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# An Analysis of the Educational Experiences of African American Male Prison Inmates Enrolled in a Voluntary College Vocational Program: Variables that Encourage or Preclude Postsecondary Degree Attainment

Kenton Rondelle Mershon

University of Missouri-St. Louis, [krm923@umsl.edu](mailto:krm923@umsl.edu)

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An Analysis of the Educational Experiences of African American Male Prison Inmates Enrolled  
in a Voluntary College Vocational Program: Variables that Encourage or Preclude  
Postsecondary Degree Attainment

by

KENTON R. MERSHON

Bachelor of Science, University of Central Missouri State, Warrensburg, Missouri  
Master of Science, National-Louis University, Des Peres, Missouri

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Dissertation Committee

Dr. Shawn Woodhouse, Advisor

Dr. Wolfgang Althof, Methodologist

Dr. Lynn Beckwith, Committee Member

Dr. John Ingram, Committee Member

### **Abstract**

There are approximately one-third more African American men who are incarcerated than those who are enrolled in postsecondary education. While in prison, African American male inmates are exposed to a variety of experiences such as mental illness and depression. Despite their impaired judgment and reasoning skills, there are some African American male prison inmates who have an avid interest in obtaining an education and completing a college program while incarcerated. Therefore, I documented their experiences in their college vocational programs.

The value of a college education in prison is significant for inmate development. It affords inmates the opportunity and ability to organize one's awareness of new ideas and gain confidence in one's abilities thus raising one's self esteem. Educating prisoners is a prudent, pragmatic, and humane policy. Therefore, this research study provided an understanding of the educational experiences of African American male inmates who were convicted of drug offenses.

Nineteen African American male student/inmates who are housed in a drug rehabilitation prison center in the Midwestern region participated in an interview. A generic qualitative design was used to provide detailed descriptions of all interviews during the study. The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of drug-convicted African American inmates who participated in a college program. The interview questions were designed to create an analysis of their experiences in correlation with the following theories: self-worth theory and self-determination theory.

Three thematic concepts that resulted from the study were: (1) motivation to attend college, (2) personal feelings about attending vocational college and (3) factors influencing

career choices. The research findings suggested that student inmates who acquired a college education endured a psychological transition from the volition to commit crimes to that of obtaining a college education or vocational skill. They associated obtaining a college education with a change in life that they felt was needed to obtain job skills and pursue personal goals. Many of the student inmates were able to achieve these goals despite having been diagnosed with mental illness and depression.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

“The likelihood of Black males going to prison in their lifetime is 16%. After that, within 3 years, almost 7 out of 10 released males go back to prison. To turn prisoners into productive citizens it is critical that in-prison rehabilitation programs are employed. To eradicate criminal behaviors, proven treatment and training programs are needed” (Reed, 2010). “We grow up in a society that puts a high premium on education from birth. That’s because it’s transformative. It turns individuals around in terms of being a good citizen, a good neighbor, and less likely to commit a crime” (Riggs, 2013). The researcher is an educator and is interested in knowing how education affects the lives of prisoners. This research introduces the history of African American access to higher education attainment and the laws and research that followed which established the foundation for access to higher education for prisoners, as well. The study will focus on the experiences of African American male prisoners who are enrolled in college programs in the division of corrections.

### **Background**

Before the Civil War, very few colleges provided African Americans the opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education. During the 1830s, higher education institutions that did permit a small number of African Americans to pursue a college education were Oberlin College in Ohio and Berea College in Kentucky (Abramson, 1993 & Unger, 2007). Oberlin was founded in 1833 as the first coeducational college in the United States (Unger, 2007). Also, it was the first traditional college to allow African American student enrollment. One of the objectives of the college was to train the African American students in the study of evangelistic missions (Unger, 2007). Berea College was also founded in 1833 and its mission was quite similar to

Oberlin College in serving the underprivileged. For instance, Berea College provided classes for former slaves and impoverished Whites of Appalachia (Abramson, 1993). Berea was credited for training students in education, ministry and physicians (Abramson, 1993). The college served Black and White students, collectively, until 1904 when Kentucky outlawed interracial education (Abramson, 1993). Following the Civil War, blacks received the support of organizations such as the American Missionary Association (AMA) and the Freedmen's Bureau to establish private colleges for Blacks. The curriculum focused on training teachers to work in black schools (DeBoer, 2013). From 1861 to 1870, AMA, the Freedmen's Bureau and black churches worked collectively to open seven black colleges and 13 normal schools. African American access to higher education gained greater prominence during the 1890s after the passage of the Second Morrill Act of 1890. Following the enactment of the Morrill Act, several southern states were granted land to build institutions of higher learning for African Americans (DeBoer, 2013).

The landscape in the United States changed as historically black colleges and universities were erected throughout the southern region. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, two prominent graduates of black institutions of higher learning, pioneered the purpose and design of the curriculum for black colleges and universities. Booker T. Washington was born during the era of slavery. In his adolescent years, he attended the Hampton Institute where the president of the institute instructed him in the areas of agriculture and the mechanic arts. Mechanic arts included industrial trades such as: blacksmithing, carpentry and bricklaying (Frantz, 2013). In 1881, he established Tuskegee Institute, a historically black college in Alabama. Booker T. Washington endorsed a practical curriculum that focused on preparing Blacks who pursued vocational training for agricultural and mechanical trades (Frantz, 2013). While working at

Tuskegee, Washington developed two forms of education: adult education and extension education. Adult education addressed the needs of the local farmers who needed food and fiber (Frantz, 2013). He provided them with tools and equipment to become self sufficient. He developed the extension program to assist Blacks in using their skills to enter a predominantly White economic system. Booker T. Washington was credited for the nationwide development of programs that focused on vocational and technical education (Frantz, 2013).

W.E.B. DuBois was born in 1868 to a middle class family in Massachusetts. He received a very good education in elementary school, and then at age 17 he enrolled in Fisk University (Frantz, 2013). DuBois studied Latin, Greek, English, chemistry and physics. Two years later he received his PhD from Harvard University and continued his studies at the University of Berlin in Germany. DuBois believed that African Americans should receive an education in liberal studies, as well as, a practical education (Frantz, 2013). He placed an emphasis on training only the academically elite Blacks in the study of arts and sciences, in order to become leaders and teachers in the community. DuBois's educational regiment was designed to prepare the elite African Americans to enter a diverse workforce with the occupational and social skills needed to be successful (Frantz, 2013).

Washington and DuBois had opposing views regarding their approach to helping Blacks advance academically as well as socially. Washington believed that developing the skills of Blacks in farming and agriculture would teach them to become self-sufficient citizens and business owners (Moore, 2003). Washington's concept of developing the practical skills of African Americans is considered to be his contribution to the growth of vocational and technical education in the United States (Frantz, 2013). DuBois was against Washington's approach of developing their skills in farming because he believed that it was an extension of slavery for

Blacks. However, they both contributed to the educational, social and economic progress of Blacks in America (Frantz, 2013).

Despite some progress in provision of higher education for Blacks, there was a landmark decision that stagnated total access to higher education at all colleges for African Americans. In 1892, Homer Plessy, an African American member of the black civil rights organization, challenged Louisiana's Separate Car Act. The Separate Car Act legally segregated seating based on the race of the carriers; Whites sat in the front while Blacks were only allowed to sit in the back of the car (Wormser, 2002). Plessy intentionally sat in the White section of the car which resulted in his arrest. The case was heard in the Supreme Court (Hoffer, 2012). As a result of the Supreme Court decision of 1896, involving the case of Plessy vs. Ferguson, southern states interpreted the 14th Amendment in a manner that supported the practice of providing separate public facilities for Blacks and Whites (Wormser, 2002). Public facilities included restaurants, theaters, restrooms and public schools. Therefore, access to postsecondary education at traditional colleges and universities continued to be limited for African American students for approximately the next 50 years (Wormser, 2002). Despite many years of denial of access to postsecondary education for African Americans, several landmark decisions by Congress provoked the era of mass student enrollment. The ensuing laws not only affected White access to higher education, but it affected access for Blacks, and prison inmates.

In 1940, enrollment in Black colleges was only 1.08 percent of the total United States college enrollment (Roach, 2007). Upon the conclusion of World War II, Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 which provided tuition and other benefits to returning war veterans of all ethnic backgrounds who wanted to pursue a postsecondary degree. As a result, hundreds of thousands of returning war veterans enrolled in colleges and universities

throughout the United States (Dongbin & Rury, 2007). By 1950, Black college enrollment increased to 3.6 percent of the total United States college enrollment (Roach, 2007). This influx of student enrollment caused overcrowding, as well as a shortage of teachers, on many college campuses (Laster, 2013).

By the 1960s, inmates gained access to postsecondary education following the results of studies that were conducted by several penologists. They determined that people committed crimes because they lacked legitimate means to acquire social resources such as status and wealth (McCarty, 2006). Therefore, they advocated for inmate access to postsecondary programs and a variety of other opportunities. By the 1970s, the federal government implemented the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (Pell Grant) that enabled the division of corrections to offer college and vocational courses (McCarty, 2006). Once the Pell Grant was introduced as financial assistance for prison inmates in prison in 1972, other college programs for prison inmates began to emerge such as bachelors and masters degree programs (McCarty, 2006). The Pell Grant largely funded postsecondary education opportunities in prisons which, during the 1993-1994 academic year, only accounted for .0006 percent of total disbursement for college programs in prison (McCarty, 2006). This implosion of college programs in corrections facilities stemmed from a discovery by social scientists. They studied the relationship between poverty, poor educational achievement and crime and learned that increasing education and employability skills can reduce crime.

In 1976, there were 237 prisons that offered college programs; during the 1990s, 772 prisons offered college programs in the United States (McCarty, 2006). However, the percentage of state prison inmates who reported enrollment in college courses while confined decreased from 57% in 1991 to 52% in 1997 (Harlow, 2003). This may have been due, in part,

to the denial of Pell Grants to prisoners which took place in 1994. During the 1990s, some members of the House of Representatives wanted to modify government spending by amending Title IV of the Higher Education Act which would eliminate funding for prisoners (Mercer, 2003). Although the initial attempt was unsuccessful, the Senate analyzed the bill the following year and approved the denial of government funds for inmates (Mercer, 2003). Senator Jesse Helms, a Republican from North Carolina, sponsored the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 which eliminated Pell Grants for prisoners; and President Bill Clinton signed it into law (McCarty, 2006). Thus, the number of prison systems offering higher education decreased from 82.6% to 54.9% between 1994 and 1998 (McCarty, 2006). According to Page (2004), lawmakers' mistrust of penal practitioners and middle class voters' fear of street criminals of color spurred the impetus to eliminate Pell Grants for prisoners.

