Impact of Post-Secondary Correctional Education on Self-Efficacy and Personal Agency of Formerly Incarcerated African American Men

David E. Jones
Western Michigan University, davy278@hotmail.com

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IMPACT OF POST-SECONDARY CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION ON SELF-EFFICACY AND PERSONAL AGENCY OF FORMERLY INCARCERATED AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

by

David E. Jones

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Counseling Psychology Western Michigan University April 2017

Doctoral Committee:

Patrick Munley, Ph.D., Chair
Glind Rawls, Ph.D.
Toni Woolfork-Barnes, Ph.D.
This study explored the impact of post-secondary correctional education (PSCE) on those released from prison, with special attention paid to individuals’ sense of self-efficacy and personal agency. A review of the literature indicates the vast majority of people who enter prison will one day return to society. These returning citizens face a number of hurdles as they work to reconstruct life outside of prison and avoid recidivism. Prior research suggests education is positively correlated with successful reentry into society. Unfortunately, there are few opportunities to pursue education past the secondary level in prison, which limits access to the corollary benefits of higher education.

This study, situated within the transformative research paradigm, recognizes multiple realities are constructed and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, and racial/ethnic forces, and attempts to capture the authentic experiences/voice of participants. As a result, a phenomenological research methodology was employed to capture the experiences of selected individuals who (a) participated in some form of post-secondary education while incarcerated (PSCE), and (b) successfully completed parole and were under no form of correctional supervision at the time of the interview. A community liaison auditor was employed to help
recruit a total of eight men who all identified as African American or Black. Individuals participated in an initial interview lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. Participants were then provided with a transcript and summary of their interview, and interviewed a second time to ensure the accuracy of the transcript and summary and provide participants an opportunity to clarify. The transcripts were then analyzed and 15 themes were identified. These themes included participants’ perceptions of the changes they experienced across a number of areas of their life as a result of participating in PSCE from goal setting to parenting, as well as shifts in perception of their previous crimes. Themes additionally highlighted growth in motivation to change. Participants were also invited to share their thoughts about PSCE with individuals currently in prison.

Participants articulated both breadth and depth of transformative experiences related to their participation in PSCE. These findings help provide a window into the components and processes of pro-social change associated with PSCE. The findings of this study are helpful in understanding the experiences of PSCE among a group of men who successfully reentered the community and completed parole. Additionally, the findings may be helpful and important in understanding the role opportunities for PSCE play in the success of men re-entering the community from prison. Key considerations are identified and discussed, and implications considered.
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We stand on the shoulders of giants, those who work to give us the opportunities that come in life. All that I am is because of those who took the time to teach me, support me, and challenge me to be better; teachers, colleagues, and friends to numerable to name. If not for the love and support of my parents Frank and Linda, and my older brother Chris, I would not be where or who I am today. They taught me the value of family, how to treat others with love and respect, and not to succumb to the trepidations of a monumental task. Another giant on whose shoulders I stand is the late Dr. Lonnie E Duncan. He was my original dissertation chair and modelled what it means to be a Counseling Psychologist. He worked in love for the people and challenged each one of his students to be better, to make a difference in the world. All who knew him are better for it and feel the loss of his absence. But, those of us who were lucky enough to be mentored by him will carry on his legacy. I am proud to join the ranks of PhD along with his other students. After Dr. Duncan’s passing, Dr. Patrick Munley guided me to finishing my PhD as my chair. Without his patience and support, and that of my committee, Dr. Toni Woolfork-Barnes & Dr. Glinda Rawls, I may not have finished the journey.

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David E. Jones
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Over 95% of the individuals currently incarcerated will be released from prison at some point in the future. Unfortunately nearly half of all those released from prison will reoffend and return to prison at some point (Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKinzie, 2000). This cycle of release and return to prison is a significant cost to individuals, their families, communities, and society as a whole. Individuals’ lives are interrupted, they are taken away from their families, and the community pays a considerable cost both as a result of crime and the money it takes to maintain these people in prison.

Two of the most significant factors related to decreased rates of recidivism are education and post release employment (Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012). The narratives of many of the studies that examine employment and education’s impact on recidivism describe a process by which education leads to employment, which lowers recidivism rates (Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2009; Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012; Rose, Reschenberg, & Richards, 2010; Schlesinger, 2005). This narrative leads to the assumption that getting a job after prison is the more significant of the two factors associated with the reduction of recidivism. A longitudinal study of prisoners in Indiana revealed that employment rates were nearly identical for those with a school education and those with some college education (Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012). An additional study reveals that employment rates are slightly better for those in a vocational program compared with those that were enrolled in college classes (Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKinzie, 2000). Both of these studies, however, revealed that rates of recidivism are lowest for those with a college education when compared to those in a high school
completion or vocational program (Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKinzie, 2000; Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012). This may suggest that perhaps there is something else more related to education’s impact on recidivism than merely the fact that it leads to employment.

Research has identified that expanding prisoners’ general cognitive abilities can help prisoners adjust to life in prison and set them up for a more successful reentry into society (Andrews & Bonta, 2003). Post-secondary education is designed to help expand their general cognitive abilities, in short it helps people learn to think more broadly. It is this change in thinking, which could explain the differences in recidivism rates at varying levels of education despite nearly identical levels of employment, at least between vocation and college education programs.

There are two additional factors to consider as a source of possible difference. These factors are self-efficacy and human agency. Self-efficacy involves how individuals view their own abilities to succeed within a given situation by influencing how people feel, how they motivate themselves, how they engage in challenging activities (Bandura, 1993). Human agency is the ability humans have to create their desired future (Bandura, 2006b). The combination of self-efficacy and human agency logically play a large impact on people’s ability to succeed after prison. To date, there have been no studies that look at how post-secondary correctional education (PSCE) may impact self-efficacy and human agency. Thus, the current study was undertaken to examine, from a qualitative perspective, the experiences of former prisoners who participated in PSCE, and to explore their experiences of PSCE with respect to sense of self-efficacy and human agency.
The Need

The United States spends over $80 million on correction each year, meaning that each United States resident is paying about $260 per year for corrections (Picchi, 2014). Torre and Fine (2005) revealed that the state of New York would save an estimated $150,000,000 if one-third of its inmates were to participate in PSCE. This ballooning cost of incarceration in this country is occurring despite a 45% reduction in violent and property crimes over the past two decades (Picchi, 2014). Without even factoring in the personal cost to inmates and their families associated with going to prison, the cost on the American taxpayer is extreme. With limited national resources, it does not make sense to continue to incarcerate our citizens at the highest rate of any industrialized country in the world, giving the U.S. the largest population of prisoners (International Center for Prison Studies, 2006). Among individuals in prison in the United States, Black/African American and Latino men account for a disproportionate portion of prisoners (Alexander, 2010). Rates of incarceration versus total population indicate that White people make up 68 percent of the total population but account for only 35 percent of the prison population, while Black people account for 12 percent of the total population but 44 percent of the prison population, and Hispanic individuals account for 14 percent of the total population but 19 percent of the prison population (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). The elevated rates of incarceration exist despite the fact that people from all races consume drugs at relatively similar rates (Snyder & Sickman, 2006). In fact, any difference in drug use rates among the various races of people indicates that White youth are more likely to engage in drug crimes than people of color (Snyder & Sickman, 2006). When discussing criminal justice issues in this country it is important to acknowledge these glaring racial disparities.
We must find ways as a country to reduce our prison population. Inmates who return to prison after release account for a significant portion of the money spent on corrections in this country every year (Cullen, Jonson, & Nagin, 2011). If we were to lower rates of recidivism it would represent a significant reduction in the prison population and save the tax payers of this country a significant amount of money. The cost to taxpayers is just one of the costs of incarceration. There is also a significant impact on families and the strength of family bonds that result from going to prison. These bonds do not, on average, recover to pre-release levels after people return from prison (La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2016). Furthermore, families suffer the loss of financial and co-parenting support. Finally, prison also impacts the psychological well-being of those who are incarcerated, and it can be difficult for people incarcerated to regain their sense of humanity (Schlesinger, 2005).

Research has identified that education plays a major role in helping to reduce rates of recidivism, and that post-secondary education in the form of vocational programs and college classes have the greatest impact on rates of recidivism. What has received little attention, however, are the psychological impacts of education on prisoners. A study conducted by Parker (1990) revealed PSCE had a significant impact on self-esteem and social competency, however Parker did not find a significant impact on self-efficacy. The author of this quantitative study indicated that there were several confounding variables. What is missing in this study and other research studies is the voice of those who directly experience incarceration. Furthermore, the qualitative studies that have included the voice of former or current prisoners have not examined the psychological shifts that may occur for individuals as a result of their participation in PSCE.
History of the Issue

The history of laws and punishment in the United States harkens back to the founding of the country, when settlers brought the traditions of harsh unyielding punishment. These punishments had the goal of making a public example out of law breakers so as to dissuade others from committing crimes (Silva, 1994). This model of punishment was the norm until the Quaker Codes came to the fore during the formation of the 13 colonies, which were based on humane principles of non-violence and human dignity (Clear & Cole, 1994). The first school was introduced into a prison 22 years after the appearance of the first prison in the United States (Allen, 1981). These schools were designed to help inmates learn to read so they could regularly read the bible and reflect on their crimes. A competing philosophy of incarceration known as the Auburn System developed in New York shortly after the Quaker Codes were introduced, and the Auburn system became the predominate philosophy by the 1840’s (Silva, 1994). The Auburn system of incarceration was a reaction against the ideas of rehabilitation and humane treatment of prisoners; and called for the prisoners to be treated with sufficient severity. The Auburn system was predominate throughout the country until the latter half of the 19th century, when a more reform minded system began to emerge (Gehring, 1997). The industrial revolution ushered in calls for universal education, including secondary education, which led to more attention being paid to the education of prisoners (Jones, 1992). Prison education began to slowly grow throughout the country, and by the mid-to late 1920s colleges began to offer sporadic classes. It wasn’t until the early 1950s that the first systematic degrees and course offerings emerged in prisons in the United States (Silva, 1994).

The passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, and the implementation of Pell grants, ushered in a golden age of PSCE (Freyberg, 2009). A number of college programs began to
grow and by 1993, 92% of correctional systems offered some form of post-secondary educational opportunity (Silva, 1993). In 1994 the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act eliminated Pell grant access to incarcerated individuals. This led to a precipitous fall of PSCE opportunities and by 1997 only 54.9% of prisons still had any form of PSCE (Mentor, 2004). Despite research indicating that PSCE had a significant impact on recidivism, in 2002 only 30 states and the federal government offered PSCE (Messemer, 2003).

**Significance**

As our country tries to find ways to reduce our prison population we must look to the research to identify programs and practices that can impact the burgeoning prison population. The documented cost of mass incarceration on both society and individuals has led to researchers identifying factors, such as employment and education, which lower rates of recidivism. However there has been a relative lack of study devoted to investigating the underlying psychological/cognitive shifts that may facilitate a reduction in recidivism. Furthermore, the scant studies that have been done in this area have not fully incorporated the voice of those most directly impacted by prison education, the inmates themselves. The current research is thus intended to bridge the gaps in the literature and our understanding of how education, particularly post-secondary education, is experienced by former prisoners who are successful in completing parole and reestablishing themselves in the community.

The current study has undertaken efforts to ensure that participants are provided with an opportunity to authentically give voice to their lived experience. This was undertaken to limit the types of biases that can negatively impact marginalized communities because it is recognized that certain identities have been historically privileged or excluded from the definition of the
research focus, questions, and other methodological considerations (Mertens, 2007). Thus the current research is a qualitative study situated in the transformative research paradigm. The methodology employed was intended to minimize bias and bring the voices of participants to the fore to learn about their experiences with PSCE.
A recent count of incarcerated individuals revealed approximately 2,239,800 people in U.S. jails and prisons (Glaze & Parks, 2011). It is estimated that 95 percent of the currently incarcerated population will be released back into society at some point in the future (Travis, 2005). It would benefit society to ensure these individuals return to their communities with the skills necessary to limit the likelihood of re-incarceration. Much has been written about what these skills are and what factors help ensure former prisoners do not re-offend. Education has been shown to be one major factor in the reduction of recidivism (Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2009; Chappell, 2003; Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012; Poitowski, & Lathrop, 2012; Rose, Reschenberg, & Richards, 2010; Schlesinger, 2005; Tewksbury, Erickson, & Taylor, 2000; Torre & Fine, 2005). There are different levels of educational opportunities available in correctional facilities, and studies show the greater an individual’s level of education, the less likely he or she is to return to prison (Chappell, 2003; Freyberg, 2009; Rose et al., 2010; Tewksbury et al., 2000; Torre & Fine, 2005). Many of these studies highlight increased employability as a primary factor involved in decreasing recidivism (Bahr et al., 2009). There is, however, scant research on the accompanying psychological shifts that occur in the minds of inmates.

Early research by Parker (1990) suggested college education improves the self-esteem of inmates, but has little effect on individuals’ sense of efficacy or personal agency. This finding, however, is not consistent with the work of Albert Bandura (1993), who suggested self-efficacy is crucial in the cognitive development and functioning of individuals. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is the most central and pervasive mechanism of human agency. Moreover,
Bandura (2006b) further suggested the exercise of agency is an essential aspect of a human’s
capacity to shape a better and more sustainable future. This dissertation investigated the impact
of post-secondary education received while incarcerated on participants’ perceptions of self-
efficacy and personal agency.

The review of literature for this dissertation is organized into three major subject areas.
The first section focuses on the history of post-secondary education in prisons in the United
States of America. The second section highlights the effects of post-secondary education on
reducing rates of recidivism. The review of literature concludes with an examination of theories
of self-efficacy and personal agency, as they relate to pro-social action, and ultimately the ability
of former prisoners to gain a greater sense of control over the course of their lives.

**History of Post-Secondary Correctional Education in the United States**

**Early History and Competing Philosophies**

The early English settlers of the United States brought with them the laws and practices
of their country. These early laws and punishments were harsh and unyielding, with the goal of
punishing wrongdoers and making a public example out of lawbreakers so as to dissuade others
in the population from committing similar crimes (Clear & Cole, 1994). Punishment was the
goal, and rehabilitation was rarely considered outside of the context of religious penance. Jails
during this period were merely way stations meant to house prisoners awaiting the execution of
their sentences, which was likely to be some form of corporal punishment, public humiliation, or
death (Silva, 1994). The English model of corporal punishment held sway throughout the
original 13 colonies until William Penn proffered the Quaker Code, which was based on the
humane principles of non-violence and human dignity. These principles argued, in part, against
the physical punishment and/or public humiliation of prisoners in favor of the rehabilitation of prisoners (Clear & Cole, 1994).

The first true prison in the United States is considered to be the Walnut Street Jail founded in 1776 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where confinement itself was the punishment. The inspectors of the prison held three main goals: “(1) The public security... (2) The reformation of the prisoners... (3) Humanity towards these unhappy members of society” (Silva, 1994, p 19). It was believed that rehabilitation could affect changes in the prisoners’ character, attitude, and behavior so as to guard against future illegal activity. Rehabilitation would also contribute to the overall welfare and life satisfaction of prisoners (Allen, 1981). By 1798, a school was introduced into the prison that taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and religious studies. During this same time, circa 1820, a system based on Quaker ideals began at another early prison, the Eastern Pennsylvania Penitentiary, which came to be known as the Pennsylvania System. This system argued for the complete separation of prisoners so they could reflect on teachings from the Bible and their crimes. The only contact afforded to these individuals was a daily visit from a chaplain who was charged with the moral education of the prisoners. This education took the form of discussions of Bible verses and other moral teachings. Prisoners who could not read did not possess the capacity to reflect on the teachings of the Bible, so chaplains were also charged with teaching the illiterate to read (Silva, 1994). Thus, these chaplains became the first prison teachers.

A competing philosophy of incarceration, which became known as the Auburn System, began to develop in New York. The founders of the Auburn System believed that too much faith had been placed on rehabilitation and argued for drastic changes in the penitentiary model. They disagreed with the tenants of the Pennsylvania model, and believed that prisoners should be
treated with sufficient severity. They doubted if prisoners were able to be reformed, as they were considered “to be something between a beast and a man” (Silva, 1994, p. 21). In the Auburn System, prisoners were required to work together in complete silence. This daily routine provided little time for anything other than work. One of the founders of this system, Stephen Allen, thought prison education was unwise because it interfered with inmates’ time for labor.

He also believed that criminals “had not the same claim upon our commiseration that the honest and unfortunate part of our species have” (Silva, 1994, p. 21). Proponents of the Auburn System argued that one could not govern a prison without a whip, and that the prison experience should produce sufficient terror and suffering. These two competing systems were virtually polar opposites. By 1840, the Pennsylvania System had fallen out of favor and the Auburn System began to be adopted by many state legislators. This shift was largely due to the fact that the Auburn System provided economic advantages, specifically forced labor.

The Auburn System held sway until the latter half of the 19th century, when more complex and nuanced ideas of criminals and punishment began to take hold. The implementation of the ideas of Zebulon Brockway, warden of the Elmira Reformatory in New York, are often credited with ushering in the Reformatory era within the U.S. prison system (Gehring, 1997). Brockway believed that even the most fractured soul should have an opportunity at redemption. He also argued that criminal behavior was not individually situated, but was, in part, a product of the environment and the economic situations individuals were born into. He offered opportunities at “redemption” through education and individually assisted reintegration into the community (Silva, 1994). The ideas of the Reformatory era slowly began to usurp the philosophies of the Auburn System, but the tension between rehabilitation and punishment remains a part of the criminal justice system today.
The forces of urban industrialization at the start of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century necessitated a more educated work force, and gave rise to calls for universal secondary education in the United States (Silva, 1994). As universal secondary education became common place in communities throughout the country, greater attention began to be paid to the educational needs of prisoners (Jones, 1992). In the early portion of the 1920s, a comprehensive evaluation of state and federal prisons was conducted by the National Society of Penal Information. One of the foci was prison education (Silva, 1994). About this, Osborne (1925, as cited in Silva, 1994) stated, 

as the function of the prison is primarily, if not exclusively punitive, it is not surprising that little to no attention is paid to the education of the inmates. In most state prisons, there are elementary classes in which illiterates are instructed in the rudiments of English and arithmetic, but rarely do we find anything more… There is a total lack of intellectual stimulus in in the American prison. (p. 22)

During this period, the first mention of correspondence courses being offered by colleges began to surface, with Columbia University being the first to offer such classes (Silva, 1994). Columbia offered programs in Sing Sing prison, which included course offerings in agriculture, real estate, salesmanship, and a number of more traditional academic subjects. While evidence exists of post-secondary educational opportunities, Osborne’s (1925, as cited in Silva, 1994) observations clearly demonstrate that education was far from ubiquitous; in fact while there was evidence of prisoners taking correspondence courses in all but 2 of 11 state prison systems investigated at this time, few were able to take advantage of these isolated opportunities (Gehring, 1997).

While slow in starting and not widely available, the movement for post-secondary education in prison was beginning. Early adopters of post-secondary programing commented
that the courses provided, “mental relaxation and an incentive to work out a worthwhile future for themselves after leaving prison” (Silva, 1994, p. 23). Additionally, others commented on the hope and future-orientated thinking that were evident in the men that had opportunities to gain education and training (Gehring, 1997). From the start of post-secondary education in prisons the recognition of the wide ranging benefits on the psyche of inmates were noted. As word of the power of education spread among prison administrators, inmates, and university staff, more correspondent college programs began throughout the country in an ad-hoc fashion, being lead and initiated through individual efforts (Silva, 1994).

While the mid-to late 1920s witnessed the first articulation between prisons and colleges, systematic course offerings and degrees would not be offered in prisons until the early 1950s (Silva, 1994). By 1929, the first thorough survey of all state and federal prisons was conducted. It provided comparative statistics across a range of topics within the prison system, including information about the level and intensity of education programs offered in prisons throughout the country. While the overall availability of collegiate education was low, significant differences were noted between programs offered by region, with more programs being offered in the northern states as compared to southern states, and, with the exception of California, more programs offered in the eastern states than western states. California, in fact, led the way with the most extensive prison education programs. A review of 438 inmates in San Quentin enrolled in the University of California correspondent courses found that the inmates averaged higher grades than their non-incarcerated peers (Garrett & MacCormick, 1929). This proved some incarcerated students were just as capable of college level course work as their non-incarcerated peers.
Advancement in the development of prison education slowed during the Great Depression, and by the end of the 1940s, only four states offered college correspondence courses to inmates (Gehring, 1997). Prior to the World War II and the GI Bill, which made college affordable for returning veterans, college education was seen as the purview of the elite. The drastic increase in the number of college students helped to promote acceptance of education for prisoners and allowed more programs to begin to take root, including college level programs (Jones, 1991). In 1942, the General Educational Development (GED) test was developed and provided opportunities for the eventual boom in high school equivalency education within U.S. prisons (Tyler, 2005). The first GED program in prison was offered in Illinois in 1945, and within 10 years, over half the states had GED programs in prisons (Gehring, 1997). By the end of the 1960s, GED programs were offered throughout the country, making access to secondary education available within the prison systems throughout most all states in the United States.

Prior to 1950, due to a persistent lack of funding, growth of prison college programs was glacially slow, with only five states offering correspondent courses (Gehring, 1997). In 1953, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale started the first degree granting program in Menard State Prison. Shortly after starting the first program, SIU expanded into two more institutions. These programs lasted until the early 1980s, when prison administrators mandated that all volunteers, including faculty, submit to a drug test before being allowed into the prison, to which the dean declined (Silva, 1994). By 1965, there were only a dozen post-secondary college programs being offered in state and federal prisons (Taylor, 1992).

**Golden Age for Post-Secondary Correctional Education**

The 1960s saw rehabilitation become the prevailing philosophy within prisons, with the previous ethos of retribution and punishment falling to the background (Freyberg, 2009).
Additionally, the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965 marked a turning point for college programs in prison. The implementation of the Basic Education Opportunity Grants, which later became known as *Pell grants*, provided access to college for the economically disadvantaged, originally including those in prison (Gehring, 1997).

Increasing numbers of colleges and universities began to offer programs to prisoners as funds became available to prisoners for use towards post-secondary education. Thus, the 1970s began what many have called the *golden age of prison education*. By 1970, there were 33 states that offered college programs to prisoners (Silva, 1994). The explosion of college education in prisons continued, and by 1982 there were over 350 programs throughout the country. By 1993, 92 percent of correctional systems offered some form of post-secondary educational program, with 43 states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons offering associate’s degrees (Silva, 1994; Tewksbury et al., 2000). Of the 43 states offering associate’s degrees, 31 offered bachelor’s degrees, nine offered master’s degrees, and in three states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, it was possible to earn a doctorate (Silva, 1994).

The seeds for the eventual demise of the boom in post-secondary correctional educational (PSCE) and the rehabilitation ethos were laid with the publication of “What Works? Questions and Answers about Prison Reform” (Martinson, 1974). Martinson (1974) argued that education offered in prison failed to have an impact on recidivism rates, and that punishment of offenders is the major factor in deterring future crime. He went on to state that the predominant “treatment” theories had so dominated research that appropriate investigation into the “deterrent effect” of prison had not been done. Although he later retracted his statements, the groundwork was laid for the eventual shift from reformation toward punishment (Freyberg, 2009). Despite the publication of numerous studies that showed the ability of prison education to significantly

**Elimination of Pell Grants and Beyond**

Even though evidence of higher education’s link to lower rates of recidivism, the U.S. Congress eliminated Pell grants for prisoners with the passage of the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Gehring, 1997). A growing group of legislators argued it was inappropriate to reward prisoners with an opportunity to obtain a college education. Again, the historical tension between the goals of punishment and rehabilitation were evident. Thus, despite the rehabilitative evidence of post-secondary education in prisons, funding was cut. The rhetoric of the debate has ebbed and flowed throughout history but ultimately it harkens back to the Auburn System (Tewksbury et al., 2000). Prior to the elimination of Pell grants, 350 different PSCE programs operated in 772 prisons throughout the country, representing 82.6 percent of all prisons in the country. By 1997, three years after the elimination of Pell grants, only 54.9 percent of the prisons still had any form of PSCE program (Mentor, 2004). The elimination of Pell grant funding led to a precipitous fall in the number of PSCE opportunities. The first year after Pell grants ended, there was a 44 percent reduction in enrollment in PSCE, which included both college and vocational education (Tewksbury et al., 2000). Not only were fewer systems offering PSCE programs, the range of options previously available dramatically decreased (Freyberg, 2009).

