the stigma of incarceration. Many reported that being a father, husband, boyfriend, son, volunteer, or Muslim kept them hopeful and grounded, despite the inability to find employment. Indeed, these roles are traditional in nature, but yet and still, refashioned out of their own lives. The way to diminish frustration with dim employment prospects, and the permanent ex-offender stigma, is to reaffirm one's own dignity, self-worth, and redemption through positive identities.

Harold, who at 46 was older than most but who still entered prison for the first time at age 18, had been incarcerated several times, mostly due to his addiction to drugs. Harold spelled clearly the balance between struggle with hopelessness and frustration and the possibilities for redemption and reconnection.

> Some of us, we struggle and struggle, and we break free. But some of us, we just don't break free. And it becomes to the point where, some of us feel there is no hope…and some of us, such as myself you know, I know that I could do better, that I don't want to go to my grave. I want to be, I want to contribute something, not only to myself, but to society and my family. And I done seen it in other people, you know, and that's what gives me a lot of hope.

Harold focused primarily on his repairing relationships with his family. His father supported him during his periods of incarceration, and he wanted to honor his father. He also received affirmation through the relationship with his wife.

> I have a loving wife who is living up in Massachusetts now. I am on parole…. when I got married, I got married because I love this woman. And I want something better. It's time for me, let's say, to grow up. And it took all these years.… During my incarceration period, my father was always there. We always established a bond, and he always supported me. You know, commissary, always had commissary.

For Harold his father and his wife were the centerpieces that held together his hope. In particular, focusing and concentrating on others, outside of himself, transformed his vision of himself as son and husband. In addition, Harold felt validation from others who recognized him as a devoted Muslim. Harold's identities as husband, son and devout Muslim mitigated stigma of being an ex-offender and elevated his hope for the future.

Similarly, Carlos credited his son for turning his life around while he was still incarcerated.

> …one day I got a letter from my son's mother. She said my son is starting to ask about me. He's asking about me. So she came up and put him on the list. She came up, and ever since she came up that day, she never left. That was like three years ago.

Carlos's son first visit changed him; he then began to do everything he could, taking every program, such as Anger Management and Recognizing what You've Done, that the prison offered to prove to the parole board that he indeed was committed to change.

> I talk to my son. It's funny, because I never been there for him. He's always 'Dad, I got this. Dad, I'm graduating from the marine thing'… he was 11 at the time when he started doing the marine thing. At 12, he is going to finish it. He is always concerned about that, and he's always trying to make me part of his life. I can hear how he tries, but I know I have never been there for

him. I know he loves me because I'm his dad.

For Carlos this new identity as father, and boyfriend, offset his anger and frustration at his employment prospects. Additionally, it allowed for a traditional definition of masculinity. And it surprised Carlos, who for many years while incarcerated had no relationship or contact with his son. The relationship with his son was central to his determination to have a different life and be a different person in the world. He stopped being as hard in prison, stayed out of trouble, and focused on parole to joined his son and his mother.

Being a father, husband, boyfriend, son, or volunteer helped the men mitigate their ex-offender status and reframe their masculinity. No longer were there focused solely on their own inability to provide financially for their families, partners or themselves; they found validation in other roles that they fulfilled. At the same time, families were their only sources of support, during incarceration and afterwards; families foremost helped with housing and occasionally would help find in low-wage employment. The reframing of their roles and masculinity gave them hope and optimism and bolstered their determination to not return to prison.

Conclusion

Successful reentry includes the removal of barriers to employment, the establishment of services and supports for ex-offenders, the creation and strengthening of positive identities, reconnections with family when possible, planning that considers individual needs, and civic and community involvement for ex-offenders. Additionally, there needs to be

changes of policies that lead to hyper-incarceration of African American and Latino young adults in order to keep them out of prisons. The solution means moving beyond the simple prevention of recidivism towards the production of individuals with positive identities and family connections, involved in their communities.

Bourdieu & Passeron's (1977) ideas of 'cultural capital' and 'symbolic violence' are useful for a discussion of the stigma of incarceration. Bourdieu used 'cultural capital' and 'symbolic violence' to describe the ways that schools work to reproduce inequalities, by validating the 'cultural capital' of dominant groups while conducting 'symbolic violence' against subordinate groups; while still emphasizing the social reproduction of social class. Bourdieu & Passeron (1997) theorized how social reproduction worked culturally, while still emphasizing the social reproduction of social class; their ideas of 'symbolic violence' and 'cultural capital' can be applied to other marginalized groups (Levinson & Holland 1996).

The stigma of their ex-offender status is a form of symbolic violence that results in the loss of cultural capital in employment. To mitigate the impact of barriers to employment, ex-offenders employ strategies to strengthen other identities—those of father, husband, boyfriend, volunteer and son etc. While adapting to and negotiating the structural barriers preventing successful reentry, ex-offenders ground themselves in other identities to mitigate the symbolic violence of ex-offender stigma (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990). While these identities are positive for ex-offenders, successful reentry still has to include broader structural reforms to end mass incarceration, move from punishment towards rehabilitation within prison, end the stigma for ex-offenders and remove barriers to employment.

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