As a result of the decline in funding for higher education in prison, fewer opportunities will be granted to inmates to earn a college degree. The less education that an inmate obtains, the less likely he will be equipped and prepared to return to society; consequently, the greater are his chances to recidivate.

### **Problem Statement**

There are approximately one-third more African American men who are incarcerated than those who are enrolled in postsecondary institutions in the United States (Schiraldi & Ziedenberg, 2002). In 2002, approximately 38% of the individuals who were arrested for drugs were African American (despite African Americans represent less than 13% of the United States population); fifty-nine percent of these African Americans were convicted of drug offenses and 74% were sentenced to prison for a drug offense (Criminal Justice Fact Sheet, n.d.). In that same research study, it was reported that African Americans comprised more than 80% of the

individuals sentenced under the harsh federal crack cocaine laws and they served substantially more time in prison for drug offenses than Whites despite the fact that more than two-thirds of crack cocaine users in the United States were not African American (Criminal Justice Fact Sheet, n.d.). The U.S. Department of Justice reported that African American men constituted for 43.91% of the United States prison population, while whites represented 34.72%, Hispanics represented 18.26% and others were 3.11% (Incarcerated America, 2003).

These statistics are significant because African Americans constitute 12.3% of the United States population (Bowman, 2010); however, they represent the majority of the state prison population throughout the country (Pettit, 2012). According to Coley & Barton (2006), black males' incarceration rates were highest between the ages of 20 and 39. African American males who ranged from 20-24 years of age represent 11.1%; 25-29 years of age represent 12.6%; 30-34 years of age represent 11%; and 35-39 years of age represent 10% of the male population. If prison rates remain constant, an estimated 32% of black males will be incarcerated in a state or federal prison during their lifetime, as compared to 17% of Hispanics and 5.9% of white males (Harlow, 2003).

Given the elimination of the Pell Grant for prisoners enrolled in college programs in prison, fewer African American males will be afforded the opportunity to obtain a postsecondary degree. Therefore more prisoners will be leaving prison without a college education which diminishes their ability to obtain a job.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons found that recidivism rates were inversely related to educational program participation in prison--the more educational programs that inmates completed, the lower the recidivism rate (Mathis, 2005). The success of correctional education has traditionally been associated with a reduction in the rate of recidivism (Mathis, 2005). The

benefit of a reduced recidivism rate equates to lowered taxes afforded to the operation of state prisons. Therefore, if the general public and policy makers were aware of the benefits of postsecondary education for prison inmates, they may be more likely to encourage postsecondary education in prisons (McCarty, 2006).

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are some African American male inmates who have an avid interest in obtaining a college education and completing a college program while incarcerated although they are not required to enroll. The purpose of this study is to document the educational experiences of African American prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in college vocational programs in prison.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that will guide this study are as follows:

1. What are the educational experiences of African American male prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in a college vocational program at a Midwestern correctional facility?
2. What barriers do prison inmates encounter in the division of corrections that may impede their desire to pursue a postsecondary education?

### **Significance of Study**

It is important to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of African American male student inmates for several reasons. African American men represent the majority of the state prison population in the country (Bowman, 2010). According to Carson & Golinelli (2012) in 2012, 637,400 inmates who were housed in United States prisons reentered society. Therefore, citizens should have some interest in knowing the college experience of the inmates to determine if their experience equates to reformed behavioral characteristics prior to reentering society.



Another significant point relates to the appropriateness of the college programs that are offered in the division of corrections. Due to state budget cuts in educational programs, several prison facilities are unable to offer certain college programs that will afford job opportunities for inmates upon release. Therefore, inmates resort to college enrollment in trades of which they have little interest. Consequently, they try to develop skills to pursue a career for post-incarceration that is not to their liking (Hall & Killackey, 2008). Prison administrators and policymakers need to know this information and the future goals of inmates in order to identify what programs to offer prison students (Hall & Killackey, 2008). This research study seeks to answer the following question: What are the educational experiences of African American male prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in a college vocational program?, and What barriers do they encounter in prison that may impede their desire to pursue a postsecondary education?

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study will take place at an all-male correctional facility in the Midwestern region of the United States. At this facility, inmates who are enrolled in college programs must also participate in the drug therapy program. The drug therapy program is a pilot program that has been active in only two states. However, many other correctional facilities throughout the country offer a variety of therapeutic programs that are structured differently. Therefore, assessment of student performance, in conjunction with the effects of the therapeutic program at this facility, may not be generalizable to African American inmate populations who participate in college programs in other correctional facilities throughout the United States.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study the following definitions were used:

*Blacks.* people with dark skin who come from Africa (or whose ancestors came from Africa)

Used interchangeably with the term African Americans

*Carceral order.* A term that is commonly used in a prison environment that refers to inmates adhere to a structured, non chaotic environment.

*College Academic Program.* Higher education programs that are offered at 2- and 4-year institutions that grant degrees once the student has met the requirements in a particular field of study.

*College prison program.* Drug therapy, educational, academic, vocational and leisure time programs that are designed to equip the inmate with the educational, mental and social tools that are needed to make wise, productive and life-enhancing decisions.

*Cocaine.* Cocaine is a powerfully addictive stimulant drug. Because of cocaine's high cost, it has long been considered a "rich man's drug."

*Correctional facility.* A government-sponsored detention facility that houses inmates for the purpose of reforming their behavioral disorders; also referred to as a prison.

*Crack Cocaine.* Crack is the street name given to the form of cocaine that has been processed to make a rock crystal, which, when heated, produces vapors that are smoked. Crack emerged as a drug of abuse in the mid-1980s. It is abused because it produces an immediate high and because it is easy and inexpensive to produce--rendering it readily available and affordable.

*Drug therapy program.* A treatment program that is intensive and sometimes confrontational as patients examine their harmful belief systems, destructive coping mechanisms, self-image and self-esteem, and patterns of behavior that have resulted in drug or alcohol addiction. The goal is to teach patients how to use more constructive ways to deal with emotions, conflicts, and problems and to function productively within a social community.

*Generic Qualitative Design.* It is a common type of research that is used in applied fields of study, such as education, that requires collecting data from interviews and identifying a theme that will develop into the researcher's interpretation of the participant's understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

*Inmate.* A resident of a dwelling that houses a number of occupants, especially a person confined to an institution, such as a prison.

*Jail.* A short-term holding facility for a person who has been convicted of committing a crime and is waiting to receive sentencing by a court before being transferred to a prison. Jails keep offenders for no longer than a year.

*Postsecondary education attainment.* Accomplishing the goal of completing a vocational program that has equipped one with the knowledge and skill to function effectively in society.

*Prison.* An institution for confinement of persons who are convicted of serious crimes.

Offenders can remain there from a year to life, including death row. The environment is prone to violence and chaotic behavior.

*Recidivism.* Reincarceration of an exoffender within a three-year absence from reentering prison that results from a person who repeats a criminal lifestyle.

*Self determination theory.* A theory of motivation that aims to explain individuals' goal-directed behavior. The critical component of the theory concerns the degree to which individuals fulfill their basic psychological needs; the more they attain these basic psychological needs, the more their behavior is self-determined.

*Self efficacy theory.* It is the belief that one is capable of performing in a certain manner to attain certain goals. It is the expectation that one can master a situation, and produce a positive outcome.

*Self worth theory.* An affective or emotional reaction to the self, taking pride in yourself and your behavior, feeling good about yourself and accomplishments, and having a general positive image of yourself.

*Social learning theory.* States behavior is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning.

*Student offender.* An inmate who is enrolled in an educational program in a correctional facility.

*Vocational program.* One and two-year programs that provide education in a specific field or occupation such as business management, commercial custodial maintenance, construction occupation, horticulture or warehousing. These programs primarily provide hands-on experiences for students and prepare them for immediate transition into a chosen career. Completers of these programs receive a certificate.

### **Organization of the Study**

This research study is arranged into five chapters and includes a bibliography and appendices. Chapter two offers a review of the literature that covers two includes the following topics: the history of prisons in America; the historical trends regarding African American male incarceration; the development of vocational programs in American prisons; self worth theory of motivation; social learning theory; education programs that were developed by African American inmates; the challenges for college programs offered in prison; and documented positive educational outcomes for ex-offenders who enrolled in educational programs in prison. Chapter three describes the qualitative research design that will be used for the study. There is also a detailed description of the instruments used to collect the data and a description of the participants and procedures that were used to conduct the research. Chapter four includes a thorough analysis of the data collected which was analyzed using a coding system. Chapter five

includes a summary of the research, a discussion of the results and recommendations for future research studies. The dissertation concludes with a bibliography and appendices that include interview scripts, coded interview responses, and approved IRB applications and protocol.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to document the educational experiences of African American prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in college vocational programs in the division of corrections. The subsequent overview covers topics that will be discussed in detail in order to gain a better perspective regarding the purpose of this study. The topics include the following: the history of prisons in America; the historical trends regarding African American male incarceration; the development of vocational programs in American prisons; self worth theory of motivation; social learning theory; education programs that were developed by African American inmates; the challenges for college programs offered in prison; and documented positive educational outcomes for ex-offenders who enrolled in educational programs in prison.

### **The History of Prisons in America**

The first American prison was built in Philadelphia, in 1790 (Schoenherr, 2009). The basic principles of the prison system were to reform prisoners and to segregate them according to age, sex and the type of the offenses charged against them. In 1821, prisons consisted of single cellblocks in which each individual resided and remained separate from any potential corruption throughout the facility. Prisoners were taught moral habits of order regularly by means of severe discipline (Schoenherr, 2009). During the post-Civil War era, from 1865 to 1900, many African American prisoners in the southern region of the United States worked in mines as part of their prison sentence (Curtin, 2000). The penal system used African American inmates as part of a leasing program with coal mining companies to serve as low-cost miners. From 1888 to 1928, the coal mining industry monopolized the use of prison labor in the South. Since many Black inmates participated in the leasing program, they received extensive training in the mining

industry. The training contributed to the development of a new Black working class; therefore, over half of the skilled black miners maintained their jobs upon prison release (Curtin, 2000).

During the 1870s and 1880s, Black ex-prisoners formed buyer and seller markets for goods and services within the black community as a gesture of independence from slavery and an expression of economic freedom. In order to stifle the competition that they were receiving from Black merchants, White authorities disbanded the markets that were managed by Black business owners and placed the Black business owners in prison (Curtin, 2000).