The reduction of available programs ran concurrent with the decrease of available spaces in the programs that remained. A study conducted by Tewksbury and colleagues (2000) found that of the 41 percent of inmates eligible to participate in PSCE, only 10 percent were able to do
so, which represented only 3.8 percent of the total prison population. The loss of PSCE opportunities was most dramatic in the first few years after the elimination of Pell grant eligibility for prisoners. PSCE programs remained low immediately following the passage of the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, but slowly more states began to add post-secondary programs. PSCE programs began to regain some of the ground that was lost in the late 1990s through programs like the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education act of 1998, and Incarcerated Youthful Offender (IYO) Program block grants (Winterfield, Coggeshall, Burke-Storer, Correa, & Tidd, 2009). Both programs included a variety of restrictions not previously associated with Pell grants. For example, the Perkins’ money was mainly geared toward vocational programing, and the IYO program was allocated on a yearly basis for post-secondary education and vocational training for inmates under the age of 25 who were eligible for release within five years (Winterfield et al., 2009).

Despite renewed federal funding options, by 2002, only 30 states offered PSCE (Messemer, 2003). This number significantly increased in 2004 when a similar survey of prison systems found 44 of the 46 responding prison systems (43 states and the Federal Bureau of Prison) offered some sort of PSCE opportunity (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). While the increase in states offering PSCE opportunities is promising, still only 11 percent of all eligible prisoners participated in PSCE. Furthermore, 15 prison systems enrolled 89 percent of all PSCE students in 2004 while housing only 66 percent of the total prison population (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). So while some states are making significant gains, most continue to lag behind. Access to PSCE clearly still remains a problem for the 65 percent of prisoners who are eligible for PSCE by having earned a high school diploma or GED (Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal, Soloman, & Lindahl, 2009; Harlow, 2003). Education has been shown to have a significant effect on
employability, earning potential, and higher-level thinking. In addition, PSCE promotes greater ability to participate in self-directed action by increasing access to employment.

**The Impact of Education on Recidivism**

Researchers have identified a variety of factors associated with criminal and anti-social behaviors, including deficits in social cognition, executive functioning, problem-solving abilities, and self-efficacy (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Foglia, 2000). It would stand to reason that education can help incarcerated individuals avoid future criminal behavior by enhancing cognitive abilities and decision making skills. Andrews and Bonita (2003) noted that by expanding prisoners’ general cognitive abilities and providing specific skills, education can enhance prisoners’ ability to adjust to life in prison and sets them up for successful reentry after release.

**Scope of Correctional Education**

The current section of this literature review focuses the impact of PSCE on recidivism and additional positive life outcomes. Before the impacts of PSCE are discussed, it is appropriate to look briefly at the scope and impact of correctional education in general, and then focus more specifically on how PSCE impacts recidivism and positive life outcomes.

The current scope of prison education includes a variety of levels and types of educational programs. The array of educational programs typically includes the following: adult basic education, adult secondary education, post-secondary education, special education, vocational education, and life skills education. The majority of state and federal prisons offer at least some sort of prison education. Adult basic education and secondary education programs are the most prevalent, followed by vocational education, but only 20 to 30 percent of prisoners participated in any one of these three programs (Brazzell et al., 2009). A number of studies have
been conducted that highlight the reduction in rates of recidivism for prisoners who participated in a prison education program compared with those who did not (Bahr et al., 2009; Chappell, 2003; Lockwood et al., 2012; Poitowski, & Lathrop, 2012; Rose et al., 2010; Schlesinger, 2005; Tewksbury et al., 2000; Torre & Fine, 2005). But, with the array of types of educational programs available, it is helpful to delve deeper into the literature to understand what types of educational programs produce the greatest positive effect.

A meta-analysis of 33 studies that examined the effects of education, vocation, and work programs on rates of recidivism and employment revealed a variety of methodological inconsistencies across studies (Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKinzie, 2000). Random-effects weighted mean odds ratios and 95 percent confidence intervals for each type of program were produced and revealed that post-secondary education had the greatest effect size, followed by vocational training, adult basic and GED programs, and correctional industry work (Wilson et al., 2000). When compared to a standardized 50 percent rate of recidivism for non-program participators, recidivism rates were 37 percent for post-secondary education, 39 percent for vocational training, and 41 percent for the combined category of adult basic education and GED programs. Interestingly, rates of employment are slightly higher for those in vocational programs than those in post-secondary educational programs, but as mentioned, recidivism rates are better for those with post-secondary education. These results suggest post-secondary education as a more powerful tool for reducing recidivism than vocational training.

A five-year longitudinal study of prisoners in the Indiana state prison system found virtually identical rates of employment for those with a college and a high school education, 66.7 and 66.5 percent, respectively. However, there are significant differences in rates of recidivism with the college educated parolees returning to prison at a rate of 31 percent, and those with a
high school education returning at a rate of 46.2 percent (Lockwood et al., 2012). These results suggest the power of post-secondary education to effect rates of recidivism. Education is often talked about as a means to employment, but these results suggest employment alone is not as powerful a predictor of successful reentry as post-secondary education. To further understand this phenomenon, it is helpful to explore the PSCE literature by first looking at rates of recidivism for those who participated in PSCE compared to those who did not, then by looking to the captured qualitative experience of PSCE for both the prisoners and the correctional staff.

Post-Secondary Correctional Education

Chappell (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of studies published from 1990 to 1999 on the impact of post-secondary education on recidivism. Camppell (2003) utilized a primary selection criterion that included only studies focused on PSCE, and reported recidivism rates for those who participated in educational programs. She then eliminated studies that: (a) utilized a duplicate cohort, (b) did not include overall recidivism rates, and (c) did not contain sufficient data to allow for the computation of Chi-square or variance estimates. The final analysis utilized 15 studies, and found an overall recidivism rate of 22 percent for those that participated in PSCE, compared to a 41 percent rate for those not participating in PSCE. The analysis only found three studies that utilized control groups. Chappell (2003) found a positive correlation of .24 for PSCE and non-recidivism, which was significant but considerably smaller than the studies not including a control group. Additionally, Chappell (2003) reported a stronger reduction in recidivism for those that completed a PSCE program than those who simply participated.

A more recent multi-state study published in 2009 examined inmates’ motivation for enrolling in PSCE, the impact of PSCE on offenders while incarcerated, the expected benefits after release, and a one-year post release comparison of recidivism rates between PSCE
participators and non-participators (Winterfield et al., 2009). The researchers reported that inmates were motivated to participate in PSCE because they wanted to learn how to own and operate a business after release. Most inmates expressed concerns about being able to gain sufficient employment outside of the entrepreneurial avenues due to the stigma of incarceration. Others reported motivational factors that included a desire to gain higher levels of education and skills, the low cost of the courses offered in their respective facilities, and the desire to turn a negative incarceration experience into something more positive (Winterfield et al., 2009).

Inmates generally reported the classes as helpful, interesting, and valuable, with courses in business reported as the most beneficial. Additionally, the focus groups revealed that PSCE positively affected students’ sense of self, with students reporting benefits of “learning that they could complete something; learning they are more intelligent that they previously believed; pride in being the first of the family to graduate from college; and having a renewed sense of confidence” (Winterfield et al., 2009, p. 6). While most inmates stated that the completed course work was helpful, they did not believe that it was sufficient to qualify them for the type of work they would like to seek post-incarceration. Only prisoners at one site reported feeling prepared when asked if they felt prepared to seek work in their chosen field.

In addition to the positive benefits experienced by inmates, prison administrators reported students in PSCE had fewer conduct issues and the presence of PSCE opportunities in facilities positively affected inmates’ behavior in general, creating an overall safer prison environment (Winterfield et al., 2009). Comparison across the three study sites of recidivism rates for PSCE participators and non-participators one year post release revealed the following: At Site 1, PSCE participators recidivated at a rate of 2.44 percent compared to 5.27 for non-participators. At Site 2, PSCE participators recidivated at a rate of 15.79 percent compared to 29.73 for non-
participators. Finally, at Site 3, PSCE participators recidivated at a rate of 39.38 percent compared to 44.92 for non-participators. It should be noted that Site 1 used “return to prison” as its measure of recidivism, whereas Sites 2 and 3 used “new arrest” as their measure (Winterfield et al., 2009). While this study again found positive effects of PSCE, it should be noted that no site was able to randomly assign participants, leaving room for selection bias despite appropriate statistical techniques employed to attempt to account for this bias.

The college program in the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (BHCF), New York’s maximum-security prison for women, is one of the longest lasting and most robust of college programs in the United States (Torre & Fine, 2005). It began in 1985, and was run by Mercy College until 1994 when it was closed; however, in 1996, the college program was reinstated through a consortium of private colleges and universities. In 2005, Torre and Fine published the results of their four year qualitative and quantitative participatory action research study of the impact of PSCE. Over the course of the study, the authors noted that 274 women participated in the BHCF college program and were released in the study time frame, compared to 2,031 women who were released in the same time frame but did not participate in the college program. Of these women, 43 percent did not have a high school diploma or equivalency when they entered prison, 21 percent had a GED, 22 percent had a diploma, 14 percent had some college credit. Recidivism rates, as defined by a return to custody calculated over a 36 month period, was 7.7 percent for PSCE participants compared to 29.9 percent of non-participants. Furthermore, women who did not participate in PSCE were 18 times more likely to have violated parole (Torre & Fine, 2005). These results intimated that college-level work in prison reduces the amount of crime committed post release, and also significantly increases compliance with the conditions of
parole. Again, this program did not utilize random assignment, so direct causal statements cannot be made, but the voices of the participants clearly demonstrated the program’s impact.

In Torre and Fine’s (2005) study, focus groups revealed that many women gained greater reflective ability, being able to process and take ownership of their criminal activity and make amends. Women also reported a greater sense of personal agency, in that they believed they had more control over their life outcomes in spite of being more aware of structural barriers they faced in their past, present, and in their future. Many women stated that the primary benefit of their participation was not the credentials they gained, but described the primary benefits as specific critical thinking and behavior skills:

Process of learning to revise; experiences of reading interpreting, analyzing and writing; participating in intellectual conversations; being a mentor to others; meeting new kinds of friends; learning how to question social arrangements and researching social situations; cultivating the skills to assess choices and see options individually and collectively; appreciating the ability to revise; and developing persistence in the face of obstacles.

(Torre & Fine, 2005, p. 584)

The quantitative impact on recidivism, combined with the qualitative narratives of growth, illustrates the positive changes PSCE can create in the lives of individuals. Women in the BHCF college program returned to the community as better citizens. It is clear that the benefit of PSCE to the individual is great, but many may argue about the fact that taxpayer dollars are used to create this benefit above and beyond the cost of simple incarceration. Torre and Fine (2005) attempted to address this concern through the commission of a cost-benefit analysis.
Cost-Benefit Analysis

The cost-benefit analysis was calculated based on a hypothetical 100 program participants and a hypothetical 100 non-participants. In the year 2000, conservative estimates indicate that it cost $25,000 per year to house an inmate, and $1,905 per student to provide post-secondary education. Thus, it cost $2.5 million to house inmates not in a college program and $2,690,500 to house those in the college program. When the recidivism rates are factored at 7.7 percent for the college educated group and 29.9 percent for the non-program inmates, with a conservative estimate of a 2-year sentence for those who return to prison, the authors estimate it would cost $900,000 extra for the non-educated group. Based on the prison population of New York in the year 2000, if only a third of the prison population participated in the college program, the state of New York would save $150,000,000 (Torre & Fine, 2005). Not only can PSCE transform the lives of participants, it can also save the taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars if it were expanded throughout the country.

The majority of the literature on PSCE focuses on rates of recidivism and/or post-release employment, but commentary on the change witnessed in the individuals involved is often embedded in the narrative of these studies. The head of pre-release and reentry for a Maryland county describes correctional education as a humanizing process, that helps elevate the overall mission and professionalism of corrections by helping to prepare inmates for a future outside of crime (as cited in Brazzell et al., 2009). The same article quoted Brian Fischer, the Commissioner of the New York Department of Correctional Services saying,

Education in the prison setting provides far more than a degree and lower recidivism rates. Through its transformational powers, it provides for a socialization and self-actualization process to better understand their own self-worth and potential, and most
often has offenders reaching out to their own children to encourage them to continue their education (as cited in Brazzell et al., 2009, p. 17)

These statements provide a glimpse at the power of education to increase inmates’ self-efficacy and sense of agency. When inmates gain these understandings, they are able to position themselves to fully embrace their freedom, a freedom that is accessed through self-efficacy and personal agency.

**Self-Efficacy and Human Agency**

**Self-Efficacy**

_Self-efficacy_, in general terms, is how an individual perceives his or her own abilities to succeed within a given situation. Self-efficacy exerts its influence through four major processes: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection (Bandura, 1993). The current section will explore these processes, with special attention paid to how they relate to academic development and how self-efficacy contributes to an individual’s sense of personal agency. Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and behave as they interact with the larger world. The benefits of positive self-efficacy are especially apparent in academic success. A meta-analysis of articles related to self-efficacy and academic performance revealed that perceived self-efficacy has a significant positive impact on student performance (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991).

**Cognitive processes.** A person’s belief in their cognitive abilities influences personal goal setting related to cognitive and academic pursuits. Thus, the stronger an individual perceives his or her cognitive efficacy to be, the higher he or she will set his or her aspirational goals and the more he or she will maintain a stronger commitment to work toward these goals (Bandura, 1991). Simply put, those who doubt their abilities visualize failure and fixate on the
possible negative outcomes of their efforts, rather than approaching tasks as an opportunity to expand their knowledge base. This fixation often cripples an individual’s progress in academic arenas. For example, according to Bandura (1993), learners who view their ability as an acquired skill, something that can grow as they gain knowledge and competencies, seek challenges that provide them opportunities to expand their cognitive and academic abilities. They view failure as a natural part of the learning process and are not paralyzed by the prospect of it. They are not as easily dissuaded from difficult tasks. Ultimately, they judge their capabilities with a frame of personal improvement rather than interpersonal comparison, allowing them to develop a sense of academic efficacy. Conversely, learners who view their abilities as inherent approach tasks as if they are indicative of their intrinsic intellectual capacities. Poor performance is diagnostic and serves as an indicator of a lack of intellectual capacity. These learners prefer tasks that have fewer options for error—tasks that will reveal only their proficiency in the areas they are comfortable. Moreover, these learners are limited in their willingness to explore new tasks that might expand their knowledge and competencies. Ultimately, they avoid putting forward their full effort out of fear of confirming they are not smart. Over time, this process can diminish a person’s belief in his or her ability to overcome current situations.

In addition to how people construct beliefs in their cognitive and academic abilities, social comparison and how individuals frame feedback also affects how they develop academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). The people with whom individuals compare themselves influence how they judge their abilities. In the world of academia, students often receive grades and are able to compare themselves with their fellow students. This process can affect their self-esteem and how much satisfaction they gain from academic accomplishments, thus influencing their
sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1993). Furthermore, a world that fosters comparisons based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, and a myriad of other categories can leave students feeling like they are falling short as they receive information on their abilities compared to others. As Bandura (1993) asserted, “Seeing oneself surpassed by others undermined personal efficacy, increased erratic analytic thinking, and progressively impaired performance attainments” (p. 123). Bandura (1993) went on to note that feedback that highlights progress promotes a person’s belief in his or her capabilities, whereas feedback that focuses on deficits focuses attention on personal deficiencies.

The final aspect of how cognitive processes affect the development of self-efficacy is in the realm of perceived controllability of a given situation, academic or otherwise. Bandura (1993) highlighted two different aspects of the exercise of control. The first is a person’s belief in his or her ability to produce changes in the environment through persistent and creative use of personal capabilities and resources. The second is related to the modifiability of the environment. Research by Wood and Bandura (1989) illustrated this through experimental controls related to the perceived controllability within a group oriented task. The researchers found that individuals who felt they had less control over how the group functioned quickly lost faith in their capabilities, and lowered their aspirations, which led to an overall deterioration of group performance. The group who believed that their behavior was able to be influenced demonstrated greater resiliency even in the face of increasingly complicated tasks and ultimately used better analytic thinking. How individuals cognitively manage information on their abilities, incorporate information from the world around them, and perceive their situation as malleable affect what they think about their ability to succeed. This belief in turn influences their motivational processes.
**Motivational processes.** Beliefs people have about their efficacy in general and in domain specific tasks play a key role in the self-regulation of motivation (Bandura, 1993). People form beliefs about what they are capable of and use those beliefs to guide their future actions. This forethought can serve as a catalyst or inhibitor of action through self-regulatory mechanisms. Thus, people’s belief about their academic ability will function to mediate their academic goals. It is possible that people who have extremely low academic efficacy will not even attempt to engage in formal curriculum because they fear the confirmatory potential of failure. According to Bandura (1993), “The motivating potential of outcome expectancies is thus partly governed by self-beliefs of capability” (p. 130). This motivational potential is directly related to the goals people set for themselves. According to Locke and Latham (as cited in Bandura, 1993), evidence suggests that explicit and challenging goals enhance and sustain motivation over a long period.

Ultimately, the beliefs people have about their abilities contribute to motivation in several ways, which include the following: “they determine the goals people set for themselves, how much effort they expend, how long they persevere in the face of difficulties, and their resilience to failure.” (Bandura, 1993 p. 131). Simply having goals is not enough to drive action; it is the belief that they are realistic, based on the intrinsic evaluation of self that sustains motivation and influences the effort people are willingly to expend, especially in the face of initial failure and/or challenges. People could have the requisite cognitive ability to achieve academic success, but if they have never had a chance to have this ability validated and fostered they may never obtain anything close to their academic potential. These individuals will likely give up in the face of the inevitable challenges that come in the pursuit of higher learning, especially in a post-secondary setting. Self-efficacy helps people to understand that mastery is a process that
involves setbacks, but is possible through sustained effort and persistence in the face of challenges. In addition to the motivational contributions of self-efficacy, people’s belief in their abilities also affects the level of stress and depression people experience in difficult situations.

**Affective processes.** People’s belief in their ability to exert control over the stressors in life plays a central role in the anxiety arousal process. People who believe they have some control over the stressors in life are less likely to develop destructive thought patterns, whereas those who do not believe they have any control over their stressors tend to experience high levels of anxiety (Bandura, 1993). People with low efficacy tend to ruminate on their deficits and view their environment as dangerous, often magnifying the impact of possible threats, even when their worries are rarely ever manifested. These individuals carry a stress burden that inhibits their functioning in daily life, especially in pursuit of challenging activities. Furthermore, when individuals try to manage threats for which they have doubts about their efficacy, “their stress mounts, their heart rate accelerates, their blood pressure rises, they activate stress-related hormones, and they suffer a decline in immune function” (Bandura, 1988, p. 96). After people develop efficacy in their ability to cope with difficulties, they minimize this stress reaction, allowing them to persist through challenges (Bandura, 1993). In addition to people’s belief in their ability to manage stressors, people’s belief in their ability to exercise control over intrusive thoughts and worries play a key role in reducing anxiety reactions and the building of general self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). The combination of these two perceived abilities lowers anxiety and avoidant behaviors (Ozer & Bandura, 1990).

The belief in a person’s ability to control anxiety producing thought patterns is especially evident in the face of scholastic challenges. Students who have low efficacy in their ability to manage academic demands are at particular risk to the deleterious effects of performance
anxiety, especially in the face of failure. According to Bandura (1993), a student’s belief in his or her ability to achieve academic success despite setbacks leads to subsequent academic attainment, and the level of scholastic anxiety has little to no relationship to ultimate academic performance. Thus, it is best to minimize academic stress through the building of a stronger sense of efficacy rather than the use of anxiety reduction techniques. Bandura (1993) asserted that this is achieved “through the development of cognitive capabilities and self-regulative skills for managing academic task demands and self-debilitating thought patterns.” (p. 134). People’s belief in their efficacy affects how they think, feel, and motivate themselves toward success, but efficacy beliefs also play a strong role in the selection processes of future activities.

**Selection processes.** The course of a person’s life is a cumulative process of choices, one choice leading to an array of options for the next choice. Thus, the selection of activities produces the opportunities for subsequent activities. According to Bandura (1993), personal efficacy can shape the course lives take by influencing choice of activities and environments. People avoid activities and situations they believe exceed their coping capabilities. But they readily undertake challenging activities and select situations they judge themselves capable of handling. (p. 135)

This process over time affects the range of competencies people develop, their interests, and social networks that influence their life’s course. For example, efficacy beliefs influence people’s career aspirations, which effects choice of academic preparation. The greater a person’s sense of self-efficacy, the greater the number of possibilities her or she considers, the greater the time he or she invests in preparation, and the more he or she is able to persist in the face of difficulty. Efficacious students simply put more effort into work in the long run, and their resulting success is not a matter of inherent ability, but rather a process of repeated activities by
which students develop tools to guide their own path toward goals of success. Bandura (1993) noted that students with a greater sense of academic and self-regulatory efficacy are more popular, act more prosocially, and experience less rejection their peers. The lack of this academic efficacy is linked to emotional lability, aggression, and greater disengagement of moral self-sanctions from harmful conduct.

Efficacy gives a person greater ability to exercise choice and intentionality in the direction of his or her life. This belief of internal capacity leads to what is known as personal agency, the ability to transcend a current environment and direct the course of life (Bandura, 2006b). As people develop a greater sense of their own abilities, they are able employ greater agency in the course their lives take.

**Human Agency**

*Agency* is the ability humans have, through self-regulation, to create imagined futures that are predicated on present action, to construct, evaluate, and modify their course of action to obtain valued goals (Bandura, 2006b). According to Bandura (2006b), there are four core properties of human agency that include intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Through the use of these strategies, people are able to contribute to their life circumstances and not be simply a product of those circumstances. The forth coming section will describe the core properties of agency and discuss the impact academic self-efficacy can have on the development of agency.

Intentionality is the first of the core properties of agency. Humans have the capacity to form plans of action, and are able to develop strategies to work toward the fruition of the plans (Bandura, 2006b). Humans do not live in a vacuum; they are constantly in interacting with other’s agentic pursuits. This interplay of agentic needs force humans to accommodate their
self-interests with that of those around them. Thus, humans work with others to form common intentions and join in collective action to achieve a common goal (Bandura, 2006b). People need to work collectively toward a common goal, utilizing collaborative efforts to achieve success. In the realm of education, collaborative learning has been shown to enhance learning outcomes for students both in the breadth and depth of knowledge acquisition (Schwartz, 1998). Personal agency does not operate in a vacuum; it is both moderated and mediated by collaboration. Collaboration is thus necessary and helpful in maximizing learning outcomes.

The second core property of agency is forethought. Forethought is more than simply future directed plans. It includes the goals and cognized anticipatory outcomes that guide action and motivation (Bandura, 2006b). Forethought helps people develop a vision and plan for future events, making them more likely to occur than if people simply wished for a positive outcome. As previously noted, the greater the perceived efficacy individuals have in their ability to bring this action into fruition, the greater the agentic capacity they will have to actually do so. This occurs through a process of anticipatory self-guidance, where behavior is directed by envisioned goals and anticipated outcomes (Bandura, 2006b). Forethought aids in planning and motivation, and is moderated by the efficacious beliefs people have about their ability to actually achieve the cognized goal.

The third property of agency is self-reactiveness, which includes human’s ability to self-regulate behavior (Bandura, 2006b). Thus, as individuals develop intention and utilize forethought to formulate a plan to enact their intention, they must also regulate their behavior so as to construct a deliberate course of action, rather than simply waiting for their goal or intention to be realized. Ultimately, “this multifaceted self-directedness operates through self-regulatory processes in the explanatory gap to link thought to action” (Bandura, 2006b, p. 165).
The final core property of human agency is self-reflectiveness. In addition to being agents of intentional action, humans are also able to reflectively examine their own function. According to Bandura (2006b), “Through functional self-awareness, they reflect on their personal efficacy, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, and the meaning of their pursuits, and they make corrective adjustments if necessary” (p. 165). From Bandura’s (2006b) perspective, the metacognitive ability of people to reflect on oneself and the appropriateness of one’s thoughts and actions is the most distinctly human core property of agency. It is this property that allows people to recognize the errors of previous behavior and commit to new action in the future. This agentic property is critical to prisoners being able to accurately assess their previous behavior, both criminal and non-criminal, and to assess what actions lead them into prison and be able to use this information in the construction of a plan of action to keep them from returning to prison. As these prisoners develop greater self-efficacy and agency they will be able to construct plans, not only to avoid recidivating, but also to create a generative life.

Race and Mass Incarceration

Racial Disparities in the Prison Population

Drug crimes account for the majority of the increase in the incarceration rates in this country. In the last 30 years the U.S. prison population increased from approximately 300,000 to over 2 million and the majority of this increase is a result of drug crimes (Mauer, 2006). This increase has most significantly impacted the African American community, which bares the highest rates of incarceration compared to the general population (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). By the year 2000 African Americans incarceration rates increased by over 26 times the rate of 1983, with Latinos incarcerated 22 times, and Whites eight times the rate (Cockburn & St. Clair, 2000). The Human Rights Watch (2000) indicated that, in seven states, African Americans
account for 80 to 90 percent of all drug offenders sent to prison. In still more states, Black individuals are sent to prison at a rate of 20 to 57 times greater than that of White individuals.

The elevated rates of incarceration of Black and Latino individuals compared to White individuals persists despite evidence that Black and Latinos do not use drugs at a greater rate than White people. In fact, The National Household Survey found that White youth were a third more likely to have sold drugs than African American youth, and that Whites were the most likely of any racial group to be guilty of drug possession and/or distribution (Tonry, 2004). Despite these numbers, Black men are admitted to prison on drug charges at a rate more than 13 times higher than White men (Mauer, 2006). The racial discrepancies in drug usage rates and incarceration allude to a racial bias within the system, a system that resulted in 1 in every 14 Black men being incarcerated in 2006, with only 1 in 106 White men in the same period.

**Race, Education, and Self-Efficacy**

The racial disparities among our incarcerated populations exist in the context of a racialized society, where the psychological impacts of racism are experienced across the life span of racial minorities in this country. The psychological impacts of racism are pervasive and damaging to the individuals who experience it. Arguably, the African American man experiences a unique set of psychological challenges as a result of racism. Fields (2015), in his book *The Psychology of Racism*, outlines what he calls “Race-Based Psychosocial Engineering” in which he outlines some of the ways racism impacts Black men. He argues that this engineering starts with a visible racial characteristic, like skin color. This visual characteristics leads to a race-based social experience, like racism, stigma, and discrimination. This then leads to a race-based psychological experience, which can include a loss of motivation, focus, and hope. The final result of this engineering leads to race-based social outcomes, which include
school dropout, crime, and poverty. Fields (2015) indicates that this engineering can ultimately lead to the internalization of racial stigma. The symptoms of stigma internalization can have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences.

The Black male, in this country, experiences this engineering from an early age. Often times the Black male adolescent is perceived through a deficit framework. This racialized exposure has cumulative impacts that can lead to mass rejection and inferiorizing beliefs related to individual efficacy and agency, which can ultimately lead to social traumatization (Fields, 2015). The messages Black men face about their capacity has a cumulative impact on their sense of self-efficacy and personal agency. The literature on efficacy and agency highlight how these beliefs can impact an individual throughout their life, from the goals they make, the effort they put forth in accomplishing their goals, and how they navigate set-backs on their way to achieving their goals (Bandura, 2006b). This impact first becomes visible related to school achievement and the beliefs individuals have about education in general. These early beliefs about academic efficacy and the value of school can impact the effort put forth in class, and eventually individuals’ willingness to engage in challenging subjects and classes.

**Chapter II Summary**

The history of education in the prison system is long, but opportunities for post-secondary education have been limited. While PSCE programs are increasing in number, many still do not have access. Those who have had opportunities to participate in PSCE show lower rates of recidivism and have better overall employment opportunities than those who have not participated in PSCE. There is evidence PSCE has an effect on recidivism above and beyond simply getting a job. One factor that may explain this effect is the benefit of PSCE on individuals’ psychological assets.
A thorough review of literature revealed a dearth of information specifically focused on post-secondary education’s impact on the building of psychology assets. Despite the lack of specific focus on positive psychological outcomes as related PSCE, many qualitative studies have captured voices of individuals who report improvements in cognition, self-esteem, impulse control, and pro-social attitudes (Freyberg, 2009; Mentor, 2004; Rose et al., 2010; Torre & Fine, 2005). The current study attempts to shed light on how PSCE affects the development of internal assets that contribute to successful reentry. Specifically, the current study examines former prisoners’ perceptions of how participation in post-secondary correctional education affected their self-efficacy and personal agency. Thus, the research question is as follows: What is the impact of post-secondary correctional education on the self-efficacy and personal agency of formerly incarcerated men?
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Self-efficacy and personal agency are complex constructs that operate in multiple ways for each individual. According to Bandura (2006a), there is no all-purpose measure of self-efficacy, and in order to fully gauge a person’s sense of efficacy, multiple domain specific strategies should be employed. Similarly, an analysis of subjective quantitative surveys of human agency reveals that such measures often are not sufficiently situated in the culture of the subjects under study, and may provide a skewed perspective of individual’s agentic capacity (Alkire, 2005). In order to gather the most complete picture possible of the impact of participating in post-secondary correctional education on perceived self-efficacy and personal agency, the current study employed a phenomenological methodology research approach, centered in a transformative research paradigm.

Research Paradigm

The transformative ontology recognizes that multiple realities are constructed and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, and racial/ethnic forces. It also recognizes that certain identities have historically been privileged or excluded from the definition of the research focus, questions, and other methodological considerations (Mertens, 2007). This paradigm was employed because the author recognizes the historical mistrust that likely exists within marginalized communities due to a history of being misled or mistreated by hegemonic forces (Ford, Moore, Whiting, & Grantham, 2008). Inmates’ experiences with confinement often make them suspicious of authority and those perceived to be a part of the authority structure. Thus, the researcher utilized participatory action to construct qualitative interview questions, and selected participants were involved in the final analysis of the data to ensure that the current study
captures the authentic voice and lived experience of the individuals involved. Attempting to conduct transformative research without sufficient trust and buy-in from the group under study may lead to researchers promoting a personal agenda rather than bringing forth the authentic experience of the group under study (Gone, 2009). To protect the confidentiality of all participants in the study, the author utilized pseudonyms when referencing individuals in the study.

**Research Methods**

The author employed phenomenological research methodology and utilized qualitative strategies to gather information to best understand the shared experience of individuals as it relates to the phenomenon under study. Emergent themes were drawn from a semi-structured interview to fully describe the phenomenon under study, which is: How does participation in post-secondary correctional education impact former inmates’ perception of their self-efficacy and personal agency?

This type of research is often called hermeneutical phenomenology, and involves the researcher bracketing his own experience, to the extent possible, and collecting data from people who have direct experience of the phenomenon under study. The researcher then analyzes the data to develop a description of the overall essence of the lived experience (Creswell, 2007). In the reporting of results, the researcher attempted to avoid the interpretation of individuals’ experiences, allowing their voices to tell the story of their experience with the phenomenon under study. This research project has not, however, avoided interpretation completely, but such interpretations are restricted to an overall discussion of results. Research results were subject to review by a community liaison research auditor who was drawn from those with direct experience of the phenomenon.
The Researcher and the Research Auditors

The author of the current study is of European descent and grew up in a middle class suburb on the west side of Michigan. He has worked with a variety of social justice issues throughout his career, and he believes in the possibility of rehabilitation. He has primarily worked in the university setting, but also has worked as a therapist for adjudicated youth and domestic violence offenders. Outside of this work, the researcher had little direct experience with formerly incarcerated individuals prior to 2011, when the researcher met a formerly incarcerated individual through a mutual friend. The author met the community liaison auditor through his participation in an annual men’s leadership conference held at an area community college. From this initial introduction, the author developed a collaborative working relationship with the identified community liaison auditor. During this time, the author and community liaison auditor have had several conversations about mass incarceration and the impact of his own educational opportunities on his life. The community liaison auditor helped to recruit men who he believed likely fit the study criterion. He knew these men through an informal network of peer support he helped create. The current research idea was developed through conversations over a one-year period. The author recognizes his experiential context is far from the majority of those who have experienced time in prison. In keeping with the tenants of the transformative paradigm, the community liaison auditor reviewed de-identified transcripts and emergent themes to help ensure the data analysis accurately captured the voice and experiences of participants.

The research study also included a psychologist familiar with the process of phenomenological data analysis utilized in the current study. This individual served as a research auditor and reviewed de-identified transcripts and emergent themes to provide feedback to the student investigator. Overall, the community liaison auditor served to ensure
accountability to the community under study, while the research auditor helped to ensure fidelity to the research process. Again, including a community liaison auditor was designed to reduce cultural bias and help ensure the current project captured the authentic experience of those who participated in post-secondary correctional education.

**Data Sources**

The primary source of data for this project was the voices of participants, gathered utilizing the interview questions/prompts developed in collaboration with the community liaison auditor. Participants were asked a series of demographic questions in the initial stage of the interview, and then were asked a variety of open-ended questions about their experiences related to PSCE (see Appendix A). Interviews for each participant occurred in one session, lasting between 45 minutes and an hour and a half.

The author recognized the interplay of his own social position and that of participants. In addition, the author was aware of issues of safety, both real and perceived, elements of danger, or possible threats that may arise for participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Participation in this study was completely voluntary and participants were able to choose to desist at any point, for any reason. Participant data was stored in a secure physical location and under electronic password protection. Participants’ identifying information was kept separate from the data they provided, and was linked utilizing unique identification codes, chosen by participants. This ensured that participants’ responses remain confidential and are not able to be traced back to them. These measures were taken to ensure the anonymity of participant responses.

In keeping with the tradition of a phenomenological qualitative study, the author utilized the combination of this information to represent the composite picture of participant experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Thus, the author used the narratives of participants’ to illustrate
and illuminate how experiences with PSCE programs affected feelings of self-efficacy and personal agency.

**Sampling, Access, and Setting**

The current research utilized a combination purposeful and snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Creswell, 2007). First, the selection criterion for subjects included that they must have been incarcerated in a state or federal prison, currently be off of parole, and they must have participated in some form of post-secondary education while incarcerated. This method of sampling utilized the community liaison auditor to gain access to participants for this study. This allowed for greater credibility of the researcher in the minds of participants, and also resulted in a sample that included only Black/African American men. There are several typical methods for delivering PSCE, including correspondence courses, in-prison college classes (some of which are experiential in nature and some of which are credit granting), in-prison vocational classes, and in rare cases, through educational release programs (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). In addition, the author invited participants who earned credits through examination while incarcerated. Participants who met the purposeful sampling criterion were recruited utilizing snowball sampling. This method is often used to gain participants in hard to reach populations, and involves gaining entrance through an initial set of participants, who then refer additional individuals who meet the proposed criterion for participation in the study (Beirnack & Waldorf, 1981).

Phenomenological studies typically have five to 25 participants (Creswell, 2007). The current study recruited eight participants. Participants were off parole and not under the supervision of the department of correction of any state or federal agency at the time of the interview. The researcher chose to limit the current study to men only for specific research
reasons. In 2012, the rates of incarceration per every 100,000 individuals were 228 for women and 4,462 for men (Carson & Golinelli, 2013). This marked disparity in incarceration rates among men versus women made it unlikely to find a sufficient number of female participants for the current study. Furthermore, research indicates men and women experience a fundamentally different reality while incarcerated (Harer & Langan, 2001). Additionally, the normative socio-cultural reality that men face post release is vastly different than that of women (Pelisser, Camp, Geas, Saylor, & Rhodes, 2003). Researchers have argued men’s prison experiences must be understood as fundamentally different from those of women (Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Two reasons often given for the argument that women’s and men’s prison experiences must be understood separately include that women remain more closely connected to their outside roles while incarcerated and that the social organization and culture of men’s and women’s prisons are dissimilar (Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Pelisser et al., 2003; & Teasdale, Daigle, Hawk, & Daquin, 2015). The fact that it would likely be difficult to find a sufficient number of women to participate in the study and the different prison experiences men and women face, both while incarcerated and after they are released, provide the research context for the decision to identify only men for this qualitative study of a small number of participants.

The author of the study recruited an initial group of participants with the help of the community liaison auditor. This individual invited potential participants to contact the researcher for more information about the study. Once participants expressed interest in participating in the study, a time and place was scheduled for the interview. The referring participant utilized the script provided in Appendix B for inviting additional participants to participate in the study. After participants contacted the researcher, the Researcher’s Recruitment Script (see Appendix C) was used to confirm they met the study criteria and an
interview time and place was scheduled. Before each interview, each participant was given the informed consent document approved by the HSIRB of Western Michigan University, and provided an opportunity to discuss and ask questions about the study and to clarify any aspect of the informed consent. The HSIRB approval letter is attached in appendix H. The interviews took place in locations that were as convenient as possible to the participants. Of the interviews that were conducted in person, three interviews were conducted in individuals’ homes; three were conducted at a pool hall; and one was conducted in a coffee shop. There was one interview conducted using face-to-face Internet technology, with the researcher and participant being in their respective homes. In the one case where an in-person interview was not possible, the researcher gained verbal informed consent as outlined in Appendix A. Additionally, the researcher sent the participant two copies of the informed consent document, one of which they signed and returned to the researcher after the interview was completed. Participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions before signing and returning the informed consent. Before the interviews proceeded, the researcher had a signed informed consent document. Member checking interviews were conducted via the phone. Research participants also were paid a total of $80 for their time and effort over the course of the study. Participants received $40 after their first interview and $40 for the follow-up interview.

Research Procedures

Data Collection: Initial Individual Interviews and Follow-Up Interview

The primary researcher conducted an in-depth interview with each participant in the location that was most convenient to them. The interview was semi-structured and employed the questions listed in Appendix A as a guide to gather the story of each participant. By utilizing open ended, semi-structured interview questions, the researcher allowed the participants to more
authentically articulate their experiences. Participants were paid $40 at the completion of their first interview.

Each interview was transcribed and summarized, and then analyzed for significant statements. These statements were then grouped into general themes. After the initial themes were identified, the primary researcher consulted with both the research and community liaison auditors for feedback on the initial data analysis. Individual participants were then contacted to schedule a follow-up phone interview (Appendix D). They then were provided with a summary of their interview and a copy of their transcripts to ensure the researcher accurately recorded their responses and adequately captured their experiences. Each of the follow-up interviews lasted between 10 to 30 minutes. Participants were paid an additional forty dollars at the conclusion of the member checking interview.

All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Both the recordings and transcriptions were de-identified to ensure anonymity and stored in a password protected electronic format.

**Data Analysis**

The semi-structured, open-ended nature of the interview process was designed to gather a more complete understanding of participant’s individual experiences with PSCE and the meaning that participants applied to their experiences (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The researcher worked to establish rapport with subjects throughout the interview process. As necessary, clarifying questions were asked to ensure understanding and accuracy of the meaning of participant experiences. Interviews were audio recorded using digital recording technology. Digital recordings were then transcribed, converting all data to a typed form. After
all data was transcribed, the researcher read through the transcripts to develop an initial
impression of the data (Creswell, 2007).

Following preliminary readings of the data, the researcher began the coding process,
which involved examining the data line by line for significant information and served as the
identified concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Member checking or follow-up interviews were
conducted to ensure the accuracy of the collected and compiled data. Data was initially analyzed
manually, and then the data was analyzed using MAXQDA software. Major concepts and
thematic elements were identified and classified into codes. After this process, salient data was
assigned to identified themes and/or sub-themes, with some data being applied to multiple areas.
The researcher labeled each theme or sub-theme, and clustered similar topics (Creswell, 2007).
This process was completed on each interview data set individually and then each data set was
compared to the others to ensure a complete list of themes and sub-themes were gathered. This
process ensured all thematic points were identified, which allowed for the most salient themes to
emerge from the combined data sets.

Through the member checking process, participants had an opportunity to review their
transcripts and a summary of their individual interviews to ensure fidelity to the authentic voice
and experiences of participants.

**Bracketing**

Bracketing is a process designed to, as much as possible, set aside the experiences of the
researcher to eliminate potential biases. According to Moustakas (1994), while it is virtually
impossible to eliminate all potential bias, the process of bracketing is an essential part of
in which the researcher provides an individual description of his or her experience with the
phenomenon under study. Since the researcher did not directly experience PSCE or the conditions of incarceration, the current bracketing process focuses on the researcher’s development of personal agency and self-efficacy through education and the barriers faced as he progressed through the education process. The following is a first person account of the researcher’s related experiences and additional information concerning the author’s worldview. Core assumptions associated with the study follow in a subsequent section.

When I started school, I was placed in the pre-kindergarten because I was determined not to be ready for preschool. I spent the first years of my schooling participating in a special education program designed for those with difficulty learning to read. I struggled as a slow reader throughout my educational experience. This initial struggle with reading left me feeling like I was not as smart as the rest of my classmates. I began to look for esteem outside of the classroom through participation in sports and other extra-curricular activities. I was frequently in trouble in school for my inattentiveness and general rowdy behavior. I had very little interest in school. Throughout my childhood, however, my parents stressed education. Throughout my primary and secondary schooling, I saw myself as less academically skilled compared to my classmates, and believe I had little academic efficacy. It was not until I took an advanced placement western civilization class that I began to see myself as academically capable and intelligent. This was also the first time I felt like a teacher saw me as more than a problem to be managed. During this same adolescent period, I was exposed to a deviant peer group. Several of the kids I was hanging around with began to get into trouble with the law and school authorities. These early experiences coupled with the fact that I had strong family support helped me to see the futility in continuing with the associated behaviors of my peer group. These changes in
behavior lead to a change in my peer group, leaving me less vulnerable to running into trouble with authorities.

As I have come to better understand the implications of unearned identity privileges and racial profiling, I realize I was able to progress through my adolescent and young adult years relatively free of legal consequences. For example, I was never stopped for matching a description, I was not pulled over inexplicably, I was never searched randomly, and I was able to explain away my misdeeds to authorities. As I became more aware of the racial and economic privilege I had, I realized the development of my self-efficacy and sense of personal agency could have been thwarted in so many ways. I realized I could have been in the very same place as many of those who are now participating in the current study if not for a different series of life events and circumstances.

I was blessed with a supportive family, and had educators, if only a few, who believed in me and saw my potential. I stand near the completion of my Ph.D. in counseling psychology because of a series of small successes, which built one on another.

Establishing the Credibility of Qualitative Data

Research Auditors

The research auditors served in the role of critiquing the study, and assisted in keeping the researcher accountable to the population under study and the established method of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The current study had two auditors, a research auditor and a community liaison auditor. The research auditor possessed the necessary training, experience, and skills to help the researcher stay on track and to help to ensure fidelity of the research process. The community liaison auditor helped to review the gathered themes to ensure that, from his experience, the researcher’s analysis of the data captured a complete picture of the
PSCE experience. The utilization of the community liaison auditor in this capacity is in keeping with the tradition of the transformative research paradigm in that it helps acknowledge that multiple realities are constructed and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, and racial/ethnic forces. It also recognizes that certain identities have been historically privileged or excluded from the definition of the research focus, questions, and other methodological considerations (Mertens, 2007). The community liaison auditor has a unique insight into the condition under study, and his ability to read these summaries from an emic perspective contributed to a deeper and richer understanding of the interview summaries.

**Dependability**

The combination of expertise of the research team (auditors) helped to provide a clearer interpretation of the gathered data on many levels. They also served, according to their roles and expertise, to review all materials throughout the process to maximize research protocol fidelity and the accuracy of the interpreted data. Having a research expert and an expert on the condition under study enhanced the dependability of the data because the researcher had multiple diverse individuals to review the study.

**Transferability**

Transferability deals with the extent to which the data gathered in this study can be applied to similar situations (Creswell, 2007). Transferability was enhanced through gathering information from individuals who experienced multiple forms of PSCE, and by providing sufficient information concerning the range and types of PSCE programs experienced. Additional contextual information concerning participants’ background and experiences is shared so as to provide a picture of the range of individual backgrounds. The goal of the current
study was to distill this array of experiences into common themes shared among participants, thus increasing the transferability of the study to other incarcerated men.

**Triangulation**

*Triangulation* is a method used to validate the information gathered in a qualitative study. It adds greater rigor to the final analysis of information by the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2007). The current study utilized the research auditors to provide multiple perspectives concerning the evaluation of the data. The study also included participants with varied and different experiences of the construct under investigation, which provides for multiple sources. The researcher also employed multiple methods of data collection through the use of both a semi-structured interview process and follow-up interviews.

**Member Checking**

*Member checks* involve giving research participants opportunities to review the information they gave to the researcher. This opportunity was open to all participants so that they could judge the accuracy and credibility of the researcher’s work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This strategy is considered to be one of the most critical validation techniques a researcher can employ to help establish the credibility of the information gleaned through a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The current study employed member checks by inviting participants to review their transcript and summary of their initial interview.

Prior to the follow-up/member checking interview, the community liaison auditor reviewed the summaries to help the research identify any possible areas where further elaboration may be helpful to fully capture individual’s experiences. The utilization of the community liaison auditor in this capacity is in keeping with the tradition of the transformative
research paradigm in that it helps acknowledge that multiple realities are constructed and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, and racial/ethnic forces. This paradigm also recognizes that certain identities have been historically privileged or excluded from the definition of the research focus, questions, and other methodological considerations (Mertens, 2007). The community auditor had unique insight into the condition under study, and his ability to read these summaries from an emic perspective contributed to a deeper and richer understanding of the interview summaries.

Participants were contacted by the researcher via telephone and invited to participate in a follow-up phone interview (see Appendix D). The follow-up interviews lasted between 10 and 30 minutes, and utilized the interview guide outlined in Appendix E. Participants were sent a reminder of this interview at least one week prior to the scheduled time (see Appendix G). This reminder included an initial summary of participants’ original interview and a copy of their transcript (see Appendix F). Follow-up interviews focused on ensuring accuracy and provided participants an opportunity to expand on key themes or ideas. This process helped to ensure that the researcher’s interpretations completely and accurately captured participants’ experiences.

**The Subjective World View of the Researcher**

The researcher is currently 37 years old and is of mixed European heritage, but identifies most closely with his Italian American ancestry. He was raised in a two-parent household and identifies his socioeconomic status as working class, middle income. He grew up with a close knit extended family, which included members of multiple racial and cultural backgrounds. While the researcher was raised in a suburban, primarily White, community he was exposed to diverse individuals and contexts. The educational background of the researcher’s family ranges from people who did not graduate from high school, to those who have earned doctorate degrees.
He grew up attending an Italian American Catholic church in the inner city of Grand Rapids, and spent time throughout his childhood within diverse family networks. As mentioned in the bracketing portion of this paper, the researcher had a rocky start to his early academic career, and was briefly associated with a deviant peer group. He was able to change his behavior and peer group through a variety of supportive and protective factors.

The researcher actively sought to put himself in a diverse set of cultural contexts, from living in Segovia, Spain for a summer, to starting multiple sexual assault peer education programs, to working to embrace diverse individuals into his social network. The researcher has sought out connections, relationships, and understanding across a variety of demographic situations. The researcher has been ceremonially adopted into an Oglala Lakota family and a Mexica tribal community. As the researcher began to pray with these aboriginal peoples, he was granted the privilege of participating in the Sun Dance Ceremony, and he completed the fourth year of his commitment as a Sun Dancer in July of 2014. In addition to actively pursuing diversity in his social context, the researcher specifically chose a graduate program that focused on diversity and social justice, and through his training endeavored to grow and challenge his blind spots.

The researcher’s deep interest in social justice and his diverse social network gave him opportunities to speak candidly with men who spent significant time in prison. The stories that these men shared prompted the researcher to consider how they were making successful transitions into society from prison, and what were the primary characteristics that moved these men from their criminal behavior to becoming engaged citizens. Despite having already started his dissertation work in the area of strength based assessment of fathering, the researcher
recognized an opportunity to bring to light a prospective related to mass-incarceration that is not often given voice in academic literature.

Despite the researcher’s extensive experience in diverse settings, the researcher recognizes he is not immune to biases, and has endeavored to create a study that minimizes this potential. He has worked to bring forth the authentic voice of his participants through his selection of research methods and the inclusion of diverse research auditors.

**Study Limitations**

Within the transformative paradigm, the researcher purposefully highlights the voice of the group under study in attempts to overcome the potential for bias that has historically existed in research (Creswell, 2007). The findings of this study are limited to only the voice of former prisoners and do not include other individuals within the prison system or those involved in the delivery of PSCE. While participants are in the best position to describe their individual experiences, the exclusion of all other potential stakeholders within PSCE programs does not provide second party perspectives of the changes identified by the study participants. This narrowing of scope was done to ensure that the study reflects the voices of former prisoners and is not through an institutional lens.

**Chapter III Summary**

Chapter III was an overview of the qualitative research paradigm and method employed in the current study, which includes the phenomenological research method informed by the transformative research paradigm. The chapter also detailed selection criterion of participants and the sampling method used to recruit them. Additionally, the chapter outlined the procedures for data collection, analysis, and establishing the credibility and rigor of the study. Finally, this chapter included information about the subjective worldview of the researcher.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The current study investigated the impact of post-secondary correctional education on the self-efficacy and personal agency of formerly incarcerated men. The author recruited 8 African American men ranging in age from 32 to 47 years old with an average age of 38 years old. The men identified for this study had been incarcerated between 4 years 6 months and 24 years, with an average of 11 years and 11 months in prison. Participants combined time served was 95 years and 8 months. All participants confirmed that they were no longer on parole and were not on any form of probation or court supervision. All 8 participants were currently employed. Four participants were enrolled in some form of post-secondary education after parole, with three individuals earning an associate’s degree after parole and two who were currently enrolled in a four-year university. The following is a table of participant demographic information. It should be noted that all names listed are pseudonyms chosen by each participant.