From the 1900s to the 1930s, prison operations transitioned from punishing inmates to reforming inmate behavior as was initially administered at the Elmira Reformatory in New York. The prison administration began to provide vocational training for prisoners. Additional procedures in prison operations included the provision of rewards for good behavior, parole and indeterminate sentences (Schoenherr, 2009).

Further observation of ineffective prison operations led James V. Bennett, director of the Bureau of Prisons from 1937 to 1964, to change the structure of prisons. The change was based on studies that indicated that a prison mentality was a disease that should be treated by medical treatment programs and not by the use of harsh punishment (Schoenherr, 2009). Therefore, in 1941 federal prisons were built without walls to mimic a medical model style facility. The medical model was based on the theory that inmates' criminal tendencies could be diagnosed and treated in a manner similar to a physical disease (Hynson, J., Miller, M. & Wishart, J., 1996). The medical model offered different treatment programs after prisoners were classified by personality types (Schoenherr, 2009). Industries were established on prison grounds which promised the greatest training potential by offering work and educational programs for inmates

(Hynson, J., Miller, M. & Wishart, J., 1996). This model was implemented in prisons throughout the country during the 1960s (Schoenherr, 2009).

### **Drug Use among African American Males**

One prototypical prisoner type that succumbed to the Medical Model was the drug abuser. During the 1960s and 1970s, as the urban job market declined, the crime rate increased. From 1975 to 2005 the United States prison population rose fivefold to over two million inmates (Mahardy, 2010). Forty percent of the prison population consisted of Black men (Mahardy, 2010) despite reports in 2000 that documented that Black men represented only 5.8% of the United States population (McKinnon & Bennett, 2005).

Socioeconomic factors considerably affected many of the poor communities in the United States. One of these factors involved drug use. In these communities, scores of young Black men have been involved in the consumption or solicitation of crack cocaine. Because of its low cost to the consumer, crack cocaine spread quickly as a drug of choice throughout low-income neighborhoods and urban areas during the 1980s (Watson, 2008). The primary users of this drug were African American men, ages 18 to 30, who were economically disadvantaged. Because the sale and consumption of cocaine is illegal in the United States, in 2002, African American men accounted for 83% of the arrests for drug related offenses (Watson, 2008).

Many of those convicted of this offense were sentenced to prisons that conduct cognitive-behavioral therapy, which teaches people how to avoid and/or deal with situations in which they might be tempted to use this drug. As a result of their drug use, African American men are predisposed to the psychologically debilitating effects of drug use. The following information explains how smoking crack cocaine can psychologically impair a person who uses the drug (Watson, 2008):



Crack and other addictive drugs chemically alter a part of the brain called the reward system. When people smoke crack, the drug traps the chemical dopamine in the spaces between nerve cells. Dopamine creates the feelings of pleasure we get from enjoyable activities such as eating and having sex. But in crack users, dopamine keeps stimulating those cells, creating a "high" -- a euphoric feeling that lasts anywhere from five to 15 minutes. But then the drug begins to wear off, leaving the person feeling let-down and depressed, this results in a desire to smoke more crack in order to feel good again. The brain responds to the dopamine overload of the crack high by either destroying some of it, making less of it or shutting down its receptors. The result is that, after taking the drug for a while, crack users become less sensitive to it and find that they must take more and more of it to achieve the desired effect. Eventually, they cannot stop taking the drug because their brains have been "rewired" -- they actually need it in order to function (Watson, 2008).

Therefore, Black communities were significantly affected when the government passed the Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1986 (Mahardy, 2010). The Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1986 mandated a harsher punishment for the possession of crack cocaine versus the possession of powdered cocaine (Mahardy, 2010).

There are an estimated 3 to 11% of inmates with co-occurring mental health disorders and substance abuse disorders (Edens, Peters, & Hills, 1997). There is a study program that has been created to assist these individuals. It includes an extended assessment period, orientation/motivational activities, psychoeducational groups, cognitive-behavioral interventions such as restructuring of criminal thinking errors, self-help groups, medication monitoring, relapse prevention and transition into institution or community-based aftercare facilities (Edens, Peters, & Hills, 1997). Because substance abuse disorders require psychosocial rehabilitation, inmates must participate in active treatment. This treatment is characterized by language, including language opportunities (both planned and incidental), medical support, vocational/habilitation opportunities to increase independence, autonomy and quality of life (Thorn, Bamburg & Pittman, 2007). Learning opportunities are quite significant in active treatment because it addresses the intellectual disabilities that are typical of substance abusers.

Huebner (2007) reported that 52% of the offenses committed in 1997 were a result of drug use. Drug users are also more likely to reconvict much sooner than any other type of offender (Huebner, Varano, & Bynum, 2007). In conjunction with these findings, additional research indicated that systemic violence is the result of crack cocaine use (Huebner, Varano, & Bynum, 2007).

Crack cocaine has been the drug of choice for many African-American male offenders. Approximately 86% of those who are serving sentences in federal prison for crack cocaine are African American males according to U.S. District Court, Judge Reggie Walton, of Washington D.C. (PBS Online NewsHour, 2007). Nevertheless, despite their lifestyle that consists of drug use and abuse, many of these African American male inmates show an avid interest in college vocational programs.

### **Landmark Government Decisions**

Legislation had to be enacted before educational programs could be introduced in the division of corrections. In 1946, the United States government proposed the Truman Commission Report which expanded higher education access to members of society who had been previously denied, such as Blacks and poor people (Vaughn, 1983). In his report, President Truman expressed his vision for a more expansive, inclusive and diverse system of postsecondary education in the United States (Laster, 2013).

Following the approval of the Truman Commission Report, landmark court cases were upheld that further impacted access to education for minorities. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, stating that racial segregation in higher education, public elementary and secondary education was unconstitutional (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Despite this court decision, many southern states maintained their resistance

against blacks who attempted to enroll in schools and universities that were formerly segregated. These tactics compelled Congress to pass Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited the spending of federal funds in segregated schools and colleges (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

In 1965, Congress passed Title IV of the Higher Education Act, enabling prisoners to afford college for the first time (Bosworth, 2002). The initial step in providing college access to prisoners began with the Truman Commission Report which proposed the following changes to the landscape of colleges and universities in the United States. Specific recommendations included the following:

.....abandonment of European concepts of education and the development of a curriculum attuned to the needs of a democracy; the doubling of college attendance by 1960; the integration of vocational and liberal education; the extension of free public education through the first 2 years of college for all youth who can profit from such education; the elimination of racial and religious discrimination; revision of the goals of graduate and professional school education to make them effective in training well-rounded persons as well as research specialists and technicians; and the expansion of Federal support for higher education through scholarships, fellowships, and general aid. In conclusion, the report urges the establishment of community colleges; the expansion of adult education programs and the distribution of Federal aid to education in the poorer States (Laster, 2013).

The government approved the operation of two-year colleges, former normal schools (Rudolph, 1990) that were established in disenfranchised communities, to provide educational opportunities for those residents. Normal schools were state funded schools that were established in 1839 for the development of public teacher education (Cheek, 1993). Normal schools attempted to provide the prospective teacher with a laboratory for learning, using model classrooms as a place to practice their new skills (Cheek, 1993). However, by the 1960s, the Truman Commission Report was presented to the United States' government and it was based on

the premise that education was part of the freedoms from which everyone should benefit in the United States (Vaughn, 1983).

### **The Development of Educational Programs in American Prisons**

Penologists determined that people committed crimes because they lacked legitimate means to acquire social resources such as status and wealth (McCarty, 2006). They advocated for inmate access to postsecondary programs. Thus, the first postsecondary education program for inmates was established in 1953 (Williams, 1989). Community colleges were ideal providers of postsecondary education programs because they administered a vocational curriculum which was developed to enhance the student's job preparedness skills. The objective of these programs was to provide a quality education for those inmates showing potential and enthusiasm; improve inmates' academic and vocational skills; change the inmates' attitudes regarding work and responsibility; and prepare inmates for the competitive job market they will face upon release (Williams, 1989). However, many prisoners enter the division of corrections with low educational skills (Braggins & Talbot, 2003). Half of all prisoners have a level of education that is comparable to that of an 11-year old in reading; two-thirds of prisoners have math skills that are equivalent to an 11-year old and four-fifths of them have writing skills that are equivalent to an 11-year old (Braggins & Talbot, 2003). Braggins also indicated that a quarter of the young adult prisoners will have discontinued their formal education by age 14, prior to entering the division of corrections (Braggins & Talbot, 2003).

By the 1970s, the federal government implemented the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (Pell Grant) that enabled the division of corrections to offer college and vocational courses (McCarty, 2006). Prison inmates have been able to enroll in correspondence courses for college credit since the 1920s, but once the Pell Grant was introduced as financial assistance for prison

inmates in prison in 1972, other college programs began to emerge (McCarty, 2006). The Pell Grant largely funded postsecondary education opportunities in prisons, and during the 1993-1994, Pell Grant funds awarded to prisoners only accounted for .0006 percent of total disbursement (McCarty, 2006). This expansion of college programs in corrections facilities stemmed from a discovery by social scientists. They studied the relationship between poverty, poor educational achievement and crime and they learned that increased education and employability skills had a direct correlation with the reduced crime rate (McCarty, 2006). Studies conducted at the Thurgood Marshall School of Law indicated that those inmates with at least two years of college while in prison were 10% less likely to recidivate than an inmate with no college experience (Beard, Johnson, & Kemp, 2003).

### **Empirical Research**

**Motivators for inmate college enrollment.** Researchers Parsons and Langenbach (1993) conducted a study regarding inmate motivation to attend college programs. The purpose of the study was to determine what motivates inmates to participate in educational programs. They conducted a quantitative analysis with 350 male prisoners participating in GED studies in four minimum and medium security facilities (Parsons & Langenbach, 1993). Using an instrument that contained a four point response scale, Parsons and Langenbach derived four primary factors of interest in inmate participation in educational programs. Factor one was labeled Cognitive Control. Cognitive Control included items such as seek knowledge, inquiring mind and to get something. Factor two was named Goal Orientation and it included such items as show the authorities, increase my status and overcome past failures. Factor three was labeled Activity Orientation. This category included talks with outsiders, meet the teachers, be with friends and be accepted by others. Factor four was called Avoidance Posture and it included such

items as screw the system, frustrate the guards, get a break, avoid cooperating and get away from responsibilities/environment (Parsons & Langenbach, 1993). After analyzing the data it was determined that Cognitive Control, Goal Orientation and Activity Orientation were similar in significance as the means of motivation for inmate participation in educational programs. Avoidance Posture played less of a role in participation than any of the other reported motivations (Parsons & Langenbach, 1993).