Table 1

Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>On Parole or Under Supervision</th>
<th>Amount of Time Served</th>
<th>Current Employment</th>
<th>Race/Cultural Background</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>20 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan Bixby</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>24 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Black/American</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.6 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerome</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>19 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaspar Yanga</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4.5 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>African American Male</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big J</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Black Man</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aladdin</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.5 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual Biographical Narratives

Each of the participants were asked to provide additional background information, regarding descriptions of childhood history, familial relationships, educational involvement/attainment prior to incarceration, their understanding of preceding factors that led to incarceration, category of post-secondary correctional education (PSCE) in which they participated, their current employment, and their current educational involvement.

Will

Will, a 41-year-old Black male, grew up in a large city in the Midwest. Growing up, he had both parents involved in his life; however his mother primarily raised him. When describing his upbringing, he noted that his mother “had a good job,” which afforded him a comfortable childhood where he felt as though he was not wanting for more. While he was growing up, his mother worked in a factory on the 3rd shift, oftentimes working from 4pm to 7am. Will noted, “I knew what I was supposed to do, you know? But I didn’t want to do it. I wanted to do what I wanted to do, you know?” These comments indicated that although his mother taught him right from wrong, he had little supervision.

As Will began to explore his prospects, he became enticed by the allure of criminal opportunities available to him early on in his life. He indicated that during this point, he began to hang around the older guys in the neighborhood and stated that subsequently, “the streets got ahold of me and one thing led to another and I was selling dope.” By the age of 12 he was participating in various criminal activities, including selling drugs. This gave him a significant amount of money and status while he was in school. Will indicated that he continued attending school until his senior year, but felt that he was never really serious about his schooling. In his
senior year, he estimates he missed a total of 160 days. He reported that he believed there was no way they would not let him graduate, and so when he came to the realization that he was not going to be able to graduate, he decided to stop attending school. Will reported he was “in the streets” from when he was 12 years old until he was 20, at which point he decided he was going to try and leave the street life behind.

In 1994, on his 20th birthday, three men confronted Will in a convenience store after accidentally bumping into in the aisle of the store. This altercation led to an argument. Will attempted to apologize to one of the men, however, the argument escalated until the point when this man threatened to kill Will. Will had a gun on him during the altercation and shot the man. Will was convicted of his crime and served 20 years in prison. When talking about his crime Will stated:

I hate that I took a life, you know… I hate that, you know, because that man is not around to see his children, if he had children, and he is not around to see his mother and none of his family, but I am. You know, but the good thing about it, is that it changed me from this person to a better person and it changed me man.

Will reflected on the impact of this action on his life, stating that he understood the gravity of his actions and that it had changed his life.

Will also discussed how the 20 years he served is the time it required for him to turn his life around. Will noted that although he has made huge improvements, his change did not occur immediately. He indicated that when he first entered prison he did not care about school, noting that his attitude was “to hell with education.” Entering prison, Will had no diploma or GED, and figured he had 20 years to earn it before he got out of prison, meaning that there would be no hurry to attain his education. During his incarceration, Will was encouraged to get his GED by a
teacher who became invested in Will because he recognized his potential. With this motivating
tfactor and encouragement towards education, Will earned his GED and continued to take a
business class through a community college extension program within the prison until it the
program was discontinued due to Pell grants being revoked from inmates. After the program
was cut, Will continued to explore his educational options and he eventually earned a trade
certifications in custodial maintenance, building trades, and horticulture.

Will began working two jobs shortly after he was released from prison. He also
attempted to take an on-line course as well, but reported that he had to drop the class because he
was working over 100 hours a week in total. Will is committed to never going back to prison
and he shows this through his daily work ethic. He reported that working as hard as he does
helps him stay out of trouble and gives him a sense of pride.

**Ryan Bixby**

Ryan Bixby is a 47-year-old Black man who grew up in the inner city of a mid-western
city, in a single parent home. He was born to a teen age mother who was 15 years old. Ryan
indicated he grew up poor, and at an early age helped his grandmother and mother make ends
meet. After Ryan’s grandmother passed away, things became more difficult for him and his
mother to manage. Ryan believed that since he was the oldest of three boys, he was responsible
for helping his family. Ryan stated that his mother became addicted to alcohol and drugs after
the passing of his grandmother. When Ryan was approximately 14 years old, his mother’s then
boyfriend, the father of one of his brothers, became abusive to both Ryan and his mother. Ryan
stated that due to trouble within his home environment, he decided school was not his primary
priority. When describing his school experiences Ryan noted:

So, I think I kind of like had self-esteem issues, you know; being poor, not having
anything and um, my brothers not having anything. Kind of like sent me to school, like feeling like that I was less than and kind of like wanting more, but not knowing how to get more and not having really the structure of a foundation around me to help me understand what it is that I was going through as a child. So, I knew that it was someplace that I should be, but I didn’t know how to maximize what it is that it had to offer at the time.

Ryan felt as though he was forced to become an adult at an early age, and never really had a childhood. At the age of 14, Ryan made a decision to sell drugs as a way to help his brother and mother escape their abusive and impoverished living situation. Ryan believed he would be able to make a difference by getting money for his family. When Ryan was raised in the midst of the crack cocaine epidemic and described his tenure as follows, “I became a drug dealer, as a result I got stabbed, I got shot, and later was incarcerated.” He also noted that he was involved in a drug deal that went bad, and that someone was shot during the transaction. Ryan would not provide any names to the authorities; thus, he was convicted of the shooting and was found guilty of second-degree murder, for which he spent 24 years in prison.

Education was something that Ryan and his family valued, and as the oldest of all his cousins, Ryan believed he had to be an example for his family. Ryan reported that he struggled in school, and he dropped out before graduating. Ryan was able to attain his GED while in prison. He earned an associate’s degree in paralegal studies in the early to mid-1990s, at a time when Pell grants were available to incarcerated individuals. He had hoped to use his education to find a way to appeal his conviction, but he was repeatedly met with frustration in this attempt. Ryan eventually stopped appealing his case due to the repeated disappointments with the outcome. As a result, Ryan began to use his knowledge help other inmates navigate the court
system as a way to feel more empowered within his life. Ryan stated that he became an expert on the prison system and its regulations, allowing him to more effectively advocate for himself and fellow inmates.

Nearly two decades after the Pell grants were taken away from inmates, Ryan became involved with a group of men who were utilizing peer-to-peer education to study for the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and Advanced Placement (AP) tests. As a result of his perseverance and dedication, Ryan earned enough credits through this process to obtain another associate’s degree within a year of his release.

After earning his second associate’s degree, Ryan was able to get a job as human resource and production manager at a small manufacturing company, which employs several individuals who are returning from prison. Ryan then got a second job as a violence intervention specialist at an area hospital. He is actively involved in helping men transition from prison to working life, and helping victims of gun violence to cope with the trauma of their experience.

Nick

Nick is a 32-year-old Black American male who grew up in a single parent household in an urban environment and an adjacent suburban area. Nick has two older siblings that did not live with him growing up, and a younger brother who he identified as being on the autism spectrum. Nick noted that his mother was relatively absent from his life while growing up, and when she was there he did not get along with her. Nick stated,

It was a lack of attention between the two of us. Even with my little brother in the picture, you know, she wasn’t there and this made me feel like I’m on my own, so let me try to do some of this stuff on my own.

Nick noted that he attempted to fill the role of being the “man of the house,” but his mother did
not appreciate his attempts. At the age of 15, he was kicked out of his house and his mother told him, “If you think you can do this all on your own, then let’s see.” Nick reported that he struggled to find his way after being kicked out of the house at such a young age.

Nick was arrested for the first time at the age of 16. His mother went to court and told the judge she did not want Nick to live in her home, so he was forced to move in with his older brother in Lansing, Michigan. Nick stated that he never really looked to his brother as an authority figure and had a hard time abiding by the rules his brother attempted to enforce in the home. Nick did not stay with his brother long because he was asked to leave, which made Nick feel like another person abandoned him. These series of events led to Nick attending several different school districts, creating a discontinuity in his education and his life in general.

Nick did not do well in school and did not see the necessity of education, despite his family encouragement to do well in school. Nick stated,

> School was rough. I didn’t care for it. Umm, all the way from elementary and as far back as I can remember, it was my playhouse. As far as academics, I didn’t see the necessity of it, and for me not to see the necessity in it, I didn’t take school serious.

Nick reported that he got into trouble in junior high school often, and was frequently bullied for his small stature. Nick noted that he had to learn to fight to defend himself and that he eventually earned a reputation for being a fighter. Nick stated, “I kind of went to school for conflicts. I went to school if I wanted to get high.” Nick then stated,

> When I started running with the gang, it was in the 7th or 8th-grade, and this is what became of school. It was more of a meet up place to talk about everything else other than academics and when it came down to academics it was, I wanted no part of it.

Between Nick’s lack of interest in school and his inconsistent educational environment,
he was forced to repeat a grade. Although he had a difficult educational history, he was able to reach the 12th-grade, however, he reported that he became invested in street culture and the fast life of “easy money,” which reinforced Nick’s belief that school was not necessary; thus, he dropped out before he graduated.

With the freedom Nick found being on his own, he began to drink alcohol and use drugs. When describing his relationship to drugs, he noted, “I could find myself making easy money, not so much selling drugs, I was more of a drug user, and so I learned how to take these drugs and make a little profit off of them.” Nick indicated that drug sales was not how he made most of his money.

Nick reported that he became involved with a group of people who were committing check fraud, and through this relationship he learned to reprint payroll checks, money orders, and financial documents. Through this newfound work, he began committing more criminal acts, eventually robing a Western Union, for which he ended up serving 7 years in prison. Nick stated, “My first two years [in prison] it was downhill for me, straight knucklehead. I wanted to build a reputation and amidst of building my reputation I did whatever I could get into.”

Nick eventually became involved with the Nation of Islam while in prison, and noted that this community of men encouraged him to become active in studying and reading for educational attainment. Nick indicated that it was then he began to realize he wanted something different for himself, stating,

So the more and more that I’m reading and I’m learning and I’m reading and learning, I say, man, I really want to do something now. I don’t want to just be one of the guys that come to prison and then just go home and don’t have no avenue to go down. I wanted to be one of those guys that take everything that I’m learning and reading and put it into
action, put it into practice.

Nick continued with his education and earned a certificate in custodial maintenance, and eventually he became involved with CLEP and AP study program. After being released from prison, Nick enrolled in a four-year university where he is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in social work, and he eventually plans to earn a master’s degree and perhaps a Ph.D. Nick is also employed at local fast food restaurant while he is going to school. Nick plans to use his experience to help kids avoid the pitfalls he experienced growing up.

Joe

Joe is a 37-year-old African American male from a large mid-western city. He grew up in a two-parent household, and was the youngest of his siblings. His closest sibling in age moved out of the house when he was just 6 years old, leaving him in what was essentially a single child home for most of his life. He noted that he grew up in a loving home and his parents were able to provide him with all of his needs. Growing up in a house where he was essentially an only child allowed Joe to get away with a lot at home.

Joe described school as being “fairly easy.” He indicated that he learned so much prior to starting high school that he felt like 9th-grade was just a of repeat of 8th-grade, leaving Joe to wonder why he was attending classes. In high school, Joe reported that he skipped classes regularly, subsequently dropping out of school at the age of 16. Joe stated that by the age of 17 he had his first child, at which time, he began to work in order to help support his child. Joe indicated he worked for a couple years, but he eventually quit this job. He had a series of jobs before finally succumbing to the “street life”.

Joe’s mother died in 2001. Joe indicated that this was difficult for him to deal with. By 2002, Joe began to sell drugs in order to make money, initially engaging in distribution of only
marijuana, but eventually selling harder drugs. In late 2002, Joe noted that he was arrested for the first time on a charge of weapons possession, for which he received probation. Shortly thereafter, Joe was arrested on charges related to selling drugs. Joe accepted a plea deal, for which he served 6 months in boot camp. Joe noted that this 6-month sentence distanced him from the influence of his neighborhood, as well as temporarily removing him from contact with his children, which he reported as being very difficult. Joe noted that without these distractions, he was able to earn his GED. While at boot camp, Joe also took the time to think about the direction in which his life was headed and determined that he wanted to “get a job and do the right thing,” but he stated, “the problem was I went back to my neighborhood.”

Joe was unable to find a job despite earning his GED while in boot camp, and believed there were no apparent educational or job prospects. As a result, Joe returned to selling drugs to support the growing number of his children. Joe reported that a year after returning from boot camp while he was in the park with his girlfriend, he noticed a friend from his neighborhood getting assaulted by two men. He indicated that when he ran over to help his friend, a third individual got out of the car with a gun. After seeing the assailant’s gun, Joe ran into a nearby alley to retrieve a gun he had stashed. Gunshots were exchanged between Joe and the men in the car. One of the men was shot in the cross fire and subsequently died from his wounds. After this incident, Joe fled the city and began to build his life in the new city. Joe was able to get a full time job, obtain an apartment, and for the first time he was living outside of the city he grew up in. Joe indicated that this move had provided him an opportunity to assess his life and he began to form relationships outside of his criminal activity. Joe was living and working in his new environment for a year before he was picked up by the fugitive squad. He was charged with first degree premeditated murder and was facing a sentence of natural life in prison. While in prison,
Joe began to investigate the details of his case and he discovered that the trajectory of the bullets that killed a man came from the opposite direction from which he was firing, meaning that the man was killed by a person in the car rather than Joe. At the time, Joe noted that he had great difficulty getting his lawyer to look at the evidence he had put together through his own examination of his case while he was in jail. It was not until Joe got his sister to take all the information he gathered about his case to his lawyer and sit down with her to explain things that the lawyer finally began to adopt a different strategy for defense. Joe was eventually convicted of only firearms charges and he received 7 years in prison.

While incarcerated, Joe took the State of Michigan auto mechanic certification tests, which would allowed him to be a licensed mechanic in Michigan. Joe was challenged by a fellow inmate to study for the Auto Service Excellence (ASE) certification tests, which is a higher level national certification. Joe passed three different ASE certification tests, while studying from 8-year-old books. Joe noted that once he was able to pass the exams, he began teaching his fellow inmates the material they need to know to also pass these national exams. Joe exited prison as a nationally certified mechanic, never having the opportunity to work on actual cars.

After several attempts to get a job after his release from prison, Joe was given an opportunity to work for an area dealership. Joe has since worked at this dealership and plans to open up his own shop one day. Joe stated that without his ASE certifications, he does not believe he would have been able to get the job he has now. Joe currently has 6 children and is actively involved in their lives. He uses the information he learned about CLEP/AP testing and the college admission process to help his oldest daughter prepare for school.
Jerome

Jerome is a 43-year-old Black male who grew up in a mid-western city. Jerome has several siblings. He noted that his parents experienced several separations and reconnections. He reported that this was difficult for him to understand and deal with as a young child. Jerome noted that when his parents separated he went to live with his mother. He indicated he had a positive loving relationship with his father, but his mother was verbally and physically abusive. This abuse eventually led to Jerome running away at the age of 14.

Jerome reported that he did very well in school in his elementary school years, was an honor roll student, and had dreamed of becoming a doctor. The turmoil at home led to Jerome becoming less and less interested in school, and he eventually dropped out when he left home. After Jerome ran away to escape the abusive conditions in his home, he was homeless for an extended period of time and was constantly in search of food and shelter. He noted that during the time of homelessness, he was approached by area drug dealers who offered him small jobs to earn money. Jerome grew up during a crack cocaine epidemic in America’s urban centers. He was able to quickly move up the ranks of his criminal network, and he eventually became in charge of running several crack houses. This criminal activity eventually led to Jerome to be sentenced to boot camp out of the state. While in boot camp, he was able to earn his GED.

Jerome experience significant levels of violence after running away from home. Both of his older brothers were shot on multiple occasions and his childhood friend was murdered. At the age of 17, Jerome was shot multiple times. He woke up in the hospital alone and was not given any support to deal with the trauma of nearly losing his life to gun violence. As a result of this incident, Jerome began to carry his gun everywhere and became hypervigilant, reporting that he had symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder. Seventeen months after Jerome
was shot, he found himself in a conflict similar to the one that led to him being shot. This time, however, Jerome fired the shots that “tragically caused a man’s death.”

Jerome plead guilty to second degree murder and spent 19 years in prison. In the early-1990s, Jerome began taking college courses through an area community college extension program, but had to stop taking classes in the midst of his program since it dissolved after prisoners lost access to Pell grants. After several years of being incarcerated, Jerome began an intensive self-guided study of literature and the business of publishing to fulfill his dream of becoming a writer. Jerome published several books while incarcerated. After he was released, Jerome became a successful author and volunteers as a mentor to local at-risk youth. He travels the country educating people about the impact of mass incarceration and the power of redemption through atonement and forgiveness. Jerome also became a father for the third time after being released from prison and is actively involved in raising his son.

**Gaspar Yanga**

Gaspar Yanga is a 32-year-old African American male who grew up in a mid-western city. Gaspar’s father passed away from a terminal illness, and his mother was murdered. As a result, he went to live with his grandmother for two years before being adopted by his aunt and uncle. He lived in the city before moving to a nearby suburbs. Gaspar stated that he went to good schools throughout his education. He also noted that he did relatively well in school and graduated with a high school diploma. He described school as being easy for him.

Despite moving to the suburbs, Gaspar spent every weekend back in the city and much of his life was still connected to the city. Drug use did not occur in Gaspar’s home, but he noted that it was all around him growing up. “It was never something that I felt like I was introduced to. It was always done in the background.” In high school, he began to sell marijuana to earn his
own money. Through connections in his family, he quickly became involved in large-scale distribution. He was eventually sentenced to 4½ years in prison for possession of drugs and a gun.

While Gaspar was in prison, he began to contemplate how he ended up in prison and the criminal lifestyle. He eventually began to see education as a way out of his condition, so he started to search for ways to earn college credits while in prison. He investigated several options, but they were all cost prohibitive. Gaspar was discouraged about his prospects of earning college credits while incarcerated until he spoke with a friend who worked at a community college and informed him about the possibility of earning credits by examination through CLEP and AP programs. As Gaspar began to research his educational options via CLEP and AP testing, he began to plan for a solitary educational journey towards earning college credits. Gaspar was in the prison library gathering resources and information for his studies when he was approached by an older inmate who encouraged him to invite other inmates to participate in a peer-to-peer learning program. He worked with this other inmate to institute a formal CLEP and AP study program where he and other inmates were able to earn college credits. He and the inmates developed course packets and syllabi to guide their peer-to-peer instruction of test material. According to Gaspar, they helped each other to apply for colleges, fill out financial aid forms prior to release, and even helped individuals register for the draft if they had not already done so, which is a requirement to receive financial aid. Gaspar reported that he earned between 15 and 20 credits through this process while incarcerated.

After being released from prison, Gaspar was able to graduate with an associate’s degree in less than a year. After completing his associate’s degree, he enrolled himself into a four-year university. Gaspar also began to educate himself about computer coding, and was able to secure
himself a number of training opportunities in Silicon Valley through coding boot camps and entrepreneurial mentorship programs. Gaspar is currently self-employed running a “tech start-up.” In addition, he works with a non-profit to teach computer coding to inner city youth. Gaspar reported that his journey through PSCE fundamentally shifted his life and helped him to become a better father and a better man.

**Big J**

Big J is a 39-year-old man who identifies as a “Black Man.” Big J spent the early part of his life living in North Carolina. He noted that he was raised by his grandmother and grew up in a large close knit family. Big J spoke fondly about living in a house with his mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and great-great grandmother. Big J said he did well in school and in his early years he earned mostly A’s and B’s, but school eventually was no longer able to hold his attention. Big J stated, “The only reason I was going to school was for the females and getting something to eat and to see who I could take home.” Big J also noted that he went to school looking to fight because he enjoyed fighting, and he was eventually kicked out of school for fighting.

Big J “began to run with the older guys,” who he noted “glorified the life of a hustler.” He indicated that soon he too became attracted to this lifestyle. Big J also described his journey to becoming incarcerated, to which he noted:” “What led me to become incarcerated? Dang. How can I put it? Just quick, fast money.” He did not provide a clear answer as to what he was convicted of, but noted that he spent 7 years in prison.

While he was incarcerated, Big J got his pesticide handling certification, as well as earning nine college credits through the CLEP and AP program. He indicated that education forced him to humble himself so that he could learn from others saying, “it [PSCE] was a real
humbling experience” and “I became more of a good listener.” Big J was provided with opportunities to serve as a teacher/tutor for other inmates through the CLEP/AP program. He stated that this opportunity changed his approach to life how he handled conflict. “It was like I meta-morphed all over again from boy to man, all over again.” Becoming part of something help him shift, stating,

I changed from knucklehead to now he’s actually looking like something or doing something. You know what I’m saying, because when you become a teacher you are held to a higher standard. And so I took it all the way, you know what I’m saying, so now I’m just a reflection of what I’m doing over here in school when I was incarcerated.

Big J indicated that he stopped wasting time the way he had previously, and began to focus on making a successful transition from prison to his community. He stated, “I didn’t want to be in the underworld-type life anymore.” Big J stated PSCE helped him realize “I can actually, I can do something different. You know what I’m saying, so I can go home and be better at not hustling.” He went on to say, “It [PSCE] changed me from wanting that fast life to just wanting a good life.”

After his release from prison, Big J got a job with a lawn care service. He reported that in addition to working a full-time job, he is starting a side business to bring in extra money. He spoke with pride about being able to provide for his family in a “legit way.” Big J’s eventual goal is to open his own business. Big J reported that he felt like he found the “good life.”

Aladdin

Aladdin is a 33-year-old Black male who grew up in an urban environment. He grew up in a two-parent home where he was the oldest of seven children. Growing up, Aladdin indicated that his parents provided him with everything he needed and that he had a close relationship with
his family. He indicated that school was fairly easy for him and he earned all A’s in school until the 6th-grade. In the 7th-grade, Aladdin stated that he began to “indulge in his surroundings,” and “The neighborhood [he grew up in] was a little tough, and I guess that mentality of the neighborhood kind of got me into the life that I ended up getting into.” He also indicated that as he progressed through to high school, he began to lose interest in school, noting, “I just didn’t care really, you know? I didn’t have the mindset that I needed to go to school to get where I was trying to go.” Aladdin indicated that his entry into criminal life began with selling drugs while he was in high school. He stated,

I wouldn't go to school I would you know, sell drugs throughout high school, skip a lot of class, not really pay attention too much. But my grades you know, stayed above par, basically cause I did a lot of studying with, you know, females helped me out a lot with grades in my class.

Aladdin indicated that he was able to maintain a 2.8 in most of his class, which allowed him graduate from high school.

After graduation, Aladdin went to community college on a baseball scholarship. He had hopes of eventually playing baseball as a professional. While away at school, Aladdin continued to sell drugs. Eventually his coach was informed about his criminal behavior, and he lost his scholarship and was kicked out of school. Aladdin stated, “I had my opportunity to maybe play baseball somewhere (professionally) triple A, double A, overseas, but I sold dope.” After being kicked out of school, Aladdin indicated that he returned to his home city and continued to do what he knew how to do to make money, which was hustling and selling drugs. He began to indulge in a number of other criminal activities, was eventually arrested in connection to an armed robbery, and was sentenced to 5 years in prison. Aladdin continued his criminal activity
while incarcerated and he received a drug charge, which added a year and a half to his sentence.

After his additional charge, Aladdin became serious about finding a way to turn his life around. He became connected with a group of men who were using peer-to-peer education to earn college credits through CLEP and AP testing. Aladdin stated,

We were starting to really need time in the library, quiet time. We were studying outside the library, in our bunks. It became school. That's the best way I can explain it. It became school. I'm getting up at 5:30 in the morning to go to the library at 7:00. Eating breakfast, drinking coffee. I grew up. And it took a matter of maybe a month and a half to get me to stop doing all of the stuff I was doing, playing cards, chess…

Aladdin indicated that he earned 30 credits through CLEP and AP testing and it cost him less than $300. Aladdin immediately got work waiting tables and was able to earn an associate’s degree within a year of being released from prison. After graduating from community college he obtained a full-time job working in a factory. At the time of the interview, Aladdin was not in college, but planned to return to school to earn a four-year degree. Aladdin’s enthusiasm for school was infectious and his whole family either went to or got back into college.

**Thematic Findings**

The coding process identified emergent themes based on participants’ responses. To stay true to the transformative research paradigm which recognizes the historical mistrust that likely exists within historically marginalized communities due to a history of being misled or mistreated by hegemonic research practices, the author has endeavored to highlight participant voices throughout the remaining results section. Each theme will be briefly described, and selected examples within each theme will be provided to illustrate participants’ experiences in their own words.
Emergent Themes

There were a total of 15 emergent themes identified in the analysis. The forthcoming section will highlight each emergent theme, provide a brief description and summary of each theme, and present selected quotes of participants sharing their experiences. Each participant was also asked to provide advice to incarcerated individuals about PSCE, and this section will close with the words of each participant.