Another motivating factor can be attributed to earned good time (“Credit On Sentence,” n.d.). According to the administrative regulations of the division of corrections an inmate who enrolls in an educational program can receive a credit on his sentence not to exceed ten days for each month served (“Credit On Sentence,” n.d.). The division of corrections will provide an educational good time credit of sixty days to any inmate who successfully receives a two-year college degree or a two-year certification in applied science. However, the department may forfeit any good time previously earned by the inmate during his term of imprisonment if he commits any offense or violates the rules of the institution (“Credit On Sentence,” n.d.). Therefore, some student inmates are inspired to continue their education in order to earn good time credit which grants them the opportunity to be released from prison on a date that is earlier than their original state-mandated release date.

Honeycutt (1995) conducted a study which indicated that inmates were motivated by their perception of the instructor’s competency. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a reading program from the incarcerated adult's perspective (Honeycutt, 1995). The participants included 18 adult men incarcerated at a maximum security prison who were enrolled in Adult Basic Education classes. Their ages ranged from 23 to 63 years old. Each participant conducted individual studies for 45 minutes in areas of basic grammar, writing,

reading comprehension or reading/decoding strategies where the student experiences specific problems (Honeycutt, 1995). During the last 45 minutes of class the teacher served as a facilitator, allowing the student to examine their own ideas, thoughts and feelings about the reading and writing activities. The research instruments that were used in this study included questionnaires, interviews, the teacher's research notes and group discussions. A constant comparative method was used to analyze the data. The results of the study revealed three significant concerns of adult literacy students: the behavior and task of the teacher, the context of the instruction and the quality and type of texts. In terms of the behavior and task of the teachers, students believed that the teacher should act as a facilitator when leading discussion before, during and after reading activities. Regarding the instructional context, the men preferred classrooms that were less formal; they didn't want to be cramped and unable to move freely. They want to feel relaxed in class but once instruction begun; they did not want to be distracted by unnecessary interruptions. In reference to the text selection, adults' perceptions about reading were closely tied to their beliefs about the importance of reading real books. The participants were motivated to read high interest short stories and nonfiction articles. When a student inmate acknowledges the instructor's competencies, he develops a mentor-protégé relationship with the instructor whom the inmate views as a mentor (Honeycutt, 1995). After completing the research, it was determined that 72% of the participants felt that the educational activity strengthened their overall reading and writing skills. The results of the study indicated that the adult males perceive the teacher's use of examples and the application of instructional content as important to the development of their literacy skills. Also discussions, reviews and illustrations allowed the men to monitor their own progress (Honeycutt, 1995).

**Personality modification of student inmate.** Chappel (2004) concluded in a recent research study that once a student inmate completes a vocational program, a transformation occurs when the student changes from protégé status to peer status. The protégé/student inmate subsequently develops trust in the instructor that results in him envisioning success in his own abilities. Peer status is reflected in how the student inmate exercises more sophisticated and independent judgments. Although a student inmate may not lawfully display overt companionship with the instructor, he does become more self-directed, autonomous, and independent as a result of the student/instructor relationship. Chappel reported that students most often display these characteristics in courses that focus on literacy, mathematics, occupational factors, good behaviors, attitudes and discipline. As a result, a student inmate is able to make qualitative changes and achieve legitimate success in his life, upon his release from the division of corrections (Chappel, 2004).

Stevens and Ward (1997) examined the correlation between a college education and the recidivism rate. Eight states participated in a survey to determine the recidivism rate of those inmates who completed a two-year or four-year college education compared to inmates who did not attend college (Steven & Ward, 1997). The following data reflects the total number of participants for three of the eight states where prison administration participated in the survey: (a) Oklahoma examined 360 student inmates; (b) Maryland reported 120 student inmates; and (c) Texas reported 60 student inmates (Steven & Ward, 1997). The results of each state consistently reflected a lower recidivism rate for student inmates compared to inmates who did not attend college. Each researcher who represented the states that participated in the survey attributed the low recidivism rate to the instructors who conducted the educational programs. They stated that the instructor possesses the dedication, commitment, enthusiasm and trust that



the student inmate acknowledges and those traits provide hope for the student inmate to have a better life (Steven & Ward, 1997). The manner by which the student inmate processes his emotions, feelings and experiences can be defined using the following theories: self efficacy theory, self worth theory, self determination theory and social learning theory.

**Student inmate perception of education attainment.** Another study explored the differences in the views of Black inmates and White inmates regarding marketability of academic disciplines (Case & Fasenfest, 2004). The study took place at a post release center for ex-prisoners. There were 29 ex-prisoners who participated in a focus group in which 27 were male and 2 were female. Also 15 were African American and 14 were White (Case & Fasenfest, 2004). The purpose of the research was for each member of the focus group to express the differences between Black inmates and White inmates regarding the marketability of each one's educational discipline (Case & Fasenfest, 2004). Whites were more likely to report that prison education was useful to them during their post-release. During the study, one of the African American participants in the study group, "Mark," stated that a college education was most useful in building self-esteem and improving critical thinking skills but not necessarily increasing employability. Another African American, "John", agreed that college courses were a good investment but vocational training was the better choice for prison education. There was only one Black male who expressed his interest in completing a 4-year degree in radiology and becoming an x-ray technologist. The perception of college education reported by White males who participated in the focus groups was quite different than that of Black participants. For instance, "Bill", having spent 20 years in a prison and completed two hundred credit hours of college course work without a degree, double-majored in business administration and pre-law. Another white male, "Tim", had just been accepted into an MBA program and had been a

placement officer who had assisted Bill in reintegration. White inmates tended to derive more value from college level courses while African Americans attributed greater value to vocational training (Case & Fasenfest, 2004). During an interview, a White former inmate stated that he earned a Bachelor's of Science degree (BS) in psychology and a BS in sociology. His desire was to work in the field of psychology with chemically dependent patients. Because of his background, he explained the difficulty involved in obtaining his license. He stated that it took 5 years for a licensed practitioner to allow him to work as an apprentice in order that he could become licensed to practice. A Black male former inmate who is now a college student also discussed the difficulties he faced during numerous attempts to maintain employment. He declared that during his ten-year period of post-incarceration, he was discharged by 8 employers. His employers often justified their act of discharging him by stating that business was slow. His assumption was that once they received his police record, they made a decision to release him from employment (Case & Fasenfest, 2004).

A case study written by Hall & Killackey (2008) is similar to this study that the researcher will conduct in terms of its sample criteria. The purpose of the case study was to gain an understanding of how prisoner students perceive prison education programs; which programs prisoners perceived as one that would increase their ability to obtain employment; what correctional educators experience in the classroom; and what correctional educators feel that prisoners need to accomplish in order to be successful after release. The research question for the study was, "How do prisoner students perceive their correctional education experience?" The criteria for participation in the research included: incarcerated males; at least 50% of the sample have the possibility of parole; and participants must be currently enrolled in one or more of the pre-college adult education programs offered at the prison. Ten prisoner students

participated in an audio-recorded interview. Data was collected through the use of pencil and paper. The researcher recorded interviews, observations and field notes on paper. Following the interview, the researcher created themes and codes from the participants' responses. It was determined that the findings from the interviews indicated the following:

“The prisoner students' perceptions of success influenced their study habits, their motivation to attend and persist in the classroom, and their future educational and employment plans. The second theme, regret is an exploration of how the life choices and experiences of the prisoner inmates impact the correctional education experience. A third and final theme, rethinking the correction education experience, reveal prisoners student perception of the previous and current GED programs at SSP” (Hall & Killacky, 2008).

Although Hall & Killacky (2008) indicated that qualitative inquiry methods were used to discover prisoners' perceptions about attending classes, interacting with prison personnel in these classes and how prisoners feel they would benefit from taking classes, she did not specify which research design was used. However, the research question and the survey equipment that were used in this study fits the description of a generic qualitative design because the study seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process or the perspective and worldviews of the people involved in the research (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). More specifically, the procedure used to gather data was reflective of grounded theory in that interviews and observations were used to gather data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

**How the environment affects student inmate learning.** Many incoming prisoners have a history of educational under achievement and poor learning skills (Braggins & Talbot, 2003). In order to properly address those deficiencies, Braggins stated that the educational opportunities that are offered to inmates must reflect the diversity of the prison population. Therefore a structured program that consists of continued professional development is most appropriate for student inmates (Braggins & Talbot, 2003). Some of the positive aspects of college education in

prison includes: inmates can voluntarily attend college programs instead of being forced by prison administration to attend college programs. Also inmates believed that prison education gave them an opportunity to make real changes in their life (Braggins & Talbot, 2003).

However, some negative attributes to student inmates' educational environment pertained to their receiving unwarranted prison discipline. For instance some student inmates believed that their instructors verbally abused them but when the student inmate responds in disapproval of the instructor's actions then the instructor reprimands the student inmate (Braggins & Talbot, 2003).

According to Astin's I-E-O Model (Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005), student development is determined by how inputs, environment and outcomes impact the overall college experience. As explained by Astin, inputs are academic and social experiences of student inmates; environment is defined by the culture and outcomes summarize the student's skills, values and behavior, as they exist after college (Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005).

Prisoners face a number of barriers in their attempt to acquire an education in prison (Scurrah, 2010). Scurrah called these barriers: Dispositional, Situational and Institutional (2010). Dispositional Barriers relate to the internal values and beliefs that the prisoner developed which resulted from the experiences he encountered prior to incarceration (Scurrah, 2010). Specific dispositional barriers that inmates experience include: traumas which resulted in a lack of cognitive development; previous educational failures, low levels of education, drug or alcohol abuse and mental illness. Several of these factors contribute to the student inmate's inability to process some of the educational material since it is written from the perspective of an educated person who has experience in the workplace and not from the perspective of a person who has never been employed, such as that of many prisoners (Scurrah, 2010). Student inmates who suffer from mental illness tend to have problems adjusting to the stress of prison life, coping

with the feelings of hopelessness and feelings of separation from loved ones which leads to depression. Those who encounter this dilemma usually display a bad attitude in school and lack motivation to participate in their vocational programs (Scurrah, 2010).

Situational barriers are external factors that the student inmate has no control over. For instance, some of the student inmates have prison sentences that are shorter than the time duration that is needed to complete the vocational program. Therefore, the student inmate is prohibited from enrolling in the program. Another barrier to the student's access to education occurs when the student enrolls in a program in which the instructor severs the relationship with the employer which results in the student inmate's inability to complete the vocational program. Prison inmates express disappointment and frustration at these outcomes (Scurrah, 2010).

Finally, institutional barriers are the practices and procedures that prevent or discourage student inmates from participating in vocational programs (Scurrah, 2010). For example, some prisons provided inadequate food choices that lacked the nutrients that the students needed to maximize their learning potential in school. Another example related to prisons that hired unqualified staff to provide educational services for student inmates. This contributed to a barrier to prisoner learning through high staff turnover, lack of service delivery and low completion rates in vocational education (Scurrah, 2010).

Students who are housed in the correctional facility under study must encounter a constantly changing social experience that includes their college curriculum, drug therapy activities, shakedowns for contraband, no-movement and other requirements that mandate that a student be removed from school so that the prison administration can conduct such activities. Since these factors must be considered during the student inmate's college experience, perhaps it

negatively impacts the evolutionary process of student inmate development and classification as a student who has developed job preparedness skills.

**Educational programs created by prisoners and ex-prisoners.** Despite the barriers that student inmates face in prison, some of them have been able to overcome those barriers and find success in their college experience and several inmates were able to transfer their success as an ex-prisoner outside of prison, as well. Former inmate and present university professor, Stephen C. Richards published an article in which he discussed the significance of the program that he developed called the Convict Criminology (CC) Perspective (Richards, 2008). CC is composed of a group of ex-convicts who hold PhDs or are completing their doctoral studies, or practitioners who are interested in conducting research that addresses the experiences of prisoners and ex-cons (Richards, 2008). The CC Perspective is now a course of study at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and it is administered by Professor Richards. This class offers readings and discussions that are devoted to the experiences of defendants and prisoners (Richards, 2008). Professor Richards also initiated a program called “Inviting Convicts to College” that prepares student interns to teach prison courses at the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. This program serves as a bridge between prisons and universities as student inmates learn how to make informed decisions about enrolling in a college or university upon their release from prison (Richards, 2008). The results of the program appear to warrant success, as some former prisoners have become academics. The research conducted by the CC group has been quite effective in combating the misrepresentation of scholarly inmates who are now working in an academic position at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh (Richards, 2008).

In January 2001, five African American inmates at the Airway Heights Correctional Facility in Airway, Washington, developed a program called the African American Literature

Program. The program was designed to help inmates develop self-pride and self-worth, make more appropriate life choices, develop an interest in African American literature and in reading in general, and create a ground for discussing current issues and concerns (Nelson, 2007). These inmates wanted to help other inmates acquire the skills needed to become contributing members of society and to avoid becoming a part of Washington's 34.1% recidivism rate (Nelson, 2007).

In order to sustain interest in the program, they offered a variety of activities that consisted of book reviews, poetry jams, community guests, inmate presentations, discussions of current events, etiquette training, applying for employment and other events (Nelson, 2007). The institution approved volunteer coordinators to facilitate the program. After a year of observing the program and its outcome, the coordinators determined that the program was successful. They based this on the men's conversations that they held in the grounds where they socialized, on the phone and during visitations, which (all conversations in the facility are recorded and monitored) had changed significantly for the better. Despite the difficulty in tracking men who leave prison, the coordinators did discover that four of the participants in the program were accepted to universities and some had gained employment (Nelson, 2007). This program indicated that learning is a process that requires student involvement.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Self efficacy theory indicates that a person will experience intrinsic rewards such as feelings of competence and effectiveness when a personal task is successfully completed (Bess, 1997). Bandura (1997) stated that self efficacy is evident in those who exert control in situations that may previously been difficult to overcome. A person who is persistent in overcoming difficult tasks possesses self efficacy beliefs. Self efficacy beliefs relate to the outlook that a person has about the chances of mastering a certain behavior and how successful that person will

be at mastering the behavior. So a person with strong self efficacy beliefs will exercise persistence in using effective behavior to carry out a task (Bess, 1997). Therefore, it is pertinent to a person's pursuit of mastery over a task that the person has achieved success in previous activities of some significance. However, the level of conviction that a person has in oneself to accomplish a task depends on if the person wants to cope with the difficulties that might accompany his pursuing that task (Bandura, 1977). The expected outcome that a person has while pursuing a task will determine how much effort is applied to completing the task and how long a person will persist in the face of adverse circumstances. The longer a person is able to cope with adverse circumstances the greater his self efficacy will develop. But if a person shuts down his ability to cope with difficult situations prematurely then he will maintain a self defeating attitude for a long time (Bandura, 1977).

The basis from which efficacy is derived was founded upon four sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977). Performance accomplishments states that if a person continues to succeed in a certain circumstances than the negative impact on one's self esteem that result from occasional failures will decline. Over a period of continued successful results from a particular task, increased self efficacy will transfer into activities that are considerably different from the previous successful activities (Bandura, 1977). Vicarious experience occurs after someone sees another person perform an activity without experiencing an adverse consequence then the observer expects to improve in that activity if he is persistent in his efforts (Bandura, 1977). He thinks that if someone else can perform a particular task successfully than he believes that he can perform the task as well. Verbal persuasion occurs when people are led, through suggestion,



into believing they can cope successfully with what has overwhelmed them in the past (Bandura, 1977). Efficacy expectations that result from verbal persuasion are usually weak because they are not based upon the performance of a task. Emotional arousal can affect perceived self-efficacy in coping with threatening situations. Since high arousal usually weakens performance, individuals are more likely to expect success when they are not overwhelmed by tending to avoid arousal that results from being tense or agitated (Bandura, 1977). By developing fear-arousing thoughts about their lack of skill, individuals can provoke themselves to high levels of anxiety that far exceed the fear experienced during the actual threatening situation (Bandura, 1977). Avoidance of stressful activities hinders the development of coping skills, and the resulting lack of competency provides a realistic basis for fear. Apparent self-competence can cause self arousal to decline. Individuals who come to believe that they are less vulnerable than they previously assumed are less prone to generate frightening thoughts in intimidating situations (Bandura, 1977). Those whose uncertainties diminish may reduce their self doubts and weaken self-arousal to the point where they perform successfully. As a result, performance in certain areas can strengthen self efficacy. Self efficacy relates to the confidence that a person can successfully implement behavior that will produce an anticipated outcome (Bandura, 1977).

Self-worth theory is an affective or emotional reaction to oneself that stems from the act of taking pride in self and behavior, feeling good about oneself and one's accomplishments, and having a general positive self image (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). When one's experiences generate emotions and feelings about self, this is what is known as the self-worth theory (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). However, self-worth theory can also apply to someone who does not try to achieve a task by deliberately withholding effort (Rabideau, 2005). This occurs most often when a student inmate experiences failure. If he performs a task poorly,

then doubts regarding his ability are confirmed. Therefore, self-worth theory also implies that one way to avoid threat to self-esteem is by withdrawing effort (Rabideau, 2005). If one possesses low self worth then it can lead to substance abuse, criminality, personal unhappiness and depression (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). Therefore, it is important for a student inmate to develop self worth by exhibiting the ability to do a specific task or possess competence in a specific field over an unspecified period of time. Self worth theory also states that a person's self esteem is less threatened if he performs a task poorly but the results of the task attribute to a situation that is not related to his ability to perform the task successfully (Rabideau, 2005). The following illustrates a study that involves students that explains how removed effort from a task relates to self worth:

“A study was conducted on students involving unsolvable problems to test some assumptions of the self-worth theory regarding motivation and effort. The results showed that there was no evidence of reported reduction of effort despite poorer performance when the tasks were described as moderately difficult as compared with tasks much higher in difficulty. The possibility was raised that low effort may not be responsible for the poor performance of students in situations which create threats to self-esteem. Two suggestions were made, one being that students might unconsciously withdraw effort, and the other stating that students may reduce effort as a result of withdrawing commitment from the problem. Regardless of which suggestion is true, self-worth theory assumes that individuals have a reduced tendency to take personal responsibility for failure” (Rabideau, 2005).

Self determination theory states that biological factors in human development attribute to psychological growth. During the process of psychological growth, an individual develops intrinsic motivation which stimulates tendencies to pursue challenges and opportunities to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self determination theory attempts to distinguish between motivating factors that are self-determined and motivating factors that result from controlled types of intentional regulation (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991). A person may be motivated to behave a certain way by choice or a person may be motivated to behave a certain way as a means of

remaining in compliance with an established policy or rule (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991). When behavior is self determined, the origin of the behavior is derived internally of the person. However, if the behavior is controlled then the motivating factor supporting the behavior derives from circumstances that are external to the person. There are various psychological needs that must be met in order for a person to experience self motivation. They include competence, relatedness and autonomy. Competency shows a parallel effect in the increase in intrinsic motivation when a person experiences success in meeting a challenge Ryan & Deci, 2000). Relatedness refers to the need to be connected to others and become a part of a larger community. Relatedness also encourages responsibility since being responsible for others is an essential element of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, self determination is achieved when a person experiences a sense of choice in the initiation and regulation of that person's actions (Bess, 1997).

Self determination theory relates to both, intrinsic motivating factors and extrinsic motivating factors. Intrinsic motivation results from behavior that is pleasurable to the person. This behavior is conducted voluntarily without the necessity of material rewards or constraints (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991). In contrast, extrinsically motivated behavior can be self-determined even when it is not behavior that is performed as a result of interest but, rather, behavior that is carried out because of obligation. Deci, Vallerand Pelletier & Ryan (1991) identified four types of extrinsic motivation that are characterized by increasingly internal forms of behavior regulation: external regulation; introjected regulation; identified regulation and integrated regulation. External regulation refers to behaviors that develop and are carried out based upon something that is external of that person; for instance, an award offered or a threat of punishment (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991). Introjected regulation involves

internalized rules or demands that a person places on himself to carry out a certain task, usually to avoid experiencing guilt if the task is not carried out. Identified regulation refers to behavior that a person may learn to value over a period of time. For instance, the person begins to identify with the behavior, and therefore it becomes a self-determined behavior and carried out voluntarily instead of coercively (introjected regulation) (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991).

“An example is being a student who willingly does extra work in mathematics because the student believes it is important for continuing to succeed at mathematics. The motivation is extrinsic because the activity is performed primarily because of its usefulness or instrumentality for the goal of improving math performance and succeeding in future endeavors, rather than because it is interesting. Nonetheless, the behavior is relatively self-determined because the student does it willingly, for personal reasons, rather than external pressure” (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991).