PSCE’s impact on ability to delay gratification/patience. Participants spoke about how their involvement in PSCE helped them to learn patience and look for the long-term payoff rather than what might be immediately enticing. Many spoke about how this helped them while in prison and after they were released. Examples of participants’ experiences related to learning patience are shared below.

Nick indicated that helping others through the educational process helped him to further learn patience, stating,

I was learning it, now I’m so eager to teach it to somebody, but at the same time, it taught me patience. And you know, there was a point where I was very impatient and I wanted it...hey, just give it to me now! And you know, going through these programs and having to take the time to read, to study, and then to put it all into realization to where I can explain it to somebody. You know, it played a role into patience. I will say that was probably the biggest change.

Joe spoke about learning the benefit of delaying gratification through his PSCE participation and the feelings of gratification that came with earning his paycheck through his work. Joe stated,
Delaying gratification, it definitely pays off. Because every penny I spend, and it’s not the most, I know I can get more, but my false sense of reality keeps me at this job, but every penny I get is worth it because I worked hard with my hands all types of scuffs…I bleed at the job. But I get my check. I cash it and put it in my bank account. It’s a gratifying feeling that more than standing on a corner and making a $1,000 in a day ever has been. It’s like, purpose. I’ve done this. I accomplished this. It’s like I don’t have to worry.

Big J spoke about the benefit of learning to see the impact of his actions further in the future than he had previously been able to prior to participation in PSCE. Big J stated,

Instead of 5 days or 5 weeks, now I actually could see like, “Oh, ok, that’s what I want to be doing” right? I don’t want to be going back and forth to prison until I’m old, what I had and got to start over and got to do this. The family ain’t messing with me. I don’t want to have to go through that no more, you know what I’m saying. So what helped me see my life, you know what I’m saying? A lot of people don’t see their life on down the road, you know, they figure they’ll be dead or locked up again. See, I don’t see that. If God wanted me to be dead or then that’s Him and that’s what He wants.

Aladdin spoke about how participating in PSCE helped him to learn the patience that he would need to be successful after being released from prison. Aladdin further indicated that acquiring patience while incarcerated helped him to be able delay gratification after his release. Specifically, Aladdin stated,

The patience of 3 months and passing the exam and 3 months, pass another exam. It gave me the patience that I need to get out. That's the second part, to get out and not feel like, “Oh I have to do something right now, or I need to make some money right now.” It
helps with bills. Let’s say bills. Everything has to be due at the end of the month. You have to pay these bills. If I want some shoes and these bills aren't paid, I'm not about to go buy these shoes. And that goes back to the CLEP. I learned patience because in the morning, I'm not going to do anything else until I finish reading this chapter. Or I finish reading these chapters or I finish this practice exam. I'm not doing anything else. So, that gave me the patience to where I am now where it's not going to lead me to doing anything that's going to get me back into prison. Because I learned my patience in prison. Where you know, um, okay I don't have no money now, but let me try to either think of another way to get it legally or just be patient and continue to work my job and when my check comes I can manage my money. Budget my money, organizational skills like that. Patience is still with me right now, it's still with me right now.

Participants’ statements reflect growth in their ability to delay gratification and an increase in their levels of patience. Additionally, participants indicated this occurred across a variety of aspects of life, from school preparation, to working to pay off bills instead of gratifying immediate needs. One of the most notable shifts occurred among the individuals who spoke about being able to look at the long-term implications of their behavior to steer their actions away from criminality.

**PSCE’s impact on self-esteem/mental wellbeing.** All but one participant spoke about how their experience enhanced their self-esteem and/or mental wellbeing in some way. Several of the men spoke about how their participation in PSCE helped them find happiness and joy while incarcerated. Joe stated, “I actually found some joy in helping people to do what I did. Basically give them another option once they return home.” Both Joe and Will spoke about feeling a sense of pride though participating in PSCE, with Joe stating, “It just made me feel like
I could accomplish anything. I am literally self-taught. So it made my sense of pride.” Will stated, “I’m worth something, so let me dig deep inside and see what I’m worth. You know… what is it that I really want? What drives me?”

Ryan Bixby spoke extensively about how PSCE helped him to deal with issues from his past that had affected his ability to be successful in school. He stated, “my self-esteem had been tarnished” when describing growing up poor and going to school with old clothes. Ryan Bixby further articulated his condition saying,

I think I kind of like had self-esteem issues, you know; being poor, not having anything and um, my brothers not having anything. Kind of like sent me to school…like feeling like that I was less than and kind of like wanting more, but not knowing how to get more and not having really the structure of a foundation around me to help me understand what it is that I was going through as a child. So, I knew that it was someplace that I should be, but I didn’t know how to maximize what it is that it had to offer at the time.

He went on to speak about his loss of his childhood as a result of the conditions he grew up in, saying,

Um, for me, school was like sort of like depressing. I never really felt comfortable, although it was something that I knew I needed. Emotionally I was detached from it because of the things that were going on at home…Ultimately what it is that I feel is I came up having to be an adult as a child, never really having a childhood – trying to figure out how to help my family out of the condition my siblings and my mother were in and that led me to the drug game, growing up in the mid-late ‘80s where crack cocaine was soaring.
Ryan Bixby went on to say that his participation in PSCE helped in that “it kind of validated you and I wanted to be validated that... you know my criminal proclivities wasn’t who it is that I was and it was just something that I did and it didn’t define all of who it is that I am. So there’s many different facets of me.” He went on to describe his participation in PSCE, saying, “I was overwhelmed or I was feeling great, just because other people were getting what it is that I was trying to give and in the process in turn, I actually began to get what it is that I was trying to give.”

Gaspar Yanga stated that participating in PSCE “It was very, very therapeutic in the sense that it provided escapism from horrific day to day life of the incarceration. It was extremely, extremely, extremely rewarding.” In addition to the beneficial nature of simply participating in PSCE, Gaspar Yanga spoke about how PSCE helped him to deal with issues from his youth and examine how those issues had impacted him, stating,

I think my post-secondary education really helped me to deal with the fact that I really needed to deal with the fact that I really needed to address my parents dying so young in my life and how that impacted my decisions and how I looked for role models incorrectly and how I didn’t identify with strength properly um and so like addressing all of those things allowed me to use that as a motivation of just like, you know, validation of myself.

Two of the participants spoke specifically about the impact PSCE had on helping them to deal with past trauma, thus enhancing their mental wellbeing. Additionally, other participants spoke about finding joy again in daily life. They highlighted impacts on their overall self-esteem and the ways that PSCE helped them find greater joy in their lives.

Greater openness to learning and the learning process. Participants spoke about how their view of the value of education expanded and they became more open to the process of
learning. Participants shared experiencing a greater willingness to engage in the learning process and ability to use the information they learned. Will spoke about his view of the knowledge he gained in the following way: “Man, once you have knowledge, you don’t want to go back to being nothing. It’s like you use them tools to keep going further and further. You know, to better yourself, and it’s a good feeling.”

Nick spoke about how PSCE opened him up to seeing every moment as a learning opportunity:

You have to kind of open up, you know, about not being closed minded, just open up to the information that’s in there and learn it and then at another point because you’re surrounded by so many people with so many walks of life, this gives you the opportunity to learn. You know, ethics, cultures, and races, people and you know you take this on and you learn it and you’re learning it. And so what I would tell the guys in there is, every moment of their life behind bars, take heed to it because it is a learning moment, it’s a learning process.

Jerome spoke about the value of learning for the sake of the knowledge gained in the process rather than the value of earning a degree:

You know, in the sense that it gave me the understanding that my success weighed heavily on what I decided to do and that even though I hadn’t got a degree, I learned through the process of that you know, the information is more important than an actual type of a degree. And so I just began to learn the things that were necessary for me to succeed once I got out.

Gaspar Yanga spoke about how participating in PSCE opened up him to a greater understanding of how language is used to convey meaning:
So, I was reading non-educational books, self-help and motivation books prior to participating in an English course, but after the classes I started looking at the nuances of language and understanding syntax. I took notes on what I was reading; that changed my level of comprehension of the material, which impacted my core beliefs and value system in a way that I never thought was possible.

Aladdin described participating in PSCE in the following way:

As much as CLEP is about education, as a micro, the macro is so much bigger. Because it opens your eyes to so much more than just school. You know what I mean? I don't want to downplay education or CLEP at all, but that's just what school does. If you go to the University of Michigan, that's just what it does. You get your education, but you meet different types of people. You're engaged in conversations with people you never thought about taking to before in your life. You read books that you never thought about reading before. You read poems and you see lectures and you see movies and documentaries that opens your eyes to so much that the world has to offer. So, CLEP is not just all an education, ‘Oh let me take CLEP courses,’ like I thought I was at first. It became so much more. It helped me with my self-esteem and thought process, my insecurities, what I wanna do, what I don't wanna do, what I watch on TV. I've never watch so much CNN in my life until I passed the U.S. Government AP exam, and I'm like wow! What is a check and balance? I didn't know what a check and balance was until I got education. Now I can watch CNN and it make sense of what they talk about. It's not just, oh I got college courses so I can get a degree, it's about life. It's about expanding your life to horizons that you never even thought you could reach. So, yeah. It's touched many, many, many more facets of my life than just the education process.
As participants engaged in the learning process, they became more eager to learn. Additionally, participants became more engaged in learning from multiple sources including the media and their peers. This enhanced openness to learning contributed to finding new paths to success and understanding what success truly looks like.

**PSCE’s impact on goal setting.** Each one of the men interviewed spoke about an increase in the number and level of the goals they made. These goals ranged from small goals, like making it to the library, to large goals like starting a publishing company. Participants also spoke about how their approach to goal making itself changed. Will described the impact of PSCE on his goal making by saying, “It changed me from this nothing to something! You know what I saying? A man with no dreams to a man with dreams.” Nick echoed Will’s statement about not having goals prior PSCE, saying,

Going in it there was no goals. Going in there for myself-speaking, it was more of a worry, than a goal. I worried if I can get a parole. I would worry if I can get a job after incarceration. I would worry if I can maintain life. And getting off into the educational programs and being in the midst of the guys that was facilitating these programs, those worries turned into goals.

Big J also stated also spoke about not having goals prior to his participation in PSCE, and how this changed through his participation, saying,

Well, first of all I didn’t have any goals, really. You know, to be honest with you. I wasn’t really thinking about goals, but it impacted me now. I’ve got goals and it, I really can’t explain it. One, it showed me how I could achieve and I just started thinking like, ok, well if I could do this in this environment, what can I do when I get to the other side? You know what I’m saying, so it helped me like you said, it helped me to enhance my
ability as a man, who I wanted to be. I got seeing myself as really going out there using this and doing what I needed to do, you know what I’m saying, and it just impacted me a lot.

Nick went on to speak about how PSCE impacted his vision of the future:

A major impact. Umm, we talked about the vision already with the educational programs. In my opinion, I feel that the longer you stay in there the wider your vision is going to be of course. And you know, going through them programs, that’s how my vision became. It’s like the more and more that I was learning the more and more that I took on. Whether it was the CLEP education or self-help, my vision was growing.

In addition to beginning to have goals, Big J began to see a path to actually achieving his goals. He stated,

So it [goal setting] went from ok, we’re just talking some whatever, to then it transforming to you then you know what? I can actually, I can do something different. You know what I’m saying, so I can come home and be better at not hustling but just being a better man period. You know what I’m saying, so that it helped my decision, you know what I’m saying, I wanted to get more education. I wanted to see if I could stay out of the madness [in prison], you know, and it would just be little goals like, let me see if I can challenge myself not to talk to certain people today. Let me challenge myself to see if I could study a longer period of time without even just being distracted, you know what I’m saying. I wanted to challenge myself, can I read bigger books or smaller books and retain the information.
Aladdin also spoke about having goals again as a result of his participation in PSCE, and like Big J, he incorporated small daily goals into his strategy for achieve his larger goals. He articulated this saying,

I started to make goals. I started, I started having goals again. I started writing down what I wanted to do when I got out. Before I was, it's so cliché to say, I was lost, but I didn't have nowhere that I wanted to go. You know what I mean? Even though I had caught that case [while incarcerated] and I wanted to change, I wanted to get education. So, I had goals. I started writing out goals. I started applying to schools, I started um, talking to my mom and my brothers and my sisters more. Like staying in contact with them, making sure they were finishing school, trying to get them to send me books. Reading all the time, like turning my TV off. It was little things I stopped doing, playing cards and chess. Yeah I stopped that, but as far as goals and where I'm trying to go and how I see life and me not even thinking about every coming back here.

Several participants spoke about not really having goals prior to participating in PSCE; they did not think about their future in terms of goals, rather like Nick, saw a future that “was more of a worry, than a goal.” However, as the men progressed through PSCE, their goals increased and they began to plan for their future in new and different ways.

**PSCE’s impact on motivation to achieve goals.** Participants also shared experiencing PSCE’s impact on their motivation to achieve their goals. This increase in motivation took two main forms. First is the motivation to participate in actions/behaviors that were experienced and perceived as helping participants to achieve their goals. Second is participants’ motivation to avoid behaviors/actions that would lead to a reduction in the likelihood of achieve their goals.
In the area of motivation to increase positive behaviors, Ryan Bixby spoke about how wanting to change future generations began to motivate him and help him prioritize things in his life differently, saying,

I began to prioritize, like, you know, what’s important. While I was there, the first thing that was important was getting out. Why did I want to get out? Because I had something to do for my family. Like, I had some generational success to produce. And so, like, that in turn, said that if I had generational success to do, I had to learn how to be able to be a functioning component of society.

Will spoke about how he stopped just talking about what he wanted to do and was able to motivate himself to make things happen. He stated,

You know how some people say ‘I want to do this and I want to do that,’ but never do it? You know? And I was one of those. I want to do this and I want to do that and… but it’s like, ok… You say you want to do it, are you really going to do it? You got to get off your ass and do it! You got to get, you got to get off your ass and do it! You know? And like I said, when I got out [of prison], it was different.

Jerome indicated he gained a greater understanding of what it took to create real success in his life. He stated,

I mean I think it put gratification in a whole new context. I realized that success wasn’t something that comes overnight and that you have to put the work in, you have to make the commitment. The same way that you have to do in the classroom in order to get the desired outcome. The more committed, the better the outcome and so the learning was definitely a great metaphor for life as I see now.
In speaking about how increasing his motivation led to decreasing unhelpful behaviors, Will stated that participating in PSCE helped to keep him from getting into trouble, “It [PSCE] keep me from going to the hole, catching tickets, you know.” Ryan Bixby stated that PSCE “…helped me to become better at who it is that I was. So I could be placed up under a microscope. It helped me to become transparent.” Nick spoke about the overwhelming impact of PSCE on making his goals a priority in his life, stating,

I’ve been in school and the impact is overwhelming. It is a good overwhelm though. The education, it makes you put goals as a priority. It makes you stick to those goals and it makes you stick to those objectives to meet the goals. And just as in prison it was the same way while I was in and sat in a lot of the educational programs and self-help groups.

The best intentions may not create change without the motivation to act on the goals established. It is thus important to note that motivation to act on one’s goals was also an important aspect of the change participants described due to their participation in PSCE. Participants spoke about an overall increase in motivation to act on their stated goals, and making their goals a priority in their lives.

Planning for parole. Several of the men spoke about how PSCE changed how they approached their parole hearing. They spoke about how earning credits gave them something tangible to show the parole board, and about how it provided visible evidence of the internal changes they experienced as a result of participating in PSCE. Big J highlighted this fact saying, “Oh man, it gave me firepower because I could show them where I was and where I am now and what I accomplished through that program.”
Nick spoke about how PSCE helped him begin to develop plans past parole, which led to him researching stocks and developing an idealized stock portfolio.

The educational aspect, it gave me a vision of what I want and what I want to do and what I need to do. I remember I was going to a CLEP program, and while we were going over the math aspect, I started to learn how to read the stock market…you know, stocks and bonds and I got real deep off into it and I remember telling myself…I was saying, I’m going to get out of here and because I’m doing this in the educational field and with this math I feel I’m this all-star stock guy now and I’m going to make me this awesome portfolio and which I did with every stock that I wanted to buy and I took that to my meeting. And when my parole officer, when he asked me, what were some of my plans and goals and I was able to open up this folder and say…well I was really thinking about investing in this and investing in that and going into the mutual stock market with this and that, and he looked, wow! You really have a good head on your shoulders. You really have your game plan going on. So it played a major role.

Nick went on to say,

You know, it wasn’t no more the worry of…can I meet parole’s standards? It was more of…I’m going to meet parole standards and even with taking the aspect of going to see the parole board, that education part helps. You know, to talk to the parole board in a respectable manner and the educational manner. You know, not looking at them for a handout, not begging them, you know…hey can you please let me out? You know, when I was getting off into the educational aspect and I get more deeper off into it and more studying and learning more, I developed the thought that and I mean, call me crazy, but I had days of you know, are you ready for the world and I thought…is the world ready for
Because of what I was learning in there and as the years come down and you know I am about ready to see the board, I’m getting excited because I want the parole board member to see the transition and to see the transformation and you know, what it took for me to get to where I was at.

Big J Spoke about how he felt like his participation in PSCE gave him a hope that he previously did not have about going to in front of the parole board:

Right. Like I went from doing just sitting around and now I’ve got nine college credits plus I got my pesticide license through the Department of Agriculture, not just no prison stuff. Actually people from the Department of Agriculture certified me and you can go on the computer right now and look and my name and number is in there as he is a certified pesticide handler. You know what I’m saying, so they gave me a lot of firepower and it gave me… I came in with more hope.

Joe spoke about how his motivation for obtaining his PSCE changed from a desire to look good for the parole board to finally seeing a plan for his future outside of criminal behavior. Joe stated,

At first my whole goal was just, this was in the beginning, get the certifications so it can look good when I go in front of the parole board and that changed from that to, “Oh I’ve got to get as many certifications as I can before I leave because it’s going to look good on my resume.” I didn’t even think about the board. I’m thinking about my future because I know what I can attain by having these college credits or having these certifications.

Aladdin spoke about how his participation in PSCE gave him tangible proof of his internal transformation. The subsequent two quotes from Aladdin illustrate that despite being
charged with an additional drug crime while incarcerated, his participation in PSCE provided him with the confidence to face his parole hearing:

Like, yeah I'm in here, yeah I gotta see the parole board, yeah I caught that case, but I'm going...it changed my perspective on how I'm going to see the parole board. I caught a dope case in prison. Everyone's telling me there's no way you're going to get out your first time going to the parole board after catching a case. I went in there so positive, so confident, like listen. I know I messed up. I know I messed up. But look, I have a plan. Look at all these college courses I done took. Look at all these credits I got. I got accepted to a university. I'm going to this college. I'm trying to go to this college. I'm moving in with my mom. Like, I had a plan and my plan was, it became tangible. I love that word. It became tangible. Because I was able to hold my credits and do what I wanted with 'em. And I knew what I wanted to do with them. So, my whole mentality changed. My whole mentality changed.

And,

I had proof of my change, but not only that, if you was to look in my eyes at that time, it wasn't just, yeah I got, I took classes...I could be slick and take classes, but when the parole board asked me what did you do? And how did you feel? And what happened? And how do you feel now? What are you going to do when you get out? My answers were honest and true where the parole board could see that. And I got my response within a week and everybody else wait 5, 6 month, I got mine in a week. Because they knew that whatever it was they saw, they knew it was real. You know what I mean? And, and preparing for that, I just went in there, and I'm like, look. All I can do is be real. All I can do is be me. Yeah I did this, I went through all this bad stuff back in my,
my previous days, but this is who I am now. And all I can do is try to portray that to you all so that you can see that it is real and genuine. And you know, it's in your hands.

The most remarkable impact of PSCE on planning for parole was described by Aladdin, who despite receiving a number of infractions prior to his participation in PSCE and getting an additional drugs charge, was able to use PSCE to demonstrate significant transformation to the parole board. But, as many participants articulated, they were not necessarily planning for parole, but rather they were planning for life after parole. Participants began to create tangible plans for after their release from prison, which likely contributed to their ability to demonstrate their readiness for release to the parole board. Ultimately, it appears PSCE helped participants to feel confident in their own progress. This hope for a positive outcome changed the way they thought about themselves in relationship to communicating with and presenting to the parole board.

**Role of PSCE in not returning to prison.** Participants spoke about not wanting to return to prison prior to participating in PSCE, and many indicated that PSCE gave them a road map for success after their release from prison. Several of the men also spoke about PSCE as a tool they were able to utilize to make sure they did not go back to hustling or illegal activity.

Ryan Bixby spoke about how PSCE helped him realize the responsibility he has to make a positive impact in his community, saying,

Returning to prison is not an option. I feel like that I’m a valuable asset and so what actually happens is that like, I have to be the example for what it is that people can be, and in being that, I’m charged with this responsibility. I’m the face of what it is that they can be if they don’t be what it is that they have been. You know, that’s what post-
secondary education has helped me to understand that like...in order to be the best...in order to produce the best, you have to be the best.

Nick reported that his participation in PSCE helped him to identify the opportunities that are available through higher education. Nick further indicated that finding his path in education made the criminal life less appealing. Nick stated that PSCE’s impact on him staying out of prison was:

Majorly. Just the lack of education in prison and the getting off into these programs and for once seeing how easy education was...when I was in there, you know, the group that I was with, we was going through these programs, and I’ll say, yeah, this is quite easy and it’s quite fun. And if it’s that quite easy and that quite fun, then this right here is enough to say, you know what, the avenue of going back into the streets, fast life, fast money, it’s not it. And taking on programs in there, it really helped. It opens up, you know, the whole door of opportunity. I can go get myself involved in this, especially in the educational sense of coming home and then going straight into school. The experience of school is 100 times better than going back to prison. You know, there’s grants for school and also you know the school keeping me so busy and I don’t really don’t have time to go devilling down off in the streets.

Big J spoke about his education giving him the confidence that he could earn a living without have to resort to selling drugs. He stated that his participation in PSCE,

Well, it gave me, I want to say it gave me more firepower and it gave me more confidence that I could survive without drugs. You know what I’m saying, because education is ever changing. So if I’m in a setting to where I can learn and continue to learn, you know what I’m saying, it just gives me more hope, you know what I’m saying,
but now that I’m out here and I’m still using it, you know what I’m saying, that really puts the emphasis on that I aint going back, I aint gotta go back! You know what I’m saying, I’m making it! I’m making it!

Aladdin identified PSCE as the single most influential reason he is not going to return to prison, saying,

Man, that's the single most influential reason why I know right now why I'm not going back to prison. I can say that with the most direct you know, direct of a quote you gonna get. That's the single most reason why I'm not going back to prison. Getting involved in CLEP is the single most reason why I know that I'm not going back to prison. That's what's up with me. I don't know if God talked to me through it or something, to get my mind right, but without CLEP I don't know where I'd be right now. Mentally, spiritually... I don't know.

Several participants clearly stated participation in PSCE programs provided them with a greater sense of confidence they were not going to return to the lifestyle that lead them to prison. This confidence came from having a plan, from having an idea about the steps necessary find success outside of criminal life. Similarly, in planning for parole, participants indicated having a plan of action and knowing how to achieve that plan was a major asset to them in their transition back to society.

**Impact on giving back to community/having a positive impact on community.**

Several of the participants spoke about how their participation in PSCE helped them to see how they could give back to the community, and this desire and ability to give back became an additional motivational force for success. Several of the men also spoke about the sense of pride they received from knowing they would become a contributing member of society. Will spoke
about the positive feelings he gets from helping others, saying, “When you’re doing something good, you feel good in yourself and you want other people to feel that and to see it. And so I like, I wanted to help other people. You know what I’m saying? I wanted to help those that’s coming in [to prison].” Big J indicated he also felt pride in being able to be an example for others in his community, saying,

Now I can come out here and show them where I came from and where I’m at right now and look at what I’ve become! And I’m staying out here and so that’s the example that I can show the community, because people that know where I came from around here, they still tell me, “yeah, you’re doing a good job” or “just keep it up.” And that makes me want to go further, you know what I’m saying, because people noticing that, you know what I’m saying, steady going forward.

In addition to the feelings of pride that come from being of service to the community, participants spoke about the sense of responsibility they feel towards their communities. For example, Ryan Bixby stated, “Now that I’m out, I feel like I owed it to society, I owed it to friends, I owed it to family for not being there and for being a part of its demise or their demise. Or you know, ah, their inability to grow.”