Integrated regulation is characterized by two different activities that motivate a person and are equally incorporated with the person's values and needs (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991). Integrated regulation is exemplified by the activity's being personally important for a valued outcome. For instance, if a person believes that being a good student and being a good athlete are valued qualities of life then both concepts may be conflicting for that person. However, the person must make a self-determination that both values are harmoniously significant in defining who that person is and the decisions that will be made for that person's future outcomes (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991).

Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are similar in that some qualities that characterize intrinsic behavior, such as behaving willingly and displaying conceptual or intuitive understanding are also qualities that characterize integrated behaviors that result from extrinsic motivation (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991). However they differ in that intrinsic motivation is characterized by interest in the activity itself and integrated regulation, which is an

advance form of external motivation, are characterized by activities that are personally important for a valued outcome (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991).

Social learning theory is defined as learning that takes place by watching other people (Cherry, 2011). According to Cherry (2011), most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling from observing others; one forms an idea of how new behaviors are formed, and later occasions of using this coded information serves as a guide for action. Although the observed behavior may be learned, it may not change the behavior of the observer. The observed behavior must be self motivating to the observer and behavior must generate some intrinsic reward such as pride or self fulfillment before the behavior is repeated (Cherry, 2011).

Social psychologists declared that drug abuse is a social learning issue (Kendall, 1998). Bandura studied the social learning phenomena which led to the development of the social learning theory. He defined social learning theory as dealing with learned behavior that results from observing the behavior of others, called modeling (Ormrod, 1999). Bandura suggested that the environment reinforces modeling, in that the imitated behavior leads to reinforcing consequences. Reinforcement and punishment influence the extent to which an individual exhibits a behavior that has been learned (Ormrod, 1999). Social learning theory describes drug use and abuse as socially influenced behaviors that are acquired through a learning process (Kendall, 1998). Social psychologists determined that prior to their conviction, drug abusers learned attitudes and general information about drug use from family members and friends who also used drugs. Therefore the drug abuser connected positive consequences with drug use. Consequently, whether a person abstained from drug use or abused drugs depended on the anticipated rewards associated with the abuse (Kendall, 1998). Therefore drug treatment

programs, that included discipline in diet, exercise and education, were developed in prison to address the inmate's learned behavior of drug abuse.

Factors such as self-improvement, hope and aspiration correlate directly with the personal, emotional and feelings of situational interest (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). Situational interest arises from an opportunistic interaction between a person and features of a temporary environment or because a learner exercises a choice to create a context that is interesting (Cruciani, 2009). Situational interest also arises when learners receive feedback as they work. Therefore, when the student receives feedback that supports the idea that the task that he is engaging in reflects his competence in that task then he develops a degree of interest in the method of engagement that correlated with task achievement. In this study, situational interest relates to the educational experiences of African American inmates with drug convictions. Interest predicts choices that the student makes about where and how intensely a student should focus on a learning activity or how persistent he wants to be in that learning engagement. However, situational interest for a student inmate will debilitate when he is involved in tasks that he must apply more intense cognitive processing to a less relevant subject matter; although the subject may contain interesting content (Cruciani, 2009). Nevertheless, a student inmate's self concept correlates with the amount of interest that he may have in the subject matter. His mental self image and perception of his abilities positively links with his interest and attributes to his academic achievements (Cruciani, 2009).

### **The Challenge of Managing a College Program in Prison**

Designing a college program for prisoners offers some challenges. For instance, San Quentin's library is quite limited in resource material; therefore, history courses are inadequate in terms of what information the library is able to lend to the students (McCarty, 2006). The

University of California at Berkeley donated many of the textbooks that were used in San Quentin's college program (McCarty, 2006). The opportunity for students to learn is sometimes impeded by administration. Students are required often to work too many hours on their assigned job, which hampers their study time. Other hindering factors in reference to running a college program include the following: student placed in segregation; the prison goes on lockdown; involuntary work assignment changes; transfers to other prisons, and other administrative matters that interfere with class time (McCarty, 2006).

Today, penal experts consider higher education programs in prison to be a success because they helped to maintain carceral order and reduced recidivism rates. Studies revealed that prisoners who were participating in higher education programs had recidivism rates as much as 55 percent lower than those who were not participating in college programs (McCarty, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

College vocational programs have been taught in United States prisons for approximately 100 years. Vocational programs in prison have evolved from simple correspondence programs to accredited college certificates and degrees. During the 1960s, it became evident to penologists that crime was a disease and needed to be treated by the use of drug therapy and educational programs. African American male prisoners became a prototypical candidate for these programs. When Congress passed Title IV of the Higher Education Act, inmates were afforded the opportunity to enroll in college degree programs. College programs in prison were largely funded by the Pell Grant but in 1994 President Clinton signed a bill that denied Pell Grant-related funding to support college programs in prison. This resulted in a decline in the affordability of college programs in prison. Despite the decline of college programs in prison, African American male inmates showed an avid interest in enrolling in college programs.

Researchers determined several reasons why inmates were motivated to attend college, they included: to seek knowledge, inquiring mind or to get something. Through other research it was determined that student inmates gained a sense of independence after establishing an instructor-protégé relationship between the teacher and the student inmate. However, the daily operations that occur in the division of corrections may be overwhelming to some student inmates. These operations include: verbal reprimand by security officers, removing student inmates from vocational programs and placing them in segregation as a result of a rule violation or transferring a student inmate from one prison to another prison institution.

To gain a better perspective on the experiences of student inmates who are enrolled in a college vocational program, several theories were used in this research. Self efficacy theory states that a person will feel intrinsic rewards when a significant task is completed. Self worth theory is an emotional reaction to feeling good about one's accomplishments. Self determination theory states that during psychological growth a person feels motivated to pursue challenges; however, a person's social settings may affect the ability to self-motivate. Finally, social learning theory claims that learning occurs through observing others. It is anticipated that these theories will contribute to the development of knowledge regarding the study of the educational experiences of African American male prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in a college vocational program.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The research for this study was designed to address the following question: “What are the educational experiences of African American male prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in a college vocational program?” This chapter described the method used to assess the educational experience of African American male inmates. The study informed the general public who desired to know if the college experience of inmates equated to reformed behavioral characteristics for those individuals prior to their reentry into society. Additionally, prison administrators and policymakers need to be aware of this information and the future goals of inmates in order to identify what programs to offer prison students.

High recidivism rates affect families in that fathers are unable to serve as caregivers and provide paternal guidance for their children. Incarcerated men impact the workforce with absenteeism because able-bodied workers who don't work cannot stimulate the economy. Finally, ex-offenders who continue a life of crime become a menace to society, as their criminal actions indirectly affect a number of different situations such as an increase in homeowner insurance, personal taxes and the illegal circulation of guns throughout a community for protection.

### **Qualitative Study**

One of the objectives of a qualitative study was to reduce the uncertainty about important phenomena or questions (Sofaer, 1999). In this study, the phenomena pertained to the parallels between the college experiences of inmates and their reformed behavioral characteristics as well as the determination of what programs were most effective based on the experiences of African American inmates. The qualitative approach to research involved documenting people's

experiences from their own perspective (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman, 2004). Through a documentation of experiences, knowledge of the experience of African American inmates was further enhanced, which gradually reduced the uncertainty regarding this phenomenon (Sofaer, 1999). Therefore, a qualitative study was conducted to examine the academic experience of African American male inmates who were housed in one of the state correctional centers in the Midwest.

Studies summarized in the literature review used questionnaires for data collection. Researchers in these studies worked with sample sizes of no less than 71 participants, as was indicated in the research conducted by Honeycutt (1997); or the research covered a span of several years. Also, questionnaires are applicative in quantitative studies that include large research samples to which the findings of the data analysis can be generalized (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). For this proposal, the research required no more than 20 participants.

### **Design**

The goal of a generic qualitative design was to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process or the perspective and worldviews of the people involved in the research (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). In pursuing this goal, Cooper & Endacott (2007) explained that it is important to state the assumptions regarding the topic of interest. For this research, the topic of interest related to understanding the educational experiences of African American prison inmates who voluntarily enrolled in college vocational programs in the division of corrections. Based on some reports that were documented in the literature review, there was an assumption that student/inmates enrolled in whatever college programs that were offered at the prison since the selection of college programs were limited at the prisons. Because prison administrations were not attentive to the college program preferences of the student/inmates, they often approved

college courses in which student/inmates were not interested. Another assumption was that behavior modifications of student/inmates pertained to their belief system that determined their ability to accomplish academically related goals.

For this study, a generic qualitative design was used to access and report data. Qualitative research shared a number of characteristics. First, the initial focus of a qualitative researcher was to make sense out of the experiences of the participants in study. Secondly, instead of using questionnaires or computers, the researcher was the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data. Third, the researcher had to go to the site to observe the behavior of the participant in a natural setting. Fourth, qualitative researchers build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field. Finally, qualitative research was very descriptive in explaining, by the use of words and pictures, what phenomenon the researcher learned (Merriam, 2009).

According to Merriam (2009), generic qualitative design was the most common type of research in applied fields of practice such as education. Using a generic qualitative design in research includes the process of collecting data from many sources; however, for this study the researcher collected data that resulted from conducting interviews (Merriam, 2009). In order to obtain a list of viable candidates for research, the researcher distributed a survey to student/inmates who fit the criteria for this study. To determine if a potential candidate fits the criteria, the researcher retrieved such information from a self-generated section opening form called the College Program or Vocational Program Enrollment Form with Start Dates and Completion Dates (Appendix A). The section opening form contained the student/inmate profile which included the following information: name, residential location, division of correction identification number, date of birth, name of vocational program enrolled, date of enrollment,

projected date of completion and parole date. Once it was determined which student/inmate fit the criteria for study, the Offender Tracking System (a computer system that stores information regarding an inmate's residence within the prison) was used to locate the potential candidate; and then the researcher sent him a letter that requested his participation in a survey. The survey included the following questions:

1. Would you like to participate in an interview that addresses your educational experiences at this correctional facility?
2. Will you agree to allow me to digitally record our interview?

In analyzing the data, the researcher identified recurring patterns that characterized the data which became themes that the researcher developed into interpretation of the participant's understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009). Unlike ethnography, which focuses on culture or phenomenology, which focuses on the essence of a type of experience, this study was classified as a generic qualitative research because it did not possess any of the distinguishing features of the previously mentioned research types. The purpose of this study was to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003) of drug-convicted African American inmates who completed a college program. According to Merriam (2009), the overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences.