PSCE also affected how one participant engaged with his community by helping him identify an alternative roadmap by which to navigate society, other than participating in the selling of drugs. Gaspar Yanga articulated this by stating,

So having a different access would provide me a different road map and so just by participating in my community with a different road map I would be coming from a different access point. I would change the effects of what I’m doing in my community, so I could no longer, you know, try to enjoy the drug game or living in the sub-culture, and
I’m able to provide an example of individual. I am able to provide, like you know, a tax paying lifestyle to my community, and just really participating as a citizen in a very impactful way in my community and I think for me post-secondary education provided me a road map. It just changed how I approached things and whatever problems will come along with that and so I think that definitely impacts how I impact my community. Jerome spoke about the feeling of responsibility he felt to the men he left behind in prison and how he feels responsible to share his success with those who are still incarcerated. Jerome stated,

Um, you know, when you live inside of a place for so long, you build genuine friendships and when you build those friendships, you know you understand that when you get released it’s not just you that’s getting released. You know, you’re carrying on your back the many men who want to do something meaningful with their lives, but haven’t had a model of that, and so I’m very intentional and making sure that you know people that’s currently on the inside can visibly see what success looks like. So I send pictures and I send letters, but that model is important because reading Malcom’s autobiography, like he modeled a behavior and show what the outcomes can be if you make a commitment.

One of the most frequent comments from participants related to the impact they can have on their communities involves simply returning to their communities as a transformed individual, as an example of what hard work and perseverance can do to create positive change. Still other participants spoke about the specific obligation they feel to their communities within prison, and how this sense of obligation helps to motivate participants to continue to make positive steps forward.
PSCE impact on changing view of past criminal behavior. As the men began to get more education and saw the options available to them through education, they began to think about their past criminal behavior differently. One of the most common sentiments among participants in this theme involved participants taking responsibility for the actions that brought them to their current position. Will stated, “So, I stopped making the excuses, prison has taught me to stop making excuses and be a man and own up to your responsibility.”

Jerome spoke about learning to understand his actions within the social context within which they occurred, and he was able to identify possible intervention points with kids who might be in a similar situation. Jerome stated,

It definitely, it put things in more of a social context… I began to look at you know that the role that the schools played in terms of just like so many missed opportunities that were there for people to intervene that helped me…. right…get back on the right path and understanding the economics of growing up in an inner city and public school systems. That kind of…. You know that learning that I took upon myself to do, really just opened up my eyes to the socioeconomic conditions that create, you know, the opportunities for so many men and women to end up in prison.

Several of the participants’ narratives include witnessing criminal behavior in their neighborhoods, often committed by people known to them. In these environments, criminality could become the normative expectation. One participant, Big J, spoke about how education helped him to reframe normal behavior, saying,

Once you get educated, you look at that as, that [criminal behavior] wasn’t normal. You know what I’m saying? It’s kind of hard because I don’t want to put people down that’s hustling or that’s in the life doing what it is that they do, but it made me look at it like… I
was insane, or I wasn’t thinking at that point and time. I was, but I wasn’t thinking about the right things. Because there is so many different ways it could’ve went.

Similarly, Gaspar Yanga spoke about how the criminal life was glorified, and how he realized that the glamor he saw associated with criminality ultimately proved to be idiotic, saying,

I got from you know my post-secondary education, and um, just participating, reading, and learning about other things that other people were doing definitely impacted me, you know, because like prior to, like I come from an environment like the things I had did prior to [PSCE participation] are really like revered, and the money I made; like you can get caught in that short-sighted, or limited experience and so you know you think that it was cool, but when start looking at the world as a whole and outside of yourself, you realize that it was absolutely idiotic.

Nick spoke about feelings of regret for not taking education more serious earlier in his life. Additionally, he reflected on impact not following his mother’s advice about education had on the way he went through the world, saying,

She [Mom] pushed me off into that educational realm and I didn’t take hold of it. I didn’t even take hold of it until I was incarcerated and I’d seen the importance of education and providing a real authentic life, not something I’d have to walk on a tightrope for. I don’t have to worry about cracking the egg or breaking the glass or somebody coming to get me. You know, education kind of put a stamp and you know people…If I would’ve finished high school with a diploma, it would’ve opened up doors. If I would’ve went to college and got a bachelor’s degree, it would’ve opened up major doors and I hate that it took for me to go to prison to see how important education is.
Aladdin spoke about finding a sense of remorse through his participation in PSCE, and how he saw the lost opportunities from not taking education more serious earlier in his life, saying,

I basically felt, what I really felt...the things that I did before I, I came to a remorseful situation with myself where I shouldna did it. I mean, these are things that I know, I know better than to do. How I got caught up in 'em, I don't know but I know that I was wrong. You know what I'm sayin'? I know I was wrong…. How it [my thinking] was changed through CLEP was how did I even end up involved in these things when I coulda just got an education when I first got out of high school? If I woulda did that from the jump, I wouldn't be where I was now. And I knew that. You know what I mean?

Participants spoke about a range of feelings when speaking about the shifts in their thinking about their past criminal behavior. A complex mixture of remorse and regret was present throughout, however. There was remorse over the harm that was caused, but also a sense of regret for the path not taken. Also participants talked about gaining a clearer understanding of the conditions that informed their previous thinking, which included acknowledgment of the toxicity of the environment within which they grew up.

**PSCE’s impact on sense of identity.** Participants noticed significant shifts in their identity as a result of participating in PSCE. Some participants spoke about PSCE as a validating agent, helping them gain tangible evidence of their worth outside of criminal behavior. For some, the shift described was more dramatic, with them adopting a whole new value system as a result of their participation.

Nick spoke about how PSCE helped him to construct a new identity, saying,
So this [PSCE] helps with that identity. It created a whole new person. Going in, a lot of people…they know me as…the savage…the gangster…as the thug in the street. You know, not so much of a role model, but a true follower, you know, somebody who doesn’t give two shits about life. And now coming out and I’m able to build up a whole new character and I’m able to do that because of the walks of life within prison and putting it all together and I don’t think I could’ve did it within prison, it’s good for me to come outside to say, you know what, this is who I am…a productive citizen.

Will spoke about a lack of any clear idea about who he was prior to participation in PSCE, and how he found a sense of worth through his studies, saying,

To tell you the truth, before… I didn’t have none. I had one, but I didn’t know that I had one. I’m like… Man! Just keep planning it over and over and over and you be like… Man! I do stand for something. I got worth. I’m worth something!

Aladdin spoke about feeling completely lost until he found a path to PSCE, and how his participation helped him to transform his identity as a transient hustler, to someone with a clear sense of how to move forward, saying,

I was lost until I found CLEP. Honestly, because I didn't have a plan when I was out. I didn't have a plan. Yeah, I sold dope. I was in rentals, I was state to state, all in hotel rooms, making money, spending money. But I didn't have a plan. I didn't have nowhere that I was trying to go and grow old and start a family and have kids, like that wasn't my thought process. At all. But, but after realizing what I can be, I began to think like that. So, my identity changed. You know, I got a girl now, I got a apartment now. You know? We talking about like getting married. I didn't even like, none of these thoughts were in my mind before I got locked up. I know it's hard to believe, but it wasn't. You know, I
come from a two-parent household with six brothers and sisters. That wasn't in my mind.

I don't know what happened to me, but it wasn't in my mind.

Gaspar Yanga highlighted how PSCE helped him develop a sense of identity in an environment designed to strip a person of his individuality. He indicated PSCE helped him regain a sense of worth, saying,

It [PSCE] was extremely redeeming. Incarceration in general is about stripping you of your individuality. No one refers to you by your name, you are given a number. Your underwear, t-shirt, socks everything is identified with this number you are given when you enter into prison. Your undershirt, underwear, everything that you brought in, that you wore – that is discarded and you put on a jumpsuit and you go to the quarter master when you are issued clothing that is very uniform. There is no sense of individuality. And so getting an opportunity to participate in this program redeemed my sense of self-worth. It gave me an opportunity that I can make a difference. I'm not branded by solely by what I did to get there. It gave me a sense of, it just really changed and sharpened my intellectual – I wouldn't say capacity, but breadth.

Big J stated that PSCE “Helped me to enhance my ability as a man, who I wanted to be. I got seeing myself as really going out there using this and doing what I needed to do, you know what I’m saying, and it just impacted me a lot.”

These participants spoke about the impact of not having a clear sense of who they were and how having a sense of who they are provided them with a path forward. They spoke about regaining a sense of self through education despite being in environments specifically designed to strip away their individuality. PSCE appears to have provided these men with an anchoring point by through which they were able to reconnect with their personhood.
Impact of being seen as a role model for family and community. As participants progressed through their educational journeys, people around them began looking to them as role models. Participants spoke about the impact of becoming more visible within the prison system, and feeling like they could not fail because it would be letting their peers down. Ryan Bixby indicated he felt a responsibility to succeed, because he felt like a valuable part of the educational team. He stated,

I feel like that I’m a valuable asset and so what actually happens is that like, I have to be the example for what it is that people can’t be…and in being that, I’m charged with this responsibility. I’m the face of what it is that they can be if they don’t be what it is that they have been. You know, that’s what post-secondary education has helped me to understand that like…in order to be the best…in order to produce the best, you have to be the best.

In addition to people finding inspiration in participants’ successes being a motivating factor, Will spoke about how people would try to find fault within individuals in order to invalidate the success of the PSCE program. Will stated, “Like I said before, the people are looking at you. They may not be looking at you for the greatness, but they looking at you like…let me see if I can see some fault in you, so I can bring it to the table.” Will went on to speak about those who he wanted to make proud, saying,

Let me get out and be the man that my father know I can be. I want him to look down on me like… “Man! That’s my son! He’s doing something.” You know what I’m saying? I want my brother to look at me like… “Man! My brother did 20 years but he’s out doing something.”
In addition to the impact of others within the prison system closely examining participants’ behaviors, several men spoke about how the changing views of their families motivated them to greater success. Joe stated,

My cousins…they are always asking me to come tell my story…so like come over here and come tell your story here, you’re very inspirational, like everything you went through. I’ll be like, you’re right. Because a lot of young people don’t know. They think like, this is it. When you get to this point, then that’s it. You’re labeled and you have be this, but my story in taking a part in the programs shows not only me, it shows people that I’ve told the story to, like you don’t have to settle for that. Like if this happens to you, you can use it as a bump in the road and not a road block, but that’s all this was for me, like a bump in the road and it made me a better person for it.

Gaspar Yanga spoke about realizing his role as an advocate for education, and speaking to those in his community and encouraging them to find their passion and get the most out of what the educational experiences have to offer, saying,

Well, you know that being an African-American male, there isn’t so much spoken about our experiences. I think post-secondary education, like the value I found in it, is something I would want to share with other people, getting to them earlier, even now, like I know relatives or friends, and I’m always pushing education you know whatever form their interests are and making sure that they get the most out of that experience and using it as a way to advance their life.

Big J spoke about how he previously avoided being around his family because he did not want to be a bad influence on them, and how this changed after he found education:
I would say, it changed to the point to whereas, now I wanted to be a family man and be around my family. Because when you are selling dope, I don’t want to meet nobody. You know what I’m saying, I don’t want to see them, keep them around me or keep me from going to see my family because, you know, I’m dealing dope and so I don’t want to bring my contaminants around. What was good and being in place and them seeing me pulling up in the big whips and seeing me, “I’m fresh.” “Well where the hell you work at?” “Well, I work at Grandad Landscaping.” “What?” “Driving that?” Getting out of here, you know what I’m saying, so I didn’t want to bring all of that around, but now, after going through the, you know what I’m saying, now I want to be around. I want to be a family man. I want to have kids, a wife, and all of that to where, you know, you want it, but before I wanted to have hoes, I wanted to have a bunch of hoes and belong to that, but now it is not that.

Similarly, Aladdin spoke about how his participating in PSCE allowed him to positively influence his entire family, and as a result they all either entered or returned to college. He stated,

I was talking with my little brothers and sisters and they was like pretty much always in school. My mom was in school, my dad was back in school. Everyone was back in school. And everybody got back to school. Everybody got back to school. Everybody got back to school after me getting back to school and in CLEP after a year, my mom ended up going back, my dad ended up going back. They just graduated. The whole family ended up going back. My mom and dad went back and my little brothers and sisters was in there.
Either through intentional action or by simply showing up in their communities differently, participants spoke about how their progress through PSCE helped to influence those around them. Additionally they spoke about the positive pressure associated with having others looking at them as role models.

**Change in view of time incarcerated/making the time work for me.** As participants began to embrace PSCE they spoke about gaining a sense of freedom, and thus how they viewed their time in prison began to change. Participants indicated education helped to set their minds free from the oppressive incarcerated conditions, regaining a sense of their humanity. For example, Nick stated,

> I was no longer in the prison life. I was becoming a person again. And as I was getting closer and closer to that outlet, to that doorway again back into freedom and with the education that I had, I knew that I wasn’t just coming back out here as the ex-convict. I knew that this education was going to allow me to go off into a higher education, college.

Participants also stated that how they used their time began to shift, and they changed the types of activities they were involved in. Joe described this shift saying,

> Oh, it made the time go a lot faster. Because before I was just idling and laying on the bunk, reading books, reading novels. But when it came like time for tutoring, like, it motivated me like, because I’m not just doing nothing, I’m not wasting my time away and wasting my life away, it’s like I’m actually helping people and I’m actually learning more for myself at this time.

Joe went on, stating,

> It stopped being about the inside and started being about the outside even though I wasn’t on the outside. Everything I was doing was for the outside. Even though my body was
trapped inside, every move I was making was to pave the way for me to have the phone – for me to sit in front of you and be able to talk to you about not worrying about going back.

Gaspar Yanga described the shift in his view of his time in prison, saying,

And so this facility represented everything that you can imagine in despair and hopelessness. There was nowhere else worse they could have placed me. So, this was the environment in which I found myself while I was in there. Once I was able to create and participate in this post-secondary educational opportunity, the place had changed. I looked at it as a learning institute, where I'm cut off from everything and I'm able to focus more clearly, plan for my life better. I found it not just in myself, but in my peers. We decided at one point that we were going to put ourselves on a “no ride-out list,” which allowed us to stay at this facility solely for the purpose of participating in this program. Individuals, for good behavior, were able to go to another facility, which some of us were going to be eligible for, we decided that we wanted stay. This was unheard of. The warden had said that he'd never had anybody ask to be on a no ride-out list at that facility. It just completely changed the way I viewed education and opportunity. My environment completely, completely changed and I found it was the first time in that environment that I found some sort of sense of freedom.

Big J spoke about the shift in how he viewed his time, saying,

It turned. From that time, when, from that time when I first met B and we talked and then I was allowed to get in the management class, it was just like, it was like I wasn’t in prison no more. That’s what it hit me like. Like, I wasn’t in prison no more. Like this
wasn’t, you know what I’m saying, this is not jail. Now I can excel. That was my turning point.

There were two major shifts spoken about by participants. First, was the idea that the prison environment changed for them. Individuals began to gain a sense of freedom from the oppressive conditions of incarceration. Secondly, individuals transformed their daily activities. They focused on studying and educating themselves. Additionally, participants spoke about a desire to stay out of trouble after they started participating in PSCE.

**PSCE’s impact on parenting.** Several of the participants had children and spoke about how they began to view their role as fathers in a different light as a result of their participation in PSCE. Will stated that PSCE “It made me a better father, son, brother, it made me a better person, a better friend. You know, because now I understand life.”

Several participants also spoke about a desire to engage differently with their children, and about how they could use what they learned to help give their children educational information and advantages they did not have growing up. Joe reported that the learning he did through PSCE helped him to be in a position to facilitate his daughter’s entry into college. He stated,

CLEP, right now, like, you don’t understand this program has done so much. It’s like I have a better understanding on how CLEP, FASFA, selective service, everything, work. So now, watching my daughters, I can give them a leg up because the CLEP was designed for high school students and the AP program was designed for high school students, but we just took advantage of it. So now I’m using the same thing that I learned to help my daughter get college credits way before it’s time. So it not only helps me, it helps my children. It made a world of difference and to be able to show my kids, like to
this day I can show them, look at what I accomplished. Like don’t let nothing hold you back. Just because they say you can’t do this, doesn’t mean anything. I tell this to my daughter right now.

Gaspar Yanga echoed Joe’s statement, saying,

So, I'm a parent so that [PSCE] reshaped my focus on what I wanted to provide from a parenting standpoint. The things that I learned became things that I could teach my child. And when I got married and had other kids, providing for them as well.

Jerome spoke about how education helped him to more critically analyze his role as a father, and helped him to search out effective models of parenting. In addition, Jerome spoke about how his education helped him to be a more effective co-parent. He stated,

I would say that it’s actually made me a better father, which is really, really important to me because, you know, parenting requires a great deal of thought, if you really care about your child’s future and the outcomes that they’ll have in life, and so just being able to read and you know study and learn and find models of fatherhood that weren’t traditional models that you see in the community. Like, being educated has greatly enhanced my ability to co-parent and to be a father to my youngest son and to really kind of help him prepare for life in a real way.

PSCE helped Ryan Bixby view success from a generational perspective rather an individual perspective. He stated,

I began to prioritize… like, you know, what’s important. While I was there, the first thing that was important was getting out. Why did I want to get out? Because I had something to do for my family. Like, I had some generational success to produce. And
so, like, that in turn, said that if I had generational success to do, I had to learn how to be able to be a functioning component of society.

PSCE affected several participants’ view of their roles as fathers, from gaining more information about the educational process, to redefining how they viewed their roles as fathers. Participants not only gained a better sense of the education process, several spoke about a fundamental shift in how they viewed their role as a parent and the benefits to their families. Many gained a deeper understanding of the impact they can have on the future of their families.

Collaborating with others and the influence of peer group. Participants spoke about a greater willingness to collaborate with others as a result of their PSCE participation. They also spoke about how the support of their peers helped them to persevere in their personal transformations and were instrumental in showing them they had options outside of returning to criminal behavior. Will spoke about how individuals in the PSCE program helped guide him, saying,

Because the people that I was surrounding myself with… they were doing positive things. Even though we was locked up, they were doing positive things and they seen it in me…they seen it in me was like… You come on with me. You know what I’m saying? And actually, they pushed me to doing what I was doing… like…No, leave that stuff alone.

Joe echoed Will’s statement concerning the influence of peers in introducing him to the PSCE program stating,

I was this idol until I ended up in Ojibwa with a fellow inmate and that’s where he came with his program. He offered me a tutoring position, which really was a teaching position to teach guys how to pass the [automotive mechanic certification] test. One of
the requirements was that I actually take a test and pass it…which I did…I took three and passed it. So he said, “Oh yeah, you’re qualified to teach these guys.” So, I credit the inmate for giving me the opportunity from not just like having the Michigan certs, but having a national certification now, which in turn, that’s pretty much how I’m working right now. I appreciate him for this program because I’m able to survive and not look over my back and don’t have to worry about like if the police are going to come or anything, it’s because of that. It’s because of what this program has to offer me.

Ryan Bixby spoke about how the he had to build support for the PSCE program he was involved in through a variety of ways among various constituents within the prison system. He described this process saying,

So, you start off with an idea and this idea is concrete. This idea is valid. But the moment that you begin to proceed to execute this idea, there’s a host of obstacles. You know, and these obstacles could range from, you know, administrative rules, policy and procedure to an individual that is in prison that thinks that what it is that you’re doing is demeaning or it isn’t cool. So we have to try to also help the individuals who think, you know, walking around in the yard being tough was cool with what prison was about…that that isn’t what prison is about and so it took a lot of mentoring and it took a lot of you know, lecturing if you will and you know, walking on the back 40 for hours trying to help individuals understand that they were doing the right thing, but all that helped me to become better at who it is that I was. So I could be placed up under a microscope. It helped me to become transparent.

Gasper Yanga described experiencing a therapeutic benefit from his peer-to-peer relationships, which was garnered through his participation in PSCE. He stated,
Participating and learning how to study, developing relationships with my peers, when we discussed the subject matter – whatever we were studying or teaching each other or tutoring. It was very, very therapeutic in the sense that it provided escapism from horrific day-to-day life of the incarceration. It was extremely, extremely, extremely rewarding.

Big J spoke further about the impact of peer-to-peer learning, stating,

The group inspired the education and the education inspired, me, to stick with the group because it gave me an outlook. That motivation in that group setting turned me into a I want to say a go-getter for a little bit of more knowledge.

The peer-to-peer nature of the learning process associated with participants’ experience with PSCE appeared to have a positive impact on their overall success. Whether it was a peer introducing the educational opportunity or facilitating the learning process, these collaborations seem to have increased individuals’ motivation to excel in their academic pursuits. Additionally, peer-to-peer collaboration was reported to be therapeutic for several participants.

Types of changes noticed as a result of participating in PSCE. In addition to goal setting behaviors, participants spoke about several other things they noticed were changing as a result of their participation in PSCE. Joe spoke about noticing how his definitions of success began to change, saying,

Like my whole definition of rich changed. It was, do they have a nice car, a nice house, and money in the bank and then you rich. But there’s there more than that. The feeling of knowing that I don’t have to look over my shoulder. I don’t have to worry about, “Hey am I going to be able pay these bills,” because enough things didn’t come and then to know that I actually have a plan to succeed in life. That’s true richness. When you
have a plan you know what you are going to do to obtain your goals…you’re rich right there! The rest is just making it happen.

Aladdin spoke about noticing that he oriented his daily activities differently after starting PSCE, and he spoke about engaging differently with his peers:

Before the education, I would get up. I can tell you about my day. I would get up, if I wanted to go to breakfast, I'd go, if they had something good I'd go, if not I'd sleep til lunch. I'd get up, go to lunch, come back, find something on TV, play cards, kick it with my homeboys. You know, just doing nothing. Nothing productive. Nothing productive. After CLEP came into my life, I'm up 5:00, 6:00 in the morning, going to every breakfast, come back, straight to the bedroom studying. Writing down my notes, highlight words in books. Um, I'm going to lunch, after lunch I'm getting together with a couple guys from class, we'd work on things, talk about class. After dinner, uh you know, we getting together, but my conversations changed from frivolous garbage to productive. Like, “What you doing when you get out? You need to come to CLEP. You need to get you education. Like the class not that much. Like get you a couple books.” I became, I guess I became didactic. I became like that. I had to tell others about what it is. Because it changed my life. And if I can get, at that time I knew. I became convicted, I knew that I was on the right path. And everything else didn't even matter.

Gaspar Yanga spoke about beginning to identify more closely with what his core values were, and noticing that his approach to life began to change. He stated his participation in PSCE:

Well, it does reinforce how our work pays off so reinforce like you know being prepared, studying, preparing like and other things can carry over in all aspects of life, so it really
helped me with my value system which says I don’t think I’d even thought about what
the fuck what core values meant, prior to participating and reading some books, even
though I read, so even though I read non-educational books, right, so, when I read self-
help books or motivational books that I was reading prior to, you know, then I was
participating in English course and even really looking at the nuances of language and
understanding syntax, you know, when I was read and took notes, that changed my level
of comprehension in that material which just impacted my core beliefs and value system
in a way that I would never thought was possible. So the other thing that impacted me
were work life in general just the way I approached doing things.

Big J spoke about how he noticed education helped him get rid of the bitterness he had
been carrying, saying,

You know what I’m saying, so that’s the part that the education helped me with, was to
get rid of the bitterness and all of the sitting around all day. I’m not just trying to glorify
knuckleheadism no more. Now, I take it to the point where it is about getting educated,
getting out here and making something with myself. I wanted to rub elbows with, you
know what I’m saying, some real civilized people, we’re going to make some power
moves-type people. I didn’t want to be in the underworld-type life anymore, you know
what I’m saying, so that’s how I changed.

Participants spoke about a range of changes they experienced as a result of their
participation in PSCE. Some of these changes included how they approached their daily
activities, while others spoke about deeper more fundamental shifts in their approach to life. The
changes participants noticed spanned a wide range of areas of their lives and fundamentally
altered how they interacted with the world.
What Would you Like to Share with Men in Prison About PSCE?

Each interview concluded with participants being offered a chance to give advice to anybody who might be currently incarcerated regarding PSCE. The following are each of the participant’s comments:

Will:

We make our own decisions and our own choices. You know… there was a… I forgot what movie it was on, but it was decisions, decisions, decisions. We always making decisions. Make the right decision. If you make a decision… I was always taught… Don’t do something that you’re going to be ashamed of. You know what I’m saying? Why do it? So, know that you’re worth more. Not just, you know, they say females are worth more… everybody is… You are worth more than what you were given. You got to go out and get it. You know, don’t accept nothing less. Don’t accept nothing less. You know, go out there and get it and if you can’t… make your own. Make your own. Man! There’s more to it – there’s more to life than BS.

Ryan Bixby:

That it’s a tool that is necessary and vitally necessary in order to help them transcend the way in which…. In who they are. So, like, I explained to you that most people are functioning illiterate that are incarcerated and so it isn’t that they don’t have the mental capacity, it’s just that they have subjected to themselves to a place that they’re comfortable with. And so, what post-secondary education does, is it challenges you to break out of your comfort zone. So once they break out of that comfort zone, then they take themselves out of that class where it is that you are a functioning illiterate. You’re functioning from a whole another capacity….a whole another level of your brain.
Nick:

The first thing I would say is, do it. And you know, man, this is one topic that I could go on for like hours. You know, we coin prison as a poor man’s college and what that means is, of course the prison system sets you up with a library and there’s times that information in the library but you have to be susceptible to that information in there. You have to kind of open up, you know…about not being closed minded, just open up to the information that’s in there and learn it and then at another point because you’re surrounded by so many people with so many walks of life, this gives you the opportunity to learn. You know, ethics, cultures, and races, people and you know you take this on and you learn it and you’re learning it. And so what I would tell the guys in there is…every moment of their life behind bars, take heed to it because it is a learning moment…it’s a learning process. One of the greatest things that I like to do, I like to sit back and observe when I was in prison. I like to see people’s interactions. I like to see the interaction with correction officers versus the inmates and you know, that was like the major of how can I or how would I be productive in life outside of prison. How can I build up enough patience to deal with them and to come home and deal with society, you know…take advantage of the library? Because you know, that’s like the number 1 thing. You know, a lot of people that complain when they’re in there because the library is holding the information that they want. You know we get off into the urban fiction, novels, James Patterson, love that guy. But it’s not worth going to advance us in life outside of prison and you know, I’m going to tell you, if there’s self-help groups – take them, and don’t take them for the sense of…I just wanted a certificate to get parole, take
them to learn and as you learn the self that needs self-help groups, this is what you are going to put into practice once you get outside of prison.

Joe:

Simple. If you have the opportunity…do it. Whatever it may be, however small it may be. Whether it is auto mechanics, whether it is horticulture and or whether it is janitorial. Do it. Because it is just a starting point, because you can always expand on that. I just think there needs to be more of it. There needs to be more opportunities for people to learn. Because no matter how tough you are and no matter how soft you are, everybody wants to learn. Some people feel like, “Oh we learning, people will think funny of them.” They won’t. Because we gain respect in there, other than CLEP class. Like, in a way it was like “the smart gang.” They’re like, people see us and “Hey, what up?” like people you…some of the toughest guys in the whole unit... “Them guys straight.” You know, it’s funny… even if they’re lifers… be like, “Hey B, are you going help me with that paragraph.” You look like, you ain’t never going home. But even to talk about that for them to have goals. And I talked to a bunch of guys. They talked to me about how at a certain point you know they used to be able to get degrees in prison and they phased it all out, so when this came back about, even the older dudes, like, “Yeah, get in this young man” and talking to the different knuckleheads and then some of them got in here. Here and there older friends or older uncles like say, hey yeah, that’s a good thing. Like, so much became of this.

Jerome:

Ah, mostly… I guess the thing that I really would share is something I learned from one of the men that I think of as a mentor and he said that education is what the school system
does to you, but learning is what you do for yourself. And so, to me, what I would share is that, you know, while you’re incarcerated, you know, there’s no greater time to take an opportunity to learn something that’s going to be applicable to your life. You know, to learn in a way that is very intentional about based on what you want the outcomes to be when you get out. So, you know, take all of the excuses off the table. Don’t wait for somebody else to validate you with a degree, but learn the things that you need to know to get out and succeed.

Gasper Yanga:

I wish they would like take it serious, like don’t try to hustle it and don’t try to just look at it and make our way and just look better to the powers that be to get out of prison you know. Use it to challenge your thought process, use it and don’t let it use you, and by that, I mean, learn from it, don’t just complete a class. Figure out how you can make it applicable to your life. You know, even outside of a degree and you know take every opportunity to use that time that you’ll never have that type of time where you are completely removed from everything else and being able to focus. I would say like, be ahead of everybody.

Big J:

Work it. Go through it. You know what I’m saying? No matter what your plans are…. Yeah… so… I would tell them to go through the process and make it work for them.

You know what I’m saying?

Aladdin:

So basically, my main thing is for every individual who is locked up. If you are really remorseful and you have made peace with yourself, with God for all the things you did,
and you get out...don't go back. CLEP or no CLEP, don't go back. You know what it is, you know what you did to get there. Don't do it again. That simple. Now if you are looking for a way to further your education while you are in prison, you need to indulge yourself in the educational program that CLEP has established for us. There is no doubt in my mind. If you are looking to further your education, CLEP is the way, no doubt. But like I said, you know. If CLEP is not what you are looking for and educational furtherance is what you are looking for, it should be CLEP. But if you not looking for further education, maybe you have a business established, or you have an inheritance or whatever the case may be and you're not looking at education, just don't do it again. But as far as education is concerned, CLEP or AP, there's nothing else to talk about. Nothing else to talk about. CLEP. And if you need help with CLEP, make sure you get the right numbers to call, CLEP is what you need to do.

Participants were unanimous in their recommendation of PSCE. They encouraged those incarcerated to take advantage of the educational opportunities made available to them, and to find a way to make the education work for them. They spoke about the decision to participate in PSCE as a personal decision, but one that would open up opportunities in the future. Participants also spoke about the benefits of opening themselves up to learning from others, to getting outside of their comfort zones in order to fully embrace a range of educational opportunities.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Studies have revealed that there are an estimated 2.2 million people locked up in jails or prisons in this country (Glaze & Parks, 2011). Recent efforts have been undertaken to lower this population and coalitions of individuals from diverse sectors of the country are gathering to investigate ways we can lower the rates of incarceration in this country. According to the International Center for Prison Studies (2006) the United States incarcerates individuals at a higher rate than any other country in the world. While there are a number of reasons for this astronomical rate of incarceration, recidivism of previously incarcerated individuals is a significant factor in the high rate of the United States prison population (Cullen, Jonson, Nagin, 2011). It would stand to reason that finding a way to lower rates of recidivism would significantly impact the overall rates of incarceration in this country. The literature clearly identifies higher education as a factor in reducing recidivism (Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2009; Chappell, 2003; Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012; Poitowski, & Lathrop, 2012; Rose, Reschenberg, & Richards, 2010; Schlesinger, 2005; Tewksbury, Erickson, & Taylor; Torre & Fine, 2005). The results of this study take these findings a step further by examining the changes participants in PSCE experience through the course of their education.

All participants in the current study reported significant benefits from their participation in PSCE. These benefits occurred in a number of ways through multiple areas of their lives. Participants experienced a variety of types of PSCE, including trade programs, credit by examination programs (CLEP and AP), and college extension programs offered on site in the facilities. While each participant’s story is different, there were common themes among them related to their experiences of the impact of PSCE. Since the intent of this study is to understand
former prisoner’s perception and experience of how participation in post-secondary correctional education impacted them personally within a focus on self-efficacy and personal agency, findings and themes will be discussed within the context of the literature on self-efficacy and personal agency (Bandura, 1993, 1997, 2006b). Some additional commonalities and observations among participants’ stories will also be discussed.

**Emergent Themes and the Relationship to Self-Efficacy and Personal Agency**

The literature identified four major process that influence self-efficacy, which include: the cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes. Additionally, the literature identified four core properties of human agency, which include: Intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. The next portion of this dissertation will discuss the relationship between the emergent themes and the concepts of self-efficacy and personal agency

**PSCE’s Impact on Self-Efficacy**

The first process of self-efficacy is the cognitive process, this involves the beliefs that an individual has about their abilities. One component of this process includes goal setting. According to Bandura (1991), the stronger a person perceives his or her cognitive efficacy the higher they will set their aspirational goals. The PSCE’s impact on goal setting theme highlights a number of ways participants began to set more lofty goals. In fact, Nick, Will and Big J spoke about not even really having any goals prior to their participation in PSCE. Nick went on to speak about how his vision of the future widened saying, “I feel that the longer you stay in there the wider your vision is going to be of course. And you know, going through them programs, that’s how my vision became.”
As participants began to believe they could achieve academically they began to expand their goal making. These cognized goals helped to provide a path forward. Aladdin spoke about this when he stated

I started to make goals. I started, I started having goals again. I started writing down what I wanted to do when I got out. Before I was, it's so cliché to say, I was lost, but I didn't have nowhere that I wanted to go.

PSCE helped Aladdin not only identify and articulate his goals, but it also helped him identify a path forward, away from the behaviors that lead him into prison.

Additional components of the cognitive process of self-efficacy involves how individuals view failure and whether they view their abilities as inherent, or if they see them as an acquired skill. Those who view failure as indicative of their intrinsic capacity will, according Bandura (1993), choose activities that do not challenge them. Those who view failure as a natural part of learning are not paralyzed by the prospect of it. These individuals do not allow others belief in their abilities to determine their capacity. Joe put it well saying that PSCE helped him realize that “Just because you think I could fail don’t mean I have to fail.” Participants spoke about how their collective effort help them persist in the face of difficulties. They began to form their own expectations for their futures rather than falling victim to the expectations of others.

Aladdin spoke about how he used his test results as a marker for the level of effort he needed in the future to achieve his desired results. He began to see that his success was directly related to the effort he put in. His ability to gauge the necessary effort level required to produce his desired results helped him to take greater control over his life.
As participants became educated they created larger goals. As they created larger goals they began to see that their ability to reach these goals was directly related to the effort they put into achieving them rather than the external factors that might inhibit their success. This became true even for the participants whose previous educational achievements were minimal. There was clearly a shift in what participants thought they were able to accomplish, and this shift in their self-efficacy beliefs translated into greater motivation to put in the work to achieve their goals.

According to Bandura (1993), people’s belief in their efficacy play a key role in the self-regulation of motivation. The motivational process of self-efficacy was evident in participants’ persistence in achieving their goals. Specifically, Aladdin talks about changing his approach to his daily activities, from “catching tickets” and generally having a lax approach to his daily schedule, to waking up early so he can study and organizing his day around completing the tasks associated with his PSCE participation. He was able to regulate his motivation and behavior to produce his desired results, which is evidenced when he stated

I've always been carefree, kind of like uh, if I do it, I do it. If I don't, I don't. CLEP made me do it, CLEP made me say, “Look, you need to buckle down and do it. Ain't no carefree, ain't no skippin' class, ain't no skippin' the test day. You have to buckle down and get it done. And because of that new mentality, that I wasn't used to having, I didn't have at the time, it stuck with me. To where now I mean, anything that needs to get done. Everybody call me, to this day, if they need something done. And I love it.

Additional participants also spoke about how PSCE helped to motivate them to stay out of trouble and focus on their studies. For example, Big J stated “I wanted to see if I could stay out
of the madness [in prison], you know, and it would just be little goals like, let me see if can challenge myself not to talk to certain people today.”

Participants began to draw on a number of sources to enhance their motivation. They spoke about the impact of their peer group and families helping to motivate them towards success. Participants drew on these multiple sources of motivation to keep them going in the face of the challenges they faced, but their growing belief in their ability to achieve their goals provided the catalyst by which they were able to ignite all of the other motivating fuels they described.

The third process within self-efficacy is the affective process. People with low levels of self-efficacy typically ruminate on the stressors in their lives’, which can amplify the negative impact of possible threats (Bandura, 1993). This stress burden can impact their ability to function in daily life. As participants began to believe in their ability to make changes in their life, the affective process of self-efficacy began to help participants to gain greater control over the stressors in their lives’. Participation in PSCE helped participants insulate themselves from the harsh realities of prison life. Gaspar Yanga indicated that despite the harsh and dehumanizing condition of prison, after beginning PSCE “the place changed” and he was able to see prison as “a learning institute, where I’m cut off from everything and I’m able to focus more clearly, plan for my life better.” Additionally, Nick stated that his success with PSCE helped to give him the confidence that he could achieve success in college outside of prison.

The selection process is the final process within self-efficacy outlined by Bandura. This process influences which activities people choose to engage in and these choices shape the course of a person’s life with one choice leading to the next opportunity (Bandura, 1993).
Participants’ choices to engage in PSCE lead them to their future opportunities. Four of the participants spoke about being enrolled in a college or university after prison, and all participants spoke about being actively employed. Two of the participants were employed in a field directly related to the PSCE, with Big J using his pesticide handling certificate in lawn care services and Joe using his Auto Service Excellence (ASE) certificates in his job in automotive repair.

The selection process also includes the how individuals choose their social networks. Several of the participants spoke about avoiding trouble after they began PSCE, and forming close personal bonds with the men they were in the PSCE programs with. Joe spoke about learning to trust again after isolating himself from others. Other inmates in the study spoke about the comradery and learning that took place among their educational cohort. Nick spoke about the benefits he experienced within the group and becoming open to learning from a more diverse group of peers. He stated his PSCE “teaches you how to talk, how to communicate and how to reason, how to think critically and how not to be so judgmental and that alone opens up the door to feel accepted.” Nick went on to say “it was like everything that was put in place in prison with the guys in there, that was a helping hand.” Similarly, Big J spoke about needing to learn to humble himself in order to learn for his peers. He stated as a result of PSCE

I went from a talker to a listener. Then I became more of, I felt like I have a future. So that’s where it started to change. It went from kind of dim to now I could see the light at the end of the tunnel. And then I went from student to teacher

These shifts, which resulted from PSCE participation helped individuals become more adept at learning from others and maximizing opportunities.
Participants’ responses reflected shifts in all four of the components of self-efficacy. These shifts illuminated an overall increase in self-efficacy among all those who participated in PSCE. These shifts lead to immediate changes in their daily behavior and opened up future opportunities after their release from prison. The findings of Andrews and Bonita (2003) that education which expands prisoners’ general cognitive abilities can enhance prisoners’ ability to adjust to life in prison and set them up for success after they are released are consistent with the findings of the current study. Along with experiencing increases in self-esteem, participants also began to experience changes in exercising personal agency.

**PSCE’s Impact on Personal Agency**

According to Bandura (2006b), human agency is the ability to create an imagined future, through self-regulation, which is based off of present action, where individuals construct, evaluate and modify their actions in order to achieve their desired goals. Agency includes the following four core properties: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Participants’ narratives have highlighted a number of ways in which their participation in PSCE was experienced as increasing their agency through all four of the core components.

Intentionality focusses on humans’ ability to form plans of action and employ strategies to work towards the fruition of these plans (Bandura, 2006b). In order to enact these plans people must navigate and accommodate the social landscape and interests of those with whom they interact. Said another way, we live in a social milieu and thus enlist others to form common intentions and join in collective action to achieve their common goals. Participants in this study spoke about having a desire for change prior to their participation in PSCE, but indicated that
their collective action helped to turn these desires into tangible goals. These goals then helped
to drive future action, this action was taken with the consideration of its impact on the peer
group. The peer group thus became a major factor in participants’ ability to persist towards their
educational goals. The peer group served as both an initiating force and a maintaining force
related to PSCE participation. It was an initiating force as it related to helping individuals get
introduced to educational opportunities, and created a system by which people were invited into
the program. Ryan Bixby spoke about his role in mentoring participants and “walking the back
40” while talking to them about the advantages of participation. The peer group served as a
maintaining force as well. Participants spoke about the group encouraging them to keep going in
difficult times. The peer group also served as a source of accountability, with several
participants speaking about not wanting to let the group down. Participants began to think about
the impact of their actions in a different way as a result of their PSCE participation.

Forethought, the second core component of human agency, involves future directed plans
in which goals and cognized anticipatory outcomes guide motivation and action. Participants
described a number of ways in which they were able to employ forethought in their life as a
result of PSCE participation. Some participants spoke about how they began to engage in
different daily behaviors as a result of their education. Still others spoke about how they were
able to utilize forethought to keep them from getting in trouble after they got out of prison. Big J
spoke about PSCE helping him become better at “not hustling” after his release and how
beginning to think about the consequences of his actions helped him to avoid getting into fights
when confronted by difficult people. Additionally, forethought was employed by participants
when thinking about the impact of their behaviors on their families. Ryan Bixby spoke about
how he began to think about his future in terms of “creating generational success.”
Forethought, with the addition of self-reactiveness, the third core component of agency, helps people regulate their behavior and formulate a deliberate course of action. Participants were able to access their increasing agentic capacity through the use of self-reactiveness. The choice participants made that increased their likelihood of achieving their goals and brought them further from their past criminal behaviors can all be used as examples of increased self-reactive abilities. The three previously mentioned core components of agency, combined with the fourth, self-reflectiveness, increase humans’ ability to direct the course of their life.

Participants spoke about a number of ways their self-reflective abilities increased as they participated in PSCE. They spoke about how their view of their past criminal behavior changed. Gaspar Yanga spoke about how he was able to reflect on those things he was taught to admire and how these ideas were “short-sighted” and how he was able to “realize that it was absolutely idiotic.” Big J spoke about becoming able to see that his past criminal behavior “wasn’t normal.” In addition to participants’ increased ability to reflect on their past criminal behavior, they were able to ably their self-reflective abilities to multiple areas in their life. This reflective ability was applied to the impact of daily behaviors on achieving their stated goals, to the impact of past trauma on their development. Both Ryan Bixby and Gaspar Yanga spoke about how PSCE helped them to gain a greater awareness on how the trauma of their childhoods impacted them as adults. Jerome spoke about becoming able to analyze the entire system within which he was reared and identify possible points of intervention for others experiencing similar challenges. These reflective abilities seemed to help participants evaluate their pasts and better plans for their futures.
**Understanding and Overcoming the Impacts of Racial Stigma Internalization**

Participants’ stories of their early school experience provides clear evidence of the impact of racial stigma internalization. Specifically, Ryan Bixby’s articulation of his feelings of inferiority attending school illustrates how stigmatization can begin early and impact how school is viewed in the long run. Several other participants spoke about how they did not see the value in school, and their motivation for attending was social. School took a back seat to a myriad of other concerns, and while there were clearly a number of reasons this became the case, several participants echoed the impacts of racial stigma internalization. Participant’s stories highlighted a number of ways that this stigmatization negatively impact their sense of self-efficacy and personal agency. Essentially this internalized racial stigma can operate to rob individuals of their efficacy, it can be seen as a step-by-step process through which racism can deconstruct a person’s belief about what they are capable of accomplishing in life. Ultimately, participants’ crimes and prison sentences can be seen as the culmination of a process by which individuals are robbed of their agency. Fortunately, participants’ stories did not end, and are not defined by, this process. PSCE has provided these participants with a way to construct a new narrative, one that is grounded in their beliefs about themselves and what they can accomplish in the world. PSCE functioned to reconstruct their personal beliefs in a way that mitigated the impacts of previous internalized stigma, and they were able to construct a future based on opportunity and hope rather than one of resignation and despair.

Racism is a major issue in this country and its impacts can be seen in a number of ways. While there is no one magic bullet to fix this problem, understanding how it impacts individuals psychosocial functioning can help provide a road map to help people lessen the life course impacts of racism. Armed with this understanding, we can construct programs and provide
resources to individuals and institutions to help people overcome the disparate impacts of mass incarceration faced by men of color in this country.

**The Role of Peer Influence in Risk and Protective Factors**

**Role of peer group in the introduction to criminal behavior.** The most striking commonality is the role environment played in leading participants towards criminality. While participants had varied experiences within their families of origin, with some participants being raised in single parent households, some in abusive and/or neglectful homes, and some in a loving two-parent home, each participant spoke about education taking a back seat to the allures of a criminal life. Similarly, participants spoke about their early exposure to criminal behavior and life styles as something that attracted them to criminality. In some cases participants witnessed family members using and/or selling drugs and in other cases the neighborhood brought them in contact with criminal elements. In each case, however, the peer influence was identified as a strong contributing factor to individuals’ entrée into criminal behavior. This exposure led to a decreased interest in school, with over half of the participants dropping out of high school before earning a high school diploma. This educational attrition occurred despite each participant indicating that education was a value in their home. While there are likely several additional factors that contributed to participants decreasing interest in education prior to being imprisoned, peer influences were clearly a common factor among all participants’ progression towards criminal behavior.

**Role of peer group as a protective factor.** When looking at the how participants were introduced to PSCE we see again that peer influences were a common factor. Several participants spoke about a fellow inmate convincing them to begin a PSCE program. All but one
participant indicated that they were approached about participating in PSCE by a peer. These individuals also participated, but not exclusively, in a credit by examination process, in which individuals taught each other materials needed to pass CLEP and AP tests.

Ryan Bixby spoke about taking time to talk with men about PSCE, saying “it took a lot of mentoring and it took a lot of you know, lecturing if you will and you know, walking on the back 40 for hours trying to help individuals understand that they were doing the right thing.” These efforts worked to counter the doubts that individuals had about PSCE. Similarly, Aladdin spoke about realizing he needed to change, especially after catching a drug charge, and how he and a fellow inmate talked about the possibility of studying for, and taking, CLEP and AP classes while incarcerated. This peer to peer processed took the education outside of a classroom context and turned, according to several participants, the prison into college. They spoke about meeting outside of designated classroom time to study. Participants reoriented their days around studying and worked to stay out of trouble in order not to jeopardize the group. This includes several men who reported a significant number of infractions prior to participation in PSCE. This finding echoes the results of a Torre and Fine (2005) study that showed that those involved in a college PSCE program while incarcerated committed significantly fewer infractions than their peers. This translates into an easier to manage prison population.

PSCE’s protective impact on participants can also be seen in the identified emergent themes. While the author will discuss each theme as they relate to their impacts on self-efficacy and personal agency later in this chapter, it is prudent to identify the themes that identified specific protective factors associated with PSCE. The theme of PSCE’s impact on self-esteem/mental wellbeing highlights a number of ways PSCE provided a protective impact. Participants spoke about how their participation in PSCE helped them deal with past trauma’s
and gave them expanded mental resources to begin to understand and process past experiences. The peer to peer format also provided participants an opportunity to discuss these issues to varying degrees. Their participation also insulated them from what Gaspar Yanga described as an environment designed to strip away individuals’ humanity. Similarly, other participants spoke about the refuge PSCE provided them within the prison walls, changing the perception of their environment to one of higher learning rather than incarceration.

**Barriers to PSCE Participation**

All participants spoke in some way about getting to the point where they decided they wanted something different from their life than their current behavioral trajectory was likely to offer, but this realization did not universally come with changes in behavior. In fact, several participants indicated a significant period of time between their desire to change and engaging in behaviors that would help bring about the change they were looking for. These participants spoke about not seeing a way to immediately begin to change their future prospects. Some participants were not able to identify strategies and/or programs available to them within which they could gain the skills and knowledge that would lead to this desired shift. As noted in the literature review there is a dearth of PSCE programs available in prisons throughout the country, especially programs that might lead to college credits. While correspondence courses are available through some colleges and universities, these programs are often cost prohibitive. Aladdin spoke about becoming discouraged when he realized the price of these courses. Similarly Gaspar Yanga indicated that his search for a way to earn college credits while incarcerated nearly came to an end when he discovered the high cost. Gaspar Yanga stated that “a friend of mine who worked in higher ed providing me with some information for alternative forms of obtaining credit through credit by examination.” If Gaspar Yanga and Aladdin had not
discovered this option it is likely that their quest for obtaining college credits would have ended because they were priced out of participation. Aladdin indicated that through taking CLEP and AP tests he was able to earn 30 credits and it cost him less than 300 dollars. Three participants who were able to take college class through an extension program were only able to do so prior to 1995 when Pell grants were still available to inmates. Jerome indicated that after these grants were cut, the program that he was in became no longer available, which stopped his progress towards an associate’s degree.

In addition to the barriers of limited program availability and cost, participants spoke about having to overcome initial skepticism/criticism of their participation by other inmates and prison officials. Those individuals that discussed this barrier, however, indicated that the support and comradery among fellow PSCE program participants helped them to overcome this barrier. One participant spoke about how they became “them CLEP boys” which originally was used as a derisive term, but became a badge of honor.

**PSCE’s Impact on Parenting and Community Involvement**

The evolution of participants’ view of their role as a member of their communities and their responsibilities as fathers are two correlated issues when we look at PSCE’s potential to transform both individuals and communities. This relationship speaks to the participants’ ability to impact on the world. One of these impacts articulated by participants includes their increased abilities to teach their children what they learned. These teachings include both the academic knowledge associated with their subjects of study, but also instilling them with an attitude geared towards educational advancement. Participants spoke about pushing their kids to earn college credits earlier, and taking care of the necessary paper work in order to be eligible for financial
aid. These shifts position participants’ children to succeed in school and matriculate into college. Ultimately, participants have put themselves in a position to help interrupt the cycles of poverty, violence, and criminality that they were previously caught up in. The generational success that Ryan Bixby spoke about creating happens within the home, but it also occurs within the community.

Participants spoke about a greater willingness to take a personal investment in making their communities better. Specifically, Ryan Bixby stated

Now that I’m out, I feel like I owed it to society, I owed it to friends, I owed it to family for not being there and for being a part of its demise or their demise. Or you know, their inability to grow.