Basic qualitative studies are one of the most common forms of research found in education (Merriam, 2009). Conclusions drawn from the data include some educated guesses or hypotheses for further study. A relationship between the interviews and concepts are proposed. Therefore, further research is required to test these proposals.

## **Sampling**

There were several reasons that support the use of 19 participants for this type of study. First, the population was small; therefore the number of individuals who fit the criteria for research was small as well. Secondly, it was unrealistic to pursue a high number of participants because many of the inmates were not inclined to participate. deMarrais (1998) reported that one of the reasons for lack of participation is that some inmates want monetary compensation in exchange for their information. Lastly, since the population was homogeneous, there is a chance that theoretical saturation (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006), an occurrence that is most often associated with the development of grounded theory, would occur prior to the twentieth participant.

Grounded Theory is a general form of research that requires the researcher to develop categories that evolve as a result of inductive methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Inductive methodology occurs when specific observations are documented and later transitioned to general observations that result in the formation of a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In order to form a theory, data was collected from the interviews; an analysis was conducted based on the responses provided by inmates pertaining to the evolving conditions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) of their education experiences. Evolving conditions include such occurrences as student/inmates who display inappropriate classroom behavior (Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006), and as a result of this behavior, these individuals impede the learning opportunities of other student/inmates who are in the classroom; security routines that require the removal of a student/inmate from the classroom; a student/inmate has to transfer between prisons while enrolled in school and a student/inmate may reach his parole date before completing his vocational program (Diseth, Eikeland, Manger & Hetland, 2008). Next, in order to continually develop a phenomenon of

study, data was collected pertaining to how the student/inmates responded to the evolving conditions that affected their education experiences and the consequences that resulted from the actions that they considered in order to address the changes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

When using the Grounded Theory approach in research, theoretical saturation occurs when the main variations of the phenomenon are identified and incorporated into the emerging theory (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). For instance, Guest, Bunce & Johnson (2006) reported a process that was used in research to determine theoretical saturation. Their study entailed a group of practitioners who conducted research with a body of participants who were homogeneous regarding their lifestyle, ethnicity, gender and residency. In order to get a reliable sense of thematic exhaustion within the data set, they analyzed sets of six interviews at a time. During this process they monitored the code network to determine if there were any changes in the definition of the codes. After analyzing a subsample of thirty interviews, “the codebook contained a total of 109 content-driven codes, all of which had been applied to at least one transcript. Of these codes 80 (73%) were identified within the first six transcripts. An additional 20 codes were identified in the next six transcripts, for a cumulative total of 100, or 92% of all codes. Clearly, the full range of thematic discovery occurred almost completely within the first twelve interviews” (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). This demonstrates a saturation effect; after interviewing twelve participants, no new stories emerged from their responses.

### **Subjects**

Upon the completion of a college vocational program, the student-inmate participated in an interview and the data collected from the interview was assessed to evaluate the overall experience of the student’s academic endeavors. Participants of the study consisted of African American male inmates who participated on a volunteer basis, who had drug convictions and

who completed a vocational program offered by a community college within the division of corrections. The participants ranged from 18 to 55 years of age. The population from which the sample was drawn had a mean age of 36.5, which was within the age range of the student population that commonly attends college programs in the division of corrections.

### **Sampling Procedures**

Each year, approximately 111 inmates enroll in college programs at the prison where the research took place. Roughly 55 African-American students complete vocational programs at this facility, yearly. However, several student inmates will reach their parole date, the day when the inmate is released from prison, prior to receiving the opportunity to participate in the research. Therefore, over the course of a year, it is anticipated that no more than 20 of 55 African American students will be asked to participate in this research interview. According to Coyne (1997) all sampling procedures for qualitative studies are purposeful because data collection addresses relatively small samples. There are 15 strategies that are used to sample qualitative data (Coyne, 1997). For this study the researcher used homogeneous sampling, which was a strategy used to sample sub-groups that shared similar characteristics. For instance, this study included African American male inmates who were enrolled in a college vocational program at a drug therapy correctional facility. There was less apprehension from the respondents during the interview process (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007) due to the shared ethnic and gender background.

### **Settings and Procedure**

The researcher obtained consent from the Institutional Review Board at University of Missouri-St. Louis as well as the state correctional facility in order to conduct interviews with inmates who were housed in this facility. This study required the use of a digital voice recorder

to record the responses of willing participants during the interview. A list of completion dates for each student who completed a vocational program was found on the College Program or Vocational Program Enrollment Form with Start Dates and Completion Dates (Appendix A). These forms, consisting of a list of potential participants, were retrieved from the following classes: Horticulture; Commercial Custodial Maintenance; Construction Occupation; and Forklift Driving. Prior to conducting the interview, the respondents received a detailed explanation of the purpose of recording the interview in hopes of minimizing any undesirable effects of the interviewing process (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007).

Students who represented the criteria for research were invited from one of the vocational programs to voluntarily participate in the study. Upon arrival, the respondent gave the university's official consent and confidentiality form which was called the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) that explained the process of the interview and the option to approve or disapprove the right to be digitally recorded. Once the participant signed the consent form indicating approval to conduct/or to participate in the study, the researcher used an interview as the survey instrument called the Interview Protocol (Appendix C) which comprised items or questions that assessed students' perceptions of their programs, educational resources, incarceration history and demographics (Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006).

Before conducting interviews with the participants, the following issues were addressed. Upon receiving the Roster Update forms for vocational student enrollment, the list of students was assessed to determine if they were potential participants. If a student fit the criteria for research, his name was retained as part of a list that was used as a tracking system to contact the student upon completion of his vocational program. At the end of each month, the vocational



program list was obtained to determine which students were eligible to participate in the research.

The participant issued a call pass to come to the vocational building to a classroom where instructions regarding the interviewing process were administered. The student completed a consent form before the interviews began.

The inmates' responses to the interview questions provided knowledge-enhancing feedback about the inmates' college experiences in the division of corrections. This assessment was based on the "nature of the inmate's physical and social world" (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007) at the correctional facility. Their environment was defined by the medication that the inmates received; the inmate's reaction to his separation from loved ones; their coexistence with unfamiliar people; their removal from a drug induced setting; and their academic experience. Therefore, their responses were beneficial resource material for other researchers who may be interested in improving student performance of African American male inmates convicted of drug offenses in the division of corrections.

### **Data Collection**

For this study, semi structured interviews were used as the instrument to collect data. The reason that this form of interviewing was used was because semi-structured interviews are an effective means of gathering data for this particular research that will provide detailed information about how inmates make sense of their college experiences as well as the meaning of their college experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Semi-structured interviews allowed for modification of questions in accordance to the inmates' responses. Therefore the interview protocol served as a guide for the interview process which gave direction to the series of questions that were asked.

Semi-structured interviews vary in length of time for completion. Interruptions or an unsatisfactory location for the interview can extend the duration of the interview. On the contrary, an interview setting that is subject to no distractions and takes place in an area that is familiar to the inmate may result in an interview that lasts much less than an hour. Berg (2007) reported on an interview conducted with inmates in a prison. The primary focus of the interview related to the inmate's view of determinate and indeterminate sentences. A determinate sentence is a sentence in which the inmate receives a mandatory term of incarceration no matter what circumstances were associated with the crime. The mandatory minimum time granted by the judge is nonnegotiable in a determinate sentence. However, an indeterminate sentence imposes upon an inmate a term of imprisonment with no definite duration. These interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes per inmate (Berg, 2007). deMarrais (1998) reported interviews that took place with drug traffickers in a Kentucky prison. Throughout the interview, the researcher obtained detailed information about their criminal histories, the frequency of their crime commission, and their decision-making processes. Each interview varied in duration of time from 1 to 3 hours.

The interview setting was located in a classroom because this setting was more conducive for the student/inmate. Some of the questions that justified the length in time of the interviews included:

1. When entering the division of corrections, what were your thoughts about college and why?
2. When you enrolled in school, what were your views about the specific vocational programs that were offered and why?
3. How helpful was the college/vocational program for your personal development?
4. Is the division of corrections conducive to conducting college/vocational programs? Why not?

5. Do you feel that this college/vocational program was beneficial in the achievement of your academic and career objectives? Why do you feel that way?

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher used Grounded Theory strategies for data analysis. By applying grounded theory, the researcher further described the categories by using properties which were dimensions of a category (Merriam, 2009). Interviews were transcribed to assure that responses to the interview were recorded verbatim. The researcher documented different concepts that emerged from the recorded data, and these concepts were grouped into categories accordingly (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Concepts were developed from noting incidents, events and happenings that were described during the interview (Corbin & Strauss, 1990); initial codes were grouped by similarity. Concepts, again, were grouped to form a category to describe a major theme that was addressed in the interview. Throughout the analytic process, as more concepts were discovered, they attributed to further development of categories which eventually can be studied as a system of interrelated variables to create a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The categories were pertinent to understanding the experiences of African American male inmates who were enrolled in a college program because “categories are the cornerstones of a developing theory because they can provide a means by which a theory can be integrated” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The researcher analyzed the interviews through the use of coding. There are three types of coding that are commonly used in grounded theory: open, axial and selective (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Open coding is a process of breaking down data that resulted from interviews, such as events, actions and interactions. Next, the data was compared and contrasted to form

categories. Categories established a basis for interpreting events and occurrences that were reflected in the interview.

In a fully developed Grounded Theory study, open coding also includes the enrichment and verification of category descriptions through further sampling, called theoretical sampling that would for instance be directed towards the identification of missing pieces of information or negative cases (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the current study, however, the sample needed to be identified and recruited in advance, so that the addition of other participants – who might have been able to add new perspectives – was not an option. In order to reach a point of saturation, the researcher attempted to “maximize differences in my groups in order to get the most out of the varieties of data bearing on the category, and thereby diverse properties of the category as possible” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 62).

When performing axial coding, categories are linked to subcategories as a means of creating a precise explanation of the phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the latter part of the study, selective coding was used to check the possibility of unifying all categories around a “core” category (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In order to assure generalizability of grounded theory, it was essential to attain abstraction in the development of concepts and the core category (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study was the specificity in defining the criteria of the sample population. Because the study involved individuals who were participating in a therapeutic program that had been conducted in one other state, the results of the research had limited generalizability.

Another limitation was the possibility of deception by respondents during the interview. “When interviewing offenders, there is a chance that they will hide information or deceive the interviewer” (deMarrais, 1998, p. 131). “In such instances, the data could be tainted with a degree of falsehood” (deMarrais, 1998, p. 132). One way that saturation was overcome was by the avoidance of asking personal questions. Personal questions included issues such as personal relationships with other inmates or staff members and personal feelings toward specific correctional officers or teachers. Also, anonymity offered some degree of comfort for the respondents, therefore allowed them to be honest and forthcoming with their responses. Finally, the researcher believed that the presentation indicated a sincere interest in learning from the feedback that the respondents provided; for that reason, they were willing to openly and honestly share their information.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to document the educational experiences of African American prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in college vocational programs in the division of corrections. This study attempts to address the following research questions: (1) What are the educational experiences of African American male prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in a college vocational program at a Midwestern correctional facility? and (2) What barriers do prison inmates encounter in the division of corrections that may impede their desire to pursue a postsecondary education and/or their opportunity to complete a postsecondary degree? The results of the data analysis are provided in this chapter.

Participants of the study consisted of African American male inmates who voluntarily participated, have been convicted of a drug offense and have completed a vocational program offered by a community college within the division of corrections. The participants ranged from 18 to 55 years of age. The mean age for the sample was 36.5, which is within the age range of the student population that commonly attends college programs in the division of corrections. There were 19 student/inmates who voluntarily participated in this study. Of the 19 respondents who participated, 100% were African American and the gender of the 19 respondents was male.

Six themes emerged from the data collected for this study. To provide an understanding of the educational experiences of African American prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in college vocational programs in the division of corrections, the following six themes will be discussed: criminal behaviors that the inmates carried out prior to entering DOC, change in thought process, motivation to attend college, personal feelings about vocational programs, issues that deter progress in education attainment and people or organizations who influenced the

career choices of the participants. This information is also summarized in Table 1- Initial Codes Informing the Themes which details the themes and concepts that developed from the interviews.

### **Criminal Behavior**

Criminal Behavior is a theme that developed from the participants' admitting their crime during the interviews. Bartol (1980) defined criminal behavior as "intentional behavior that violates a criminal code; intentional means that the behavior did not occur accidentally or under duress. To be held criminally responsible, a person must have known what he was doing during the criminal act and must have known that it was wrong" (Bartol, 1980, p. 17). Criminal acts served as an initial point of development for the criminal behavior that the participants committed. Criminal acts were evident in the responses given by the participants during the interviews.

One of the questions to which participants responded was as follows: "What personal challenges did you encounter that led you to entering the division of corrections?" Most responses that were provided by the participants included some form of drug and alcohol related criminal act. The responses included the following: "Aggravated robbery, simple robbery and two batteries," "Property damage and using drugs," "I got a DUI," "I was carrying guns," "I was livin' a fast street life and drug activity," "I was sellin' drugs," "I had a gun that wasn't registered in my home and that's what led me to DOC," "I was committin' crimes, getting high and drunk off drugs and alcohol," and "Drug selling...I felt I had to sell drugs to keep a certain lifestyle and one of the reasons was I wasn't educated." These responses were categorized under the theme "Criminal Behavior" because the behavior violated the criminal code that was sanctioned by the governmental powers located in the Midwestern region in which the criminal acts occurred.

When the respondents were asked the question, “What led you to entering the division of corrections?” 40% of the responses were related to drug offense connections. Several respondents reported that their reason for entering the division of corrections (DOC) was the result of aggravated battery, aggravated robbery, alcohol addiction, possession of unregistered guns, property damage and low self-esteem. This list has two elements: the crimes committed and two reasons for committing the crimes: alcohol addiction and low self-esteem. All of these activities were a result of the respondents’ affiliation with drug abuse or the sale of drugs.

### **Change In Thought Process**

There were a series of questions that led to the development of the second category or theme called “Change In Thought Process”. When the researcher asked the participants, “How were you able to address the demand of group therapy and the vocational program,” several of the responses indicated that the participants acknowledge themselves as an initiator of change in the direction that their lives were heading. For instance the following responses were given: “I just gave in because I really want to change and do something in my life,” “It's stressful at times but I realize if you going to succeed in life you must work hard for what you want in life,” and “I was able to address the demand by applying myself....putting the same energy in that I once used on negative things to positive things and these are some things I really needed in my life.” Then participants were asked the question, “When entering DOC, what were your thoughts regarding college? and Why do you feel this way?” Some of the participants stated that since they were in prison then they may as well do something they felt was a positive attribute to their lives’ development. Others realized that being in prison provided them with the best opportunity to attend college. They responded in the following manner: “I was not interested but my thoughts have changed now,” “I thought that since I will be locked up for a while, I need to get



as much education as I can. I felt this way because if I was out on the streets, going to school would not be an option...I wouldn't be open for it," "I was thinking, this will be my first time taking a college course. Well because I achieved my GED in County Jail so I wanted to go beyond a GED," "My thoughts were, it's time to buckle down and get my education cause I know I ain't gone get it in the real world," and "I hadn't thought about it at all but now that I'm here I felt the need to take advantage of the schooling that's available to better my chances with employment."

Another question asked that was relevant to the change in thought process theme was worded, "As you entered the college program, what were your views regarding the specific vocational program that you preferred and selected?" While one respondent did not state a specific reason why he chose a particular vocational program, several others linked their expectation with the vocational program they enrolled in. Some of the responses included, "I chose the vocational program 'cause I really needed some kind of skills that would allow me to do something different upon my release," "I'm somewhat familiar with construction so I know I will excel because I've been in the field for some time. I feel it's things that I don't know so that would only sharpen my skills and help me be successful," "I wanted Warehousing so I could be certificated in forklifting," and "The classes I took mainly Sociology was to study my human behavior. I wanted to learn the behaviors I've been displaying through the years."

Throughout the interviews, the respondents' replies reflected a change in their thought process regarding the path that their lives were taking. The responses offered by the respondents varied, however the word change was used often in their responses. Some of the responses relating to change which evolved from the interviews included: "I was pursuing college for a change in life," "My thoughts have changed about the drug program to better myself." Still

other participants provided the following responses: “Applying the drug therapy created a change in my life” and “I realized I needed more education which is an element of change.”

Other responses that were provided by the participants indicated that the change that they were pursuing would result in a future that was more interesting than their past. They were as follows: “This time I’m taking it serious,” “The vocational program is something new,” and “I came to this drug facility because I was tired of spending my life in and out of jail.” Another respondent indicated an interest in “acquiring skills in school that will allow me to do something different upon my release,” and another respondent replied, “I’m putting the same energy in that I once used on negative things to positive things and these are things I really need in my life.” Based on their responses, it is evident that the respondents desire change in their lives. However, none of the respondents expressed a plan, activity or goal that they anticipate pursuing once they have completed the education program.

### **Motivation to Attend College**

Participants were asked the following question: “Do you plan to pursue a college degree once you have been released from prison?” Based upon their responses, the category Motivation to Attend College was developed. The responses were as follows: “Yeah, I would like to one day say I have a degree,” “Yeah because I want to further my education and be able to obtain a better job,” “Yes, to get my CADIC license,” “Yeah, so I can get my certificate in mechanics,” and “Maybe in the long run 'cause I would like to get a masters degree in psychology.”

According to the responses from the interview, the respondents expressed two main factors that motivated them to attend college. Several respondents offered responses that reflected an understanding that college is a prerequisite to attaining a job. For example, one respondent stated, “I want to get a degree to obtain employment,” and another replied, “I’m

pursuing a college degree to get my life together and be a working man.” Still another respondent said, “I’m pursuing a college degree to increase my chances of obtaining a job.” Therefore, their motivation to go to college was rooted in a reward system that indicated that if one goes to college, one can obtain a job.

Other respondents expressed their motivation to attend college as the source for developing a skill. Their responses were as follows: “I want to achieve goals in vocational classes like forklifting because it’s a marketable skill” and “I want to take Sociology to learn about the behaviors I’m displaying.” There were also some respondents who were encouraged by family and girlfriends to attend college while incarcerated. When a participant was asked what motivated him to attend college, he responded, “My girlfriend pushed me to do better and strive for the best.” Another respondent stated, “My family impacted me toward education.”

### **Personal Feelings about Vocational Programs**

When the participants were asked, “How helpful was the vocational program regarding your personal development,” the majority of them provided positive feedback regarding their personal feeling about the vocational programs. Their responses included the following: “I think the vocational program has helped me to open my mind to learning,” “It was helpful to me 'cause I want to further my college career,” “It was helpful because I know I could make better decisions,” “It was real helpful.....made me like had faith into getting my GED and moving on to bigger and better things,” “It helped me to bring my scores up so I can finish my education,” “You was helpful 'cause you believed in me. You knew I was capable of scoring high on my TABE test when I was questioning myself,” “Well....I finished my auto-body class, my culinary arts or food service class, obtained my food safety and sanitation class, my custodial

maintenance and I am now trying to finish my last four classes needed to get my associates degree,” and “It showed me I could do anything if I put my sober mind to it.”

The division of corrections offers one and two-year college programs in a specific field or occupation to provide hands-on experiences for students and prepare them for immediate transition into a chosen career. Six of the respondents felt that the purpose of the vocational programs in the division of corrections was designed to be used as a tool for self-improvement. For instance, when the researcher asked the question, “Is DOC conducive for conducting vocational programs?” some of the participants responded as follows: “Because people would be able to go out and do something with their self,” and “Cause it will help you better yourself later on in life because you goin' need GED or certificates.” Yet another participant stated, “Cause they got all the tools they need to make people successful and become better students of life.” They did not, however, state specifically how the vocational programs will enhance their lives. However, a few of the respondents stated a specific purpose that the vocational programs in the division of corrections served in their lives. Some of the responses included: “It’s teaching me about different business opportunity that’s going to help in the long run,” and “It was real helpful...made me like had faith into getting my GED and moving on to bigger and better things.”

### **Issues that Deter Progress in Education Attainment**

Three participants gave a negative answer to the questions regarding college and career plans. During the interview the researcher asked, “Do you plan to pursue a college degree once you have been released from prison?” One participant responded, “Not really because school wasn't really my thing.” Another question asked by the researcher was, “When entering DOC,

what were your thoughts regarding college?” One participant responded, “I thought college was too hard for me because I tried college and it was too fast.”

The personality of some of the respondents, a fear of failure and the surrounding environment were deterrents to the pursuit of education. One of the respondents described his state-of-mind as one that was still in its addictive ways. Based on his response, one can digress to a question that was previously asked of the respondent and the response that were provided. The question and answer were as follows: What personal challenges