PSCE helped give Ryan Bixby the skills to create the types of impacts he wanted to create in both his community and his family. Additional participants spoke about the impacts they have had on their communities by simply showing up amongst their family and friends a different way than they did previously. Joe stated that he often gets asked to tell his story to others and he tells them

Because a lot of young people don’t know. They think like, this is it. When you get to this point, then that’s it. You’re labeled and you have be this, but my story in taking a part in the programs shows not only me, it shows people that I’ve told the story to, like you don’t have to settle for that. Like if this happens to you, you can use it as a bump in the road and not a road block, but that’s all this was for me, like a bump in the road and it made me a better person for it.
Joe, like other participants use their stories as an example to their communities, an example of perseverance and redemption. These men are examples to others that they are not defined by their worst deeds, they are not what they did in the past, but rather they are who they choose to be moving forward.

**PSCE’s Impact on Freedom, Both Physical and Mental**

When speaking of freedom one must examine both the physical and mental aspects of the word. Physical freedom, in this context, refers to being free from incarceration, while mental freedom deals with an internal state. The poet Kahlil Gibran wrote a poem entitled ‘Freedom’ in which he states “You shall be free indeed when your days are not without a care nor your nights without a want and a grief, but rather when these things girdle your life and yet you rise above them naked and unbound” (Gibran, 1923, pp.54-55). Freedom is thus not absence of struggle, but rather it is the ability to, in the face of struggle, rise above your challenges to claim one’s agency in life. Participants in this study articulated a number of ways their PSCE participation helped them gain their freedom.

The first steps towards freedom participants articulated involved freeing their minds from the mental incarceration they experienced while in prison. Nick stated that his participation in PSCE helped him feel like “I was no longer in prison. I was becoming a person again. Gaspar Yanga echoed Nick’s remarks saying “Once I was able to create and participate in this post-secondary educational opportunity, the place had changed. I looked at it as a learning institute.” This sense of freedom helped participants to be able to look into the future, to see the options available to them outside of their past criminal behavior. This vision helped the participants
begin to plan for life after prison. Part of planning for life after prison started with participants planning for their parole hearing.

Each participant spoke in some way about how their participation in PSCE helped them face the parole board with confidence. Aladdin indicated his confidence was rooted in knowing his responses to the parole board’s questions were “honest and true” which allowed the parole board to see the depth of his transformation in his eyes. Despite having an additional drug charge and other infractions prior to PSCE participation, Aladdin received his parole results within a week where it took others several months. The change that participants experienced became a tangible thing, something that others could see in them by how they carried themselves. This change translated into participants feeling confident in never returning to prison after their release.

The final aspect of achieving freedom is the maintenance of that freedom. Participants spoke about how becoming involved in PSCE helped them to feel confident that they did not have to return to criminal behavior to support themselves. PSCE helped participants realize the truth that Nick articulated “the avenue of going back into the streets, fast life, fast money, it’s not it.” Nick and other participants began to see the advantage of build over time rather than chasing fast money. In addition to gaining a greater sense of long term financial stability, participants gained something greater, they began to see themselves as an asset. Ryan Bixby stated that “Returning to prison is not an option. I feel like that I’m a valuable asset.” This sense of worth, something that many participants indicated they lacked prior to PSCE, helps individuals stay committed to staying out of prison.
PSCE has contributed to the freedom of the participants in this study in a number of ways. This freedom appears to be of a lasting nature, participants voiced a commitment, not only to never return to prison, but also to engage forming in the direction their lives’ will take since being released from prison. They are embracing the type of freedom that Gibran speaks of.

Implications

From the first prison in the United States to our current prison system, people have vacillated and held different views on the purpose of prison. Is it to punish a wrong doer or rehabilitate him or her? If punishment is goal, then locking people up and throwing away the key seems like a viable option. Currently the United States has the highest number of people incarcerated in the world, and the second highest rate of incarceration, next to the Republic of Seychelles a small archipelago nation with a population of 92,000 (International Centre for Prison Studies, 2006). This would suggest a practice of warehousing criminals within a system designed to just punish. However this view is contrary to the mission statement from the Federal Bureau of Prison, which states

It is the mission of the Federal Bureau of Prisons to protect society by confining offenders in the controlled environments of prisons and community-based facilities that are safe, humane, cost-efficient, and appropriately secure, and that provide work and other self-improvement opportunities to assist offenders in becoming law-abiding citizens. (Bureau of Prisons, 2017)

While confining criminals is part of the mission of prisons in America, it is not the only thing the Bureau is called to do. The Federal Bureau of Prisons are called to create cost effective systems by which returning citizens can become “law-abiding” citizens. This mission is not
accomplished by simply warehousing inmates until their release. Prison systems must find cost effective ways to help prisoners re-enter society, which in part means providing ways to help reduce recidivism. Research indicates that prison education helps to significantly reduce recidivism rates (Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2009; Chappell, 2003; Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012; Poitowski, & Lathrop, 2012; Rose, Reschenberg, & Richards, 2010; Schlesinger, 2005; Tewksbury, Erickson, & Taylor; Torre & Fine, 2005). Additional studies found that post-secondary education in particular has the greatest impact on reducing recidivism among vocational and GED education programs (Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKinzie, 2000). In addition to the marked reduction of recidivism rates related to PSCE, studies have also found that prisons that have PSCE programs also report a better attitude among inmates and a lower number of conduct issues. These findings are congruent with the information provided by participants which indicate they made changes to their behavior while incarcerated as a result of PSCE participation, and in the commitment they articulated to not returning to prison after their release.

Despite the fact that PSCE helps to significantly reduce both recidivism rates and behavioral issues within the facilities, both of which are part of the Bureau of Prison’s mission statement, the number of PSCE programs across the nation has fallen dramatically since 1995, after the Pell grants became no longer available to prisoners. This translated into prisoners, like Jerome, who had to stop taking classes mid-way through obtaining an associate’s degree and prevented countless others from being denied the opportunity for PSCE. A study by Torres and Fine (2005) revealed that the cost of educating prisoners at the post-secondary level is only about 7% higher than housing them, with recidivism rates at 7.7% for PSCE participants versus 29.9% percent for non-participants. Torre & Fine, (2005) further revealed that if only a third of prisoners in the state of New York enrolled in PSCE, the state would have saved $150,000,000
in the year 2000. The majority of current study participants indicated that they earned college credits and other certifications through a peer lead study for credit by examination tests such as CLEP and advance placement testing. They were able to get books at minimal costs and then they taught each other the material needed to pass these tests. As participants passed a test they then became eligible to teach others the required material. Participants were required to cover the fees for testing, but several of these tests were available to low-income students for free. This allowed one participant, Aladdin, to earn approximately 30 college credits for less than $300.

In addition to the low-cost of the peer-to-peer education model, this model of education helps to foster a collaborative learning environment. Peer support was identified as a major factor in the beneficial transformations participants experienced as a result of their PSCE participation. This model of PSCE was delivered at a low cost to both participants and the prison system, and provided both the individual and institution with clear and credible benefits, from lower behavioral incidences, as articulated by participants, to a greater sense of self-efficacy and personal agency, as identified in the current study.

**Strengths and Limitations**

The current study is a phenomenological study situated in the transformative paradigm and as such has taken great efforts to minimize the bias that can occur in research studies. One method employed to minimize bias was the use of a community liaison auditor. This person helped formulate the interview questions and guided the author in the development of the study. Additionally, the community liaison auditor helped to recruit participants. This assistance helped the author gain access to participants in a way that would not have otherwise been possible. Furthermore, the community liaison auditor’s embeddedness within the community under study
helped provide the author of the study with greater credibility among the participants. Because the auditor is a trusted member of the community under study, it is likely that participants had a greater level of trust for the author and thus felt more comfortable providing responses to interview questions in a less guarded manner. The honesty, vulnerability and detail with which participants answered questions helped the author develop a clearer picture of the phenomenon under study. This all allowed the author to more authentically capture and illuminate the voice of study participants. The current study is expected to contribute to the literature in because few studies have examined the psychological impacts of PSCE, especially as it relates to self-efficacy and human agency.

As with any qualitative study within the phenomenological frame work, it is important to understand that the information gathered is not intended to be generalized, but rather to capture a picture of a phenomenon as describe by participants. The themes of this study are not intended to be generalizable. It is not possible to, for a number of reasons, to conclude that the reported results would be the same for other individuals who participated in PSCE. It should also be noted that the data gathered for this study was qualitative and self-reported. While participants’ responses appeared to be honest and thorough, there were no external measures, such as interviews with prison officials or the use of standardized quantitative tools, used to gather and/or verify the data gathered from participants.

Additionally, the method of sampling involved a criterion snowball sampling, which provided participants who participated in similar types of PSCE programs, and many, but not all, of the participants participated in these programs at the same institution during a similar period of time. It is possible that the success they experienced was related to the particular nature of the community that they established rather than a direct result of the education. Furthermore,
participants were drawn from a pool of individuals who successfully reentered society, as evidenced by not returning to prison, and these individuals may represent a highly motivated subset of a population, which could provide a one-sided perspective of the impact PSCE has on individuals.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Further study of PSCE’s impact on former inmates’ sense of self-efficacy and personal agency may be helpful in further understanding former prisoners experience and add new information about the experience of PSCE. Additional qualitative studies might be conducted in a number of ways that would help to expand on the current study. A larger number and different group of participants who experienced a more diverse number of PSCE programs may provide a different and more comprehensive picture of the impacts of PSCE. A larger sample size of participants and programs would allow the results to be more reflective of the impact of PSCE. Quantitative studies could also be employed in a number of ways to gather information about the degree and types of changes experienced by PSCE participants. This would allow for the studies to include larger sample sizes. Caution should, however, be taken with this course of action due to the fact that many instruments that examine self-efficacy and personal agency are normed and validate on populations very different from the populations in prisons. These differences span race, socioeconomic status, and educational backgrounds. Without appropriate re-norming and validation to the specific and unique population of incarcerated individuals, quantitative measure are likely to contain biases that may skew their results. However, a quantitative study would allow comparisons of the impacts of the various types of PSCE programs available to prisoners. Understanding what types of PSCE may create the largest change would help to more effectively direct resources to the types of programs most likely to result in lower rates of recidivism and
greater post prison success. A larger sample size may also allow for comparison and analysis of the components of PSCE programs that may be most influential in creating change. This would provide for opportunities to specifically tailor each program to foster change.

While there is no ethical way to fully randomize a study of prison education because assigning participants to a control group that would receive no education would be denying them an opportunity to better themselves, implementing credit by examination programs across a number of prisons would allow researchers to study participants prior to joining the program, and then across their experiences while taking courses and after they are released. While this would be logistically difficult to accomplish, peer-to-peer credit by examination programs could be started for a fraction of the cost of traditional college classes in prisons. Another possible study might include the study of former inmates who returned to prison after significant PSCE. This could allow some comparison of this population with successful former prisoners who had PSCE and remained in the community.

Investing in PSCE has the potential to be transformative to both individuals and our nation. Kofi Annan (1998) stated, “No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime.” We must invest in the process of building good citizens, no matter what part of our society they occupy.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Opening Script
Hello my name is Dave Jones, thanks for agreeing to meet with me. Before going any further, I would like to review the “Informed Consent” document and ask that you sign it if you are willing to participate in the study. I would like to inform you that this entire interview will be audio recorded. (Review informed consent document at this time)

**If the interview is not conducted in person each participant will be asked to verbally assent to their participation and informed that their continued participation in the study indicates their consent. The script for ascertaining their assent is as follows. “Do you, (individual names), agree to take part in this study.” Wait for verbal agreement “(Individuals name) you have agreed to participate in this study, your continued participation implies you consent to continue, but you may discontinue with your participation at any time. Please don’t forget to send the signed informed consent document in the stamped and addressed envelope provided”

This study is for my dissertation, which is the final requirement I have for completing my Ph.D. in counseling psychology. My goal is to better understand how peoples’ participation in post-high school or post-GED education programs while they were in prison changes their perception of their abilities to be successful after they get out of prison. But before we get into that, I thought it was only fair that I give you some info about who I am and why I decided to learn more about how PSCE, which I define as any education pursued after high school or after receiving a GED, impacts peoples thinking about their abilities to succeed after prison.

A little over two years ago I met a man, through a close mutual friend, who had just returned from a four year sentence. Over time this man began to talk about his experience in lock-up and how he decided to do whatever he could to make the time he was serving serve him. So he and one of the older guys on the yard started a study program for college level tests that would earn them college credits. This man talked about how the process of learning changed his view on what was possible and impacted what he felt like was his responsibility to his community. After several of these types of conversations and after hearing from more men who experienced college level education while incarcerated, I realized that there was something powerful at work. It was more complicated than what the current research reports concerning education, which typically look at post-secondary correctional education (PSCE) impacts on employment and recidivism. And there were no studies that asked returning citizens to articulate their experience from their perspective. So my goal is to give you and other men an opportunity to tell your stories to the larger world and the research community. Because, after all, there is no greater expert on what you experienced by participating in PSCE than you. My goal is to share the collective expertise of you and other individuals like you.

Do you have any questions about where I am coming from, or about why I chose this topic of study?

I want to highlight some key points from the informed consent document you signed earlier, which indicated your willingness to participate in the study. You are free to share as much or as little as you would like, and your privacy is one of my top priorities. I will take measures to
make sure that no one will be able to link what you say to me back to you individually. I will store your interview in a password project file and I will not store any identifying information with what you have shared. When I present the data I will do so in a way that combines the major themes from each participant’s interview. On some occasions I will use direct quotes from individuals’ interviews, but only to help readers more clearly understand the common themes from the group. If I quote something directly, it will be using a fake name I will ask you to provide me in after the interview.

I want you to know that what you tell me is private and won’t be able to be tied directly to you, because I want you to feel comfortable being as honest with me as you can.

As part of your participation today you will be paid $40 for your time and effort. After this interview is transcribed and summarized you will be asked review your transcript and your individual summary to be sure your transcript is accurate and that the transcript and your individual summary captures what you wanted to express. At the conclusion of the second interview you will be sent a cashier’s check for $40.

Do you have any questions or concerns about how I will keep your information private and protect your identity? Any questions before we get started?

**Background Questions**

1. What type of post-secondary correctional education (PSCE) did you participate in?

2. Please confirm that you are no longer on parole, probation, or under any form of correctional supervision.

3. Tell me a bit about yourself and how you came up?

   **Possible Probes:**
   - What was school like for you?
   - What was your family like?
   - What were your family’s thoughts on school?
   - What is your age?
   - How do you identify racially and/or culturally?
   - Are you currently employed? If yes where?
   - Are you currently in school? If yes where and what degree are you pursuing
   - Does/did anyone in your family attend college? If yes what was their relation to you?
   - How much time did you serve in prison?
   - What types of educational post-secondary/post-GED educational programs have you participated in, and approximately how many college credits (or their equivalent) did you earn?

4. To the extent you feel comfortable, please share what led to you becoming incarcerated.
Experiences Related to PSCE Participation

5. Please tell me about your experience in deciding to participate in a post-secondary program while incarcerated?

*Possible probes:*
- How were you introduced to PSCE?
- Please tell me your decision making process in deciding to participate?

6. Please describe your experience of participating in PSCE while you were incarcerated.

7. What types of changes did you experience and notice in yourself as you participated in PSCE?

*Possible probes:*
- Please share the ways the experience of participating in PSCE impacted you?
- How did PSCE change how you approached your time in prison?

8. How did the PSCE experience impact your identity and your sense of who you were as a person?

9. How did the experience impact your priorities and goals in life?

*Possible probe:*
- How did PSCE change your perception of the impact you can have in your own life?

10. In what ways did your participation in PSCE impact your planning for parole?

*Possible probes:*
- What was your plan for parole before PSCE?
- Did your plan change during or after your participation in PSCE?

11. What was your view of your ability to be successful in academics prior to your participation in PSCE?

12. How did your participation in PSCE impact your belief in your ability to succeed in:
   - A. School?
   - B. Work?
   - C. Staying out of prison?

13. In what ways did your participation in PSCE impact your belief that you have control in creating a desired future for yourself?

*Possible Probes:*
What about goal setting?
Delaying gratification to achieve something greater than you previously thought you were able?

14. In what ways did participation in PSCE impact the ways you viewed your past criminal behavior?

Possible Probes:
Over the course of your sentence did you notice a change in how you viewed your past criminal behavior, and if so what helped you to develop this perspective?

15. Has your experience with PSCE changed your view on the impact you can make in your community? If yes, please share the changes you experienced.

Possible Probes:
Are you more likely to collaborate with others in this work now?
Do you feel a greater sense responsibility after completing PSCE?
How does this related to the impact you can have in your own life?

16. What role do you think your participation in PSCE will play in keeping you from returning to prison?

17. What would you like to share with other people currently in prison about PSCE?

18. Do you think PSCE has made any other impacts in your life that you did not get a chance to share?

19. What pseudonym or fake name would you like me to use to refer to you throughout the study (the simpler the better. Also please choose something that WILL NOT identify you to others, like a nickname)

20. Do you have any problem with me sharing a de-identified summary of your interview with Mr. (Name of community liaison auditor)? He has agreed to keep information confidential, but if you have any reservations please let me know and he will not be given a copy of your summary.

General Probes:
At various times during the interviews, the following probes were used when deemed appropriate and necessary to elicit a more detailed and rich description of the participant’s experiences:

Tell me more about that experience.

Describe how that made you feel about yourself?
What was it like for you to experience that?

How did your thoughts and feelings about that change over time?

Explain how that impacted you.

What happened exactly?

Can you give me an example of that?

What were the reactions of others?

Can you say more about that?

How is that different from before you participated in PSCE?

**Probes related to self-efficacy and personal agency:**

The following probes were used to help participants address specific aspects of self-efficacy and personal agency that they may not have covered:

How did your goal setting behavior change?

Has your approach to managing challenging situations changed?

Do you notice that you take on more challenging goals?

Describe how your motivation to accomplish your goals has changed?

How has your reaction to stress changes?

Do you believe you have more control over the stressors in your life?

Does stress/pressure keep you from being able to perform at your best?

Are you more likely to select tasks that you previously considered too challenging?

What about your ability to resist others attempts to pull you away from your goals?

Do you notice that you reflect on the how your behaviors are impacting your goals or life in general?
Appendix B
Referring Potential Participants Script
Referring Potential Participant’s Script

Hello, _________ I am calling/talking to you because I thought you might be interested in participating in a study designed to look at the experiences of men who participated in some form of education past the level of high school or GED while incarcerated, and who are no longer on probation or parole. The man doing the research asked me to see if you would be interested in calling him to discuss possibly participating in the study. If you would please call him at (616)821-3392 so he can explain more about the study and ask if you are willing to participate. The study is completely confidential and involves talking to him about your experiences with education past the level of high school while incarcerated. The researcher will compensate you for your time; for the initial interview, which should take about 90 minutes, he will pay $40. After this you will have an opportunity to participate another 30 minute follow up interviews for the purposes of reviewing your transcript for accuracy and clarifying anything we discussed in the interview, you will be paid another $40 for your review of the transcript and brief interview. This follow-up interview is designed to ensure that your words are accurately represented in the study. Are you interested in calling Dave to discuss this project further? His phone number is (616)821-3392. Feel free to call him at your convenience.
Appendix C
Researcher’s Recruitment Script
Researcher’s Recruitment Script

Hello __________ this is Dave Jones, I am glad you were given my number so I can tell you a bit about what I am doing and to see if you would be willing to participate in a study I am doing as part of my requirements to complete a PhD in Counselling Psychology.

My study is looking at the experiences people who participated in post-high school/post-GED education programs while in prison and how these experiences impact their view of their ability to succeed after prison.

I became interested in this study after hearing individuals’ share their experiences of being in the system and the efforts they had to go through to access educational programs in prison. As I spoke with these men I realized that there was something powerful at work. And their experiences were more complicated than what the current research is saying, which focuses primarily only on education’s impact on employment and recidivism. Also there have been no studies that asked returning citizens to articulate their experience from their perspective in this area. So my goal is to give you and other men an opportunity to tell your stories to the larger world and the research community. Because, after all, there is no greater expert on what you experienced by participating in PSCE than you.

Participation in this study would require an interview lasting about an hour and a half. I will come to you, and we can do the interview in a private location that is convenient for you. If this is not convenient we can do the interview over the phone or via the web. After our interview I will transcribe what you said in the interview and you will be given an opportunity to review this to make sure it accurately captures what you were trying to say. This will be done in another over the phone, or possibly by Skype, and will last about 30 minutes. If you would like I will also provide you with a copy of the final copy of my dissertation. The researcher will compensate you for your time by paying $40 for after the first interview. Then the researcher will pay an additional $40 for the follow-up interview, which will be paid to you after your final interview has been completed.

Do you have any questions?

Are you interested in learning more about participating??

Please confirm for me that you participated in some form of college level educational programing while incarcerated, and that you are no longer on probation or parole.

When and where would you like to set up a time to review the informed consent document and proceed with the interview, should you agree to participate?

(In cases where a face-to-face interview is not possible arrangements will be made to set up a meeting using either a phone or internet technology.)
Appendix D
Script for Scheduling Follow-Up Interview
Script for Scheduling Member Checking Interview

Hello, (name of respondent), this is Dave Jones. I am contacting you because the transcript and summary of your first interview is now completed and I would like to schedule a follow-up interview to make sure that I accurately captured what you said in our previous interview. These interviews are important so that I can ensure that I have accurate information. I would like to remind you that you will receive $40 for your review of your transcript and participation in this 30 minute interview. You will receive this money following the completion of all the follow-up interviews.

When are you available for the interview?

Is this number ok to reach you on at that time

I will be sending you a reminder of our scheduled time and your individual interview transcript and summary for your review. Would you like me to email or mail you your individual summary prior to our meeting?

(ask for e-mail address and/or physical address)

Thank you again and I look forward to speaking with you on (date and time of meeting) by phone. Please contact me in the meantime should any questions or concerns arise (give contact information).
Appendix E
Guidelines for Follow-up Interview
Follow-up Interview Guide

Hello _______ this is Dave Jones, I am calling to follow-up on the summary and transcript I sent you earlier. Did you receive the transcript and summary? Did you have some time to review it to make sure everything was accurate? Is now an okay talk about it or can we set up a time to talk later?

(If there is a need to call back) Hello, _______ this is Dave Jones, calling to review the transcript and summary I sent you.

The following guide will help focus the follow-up interview process. This is not intended to be a script, but a document to provide the researcher with guidance in asking questions that will deepen the understanding of the data collected. The researcher will also facilitate the process and ensure collection of a detailed participant description by using interviewing skills such as active listening, reflection, clarification, and probes.

Participant Check of Individual Narrative and Summary

• Were there any errors in your transcript?
• Do you feel the summary accurately reflects what you said during the interview?
• Is there anything else that you think I should know for me to accurately capture your experience with post-secondary correctional education?

Follow up with interview probes as appropriate.

Thank the participant for their time and ask them if they would like to have a chance to review the final dissertation. Remind the participants that they will receive their final payment of $40 at the conclusion of the follow-up interview.
Appendix F
Letter Accompanying the Summary and Transcript
Letter Accompanying the Summary and Transcript

TO: (Participant)

From: David Jones

Date and Time of Next Interview: (date/time)

Thank you for your continued help with this study. As we discussed I have attached a transcript and a summary of our interview. I would like you to review your transcript and summary to make sure that the documents accurately capture what you said during our interview. If you notice anything that you would like to correct please make a note of it and share it with me during our upcoming conversation. Additionally, if you would like to add any information that you think would help me to better understand what you were trying to communicate to me please do so in our next interview. My sincere goal is to accurately capture and report the combined experiences of the men I interviewed, your review of the attached transcript and summary helps to ensure this occurs. Please make a note that our next interview, which will take about 30 minutes, is scheduled for _______. Remember you will receive $40 for this interview, and I will be sending you the money after the follow-up interview have been completed.
Appendix G
Interview Reminder E-mail Content
Interview Reminder Letter/E-mail Content

Hello, (Participant)

I just wanted to remind you that we have a 30 minute interview/conversation scheduled for _____ at_____. If you can no longer do this interview please let me know through e-mail or by phone (616)821-3392. Also you should have received a copy of your interview transcript and summary, if you have not let me know ASAP. Thanks. Remember that you will receive $40 after 30 minute follow-up interview and I will send you a check for your participation after the follow-up interview.

Peace,

Dave Jones
Appendix H
HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: June 17, 2015

To: Patrick Munley, Principal Investigator
   David Jones, Student Investigator for dissertation
   Glinda Rawls, Co-Principal Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 14-12-27

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “The Impact of Post-Secondary Correctional Education on Self-Efficacy and Personal Agency of Formerly Incarcerated Men” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study.”) Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: June 16, 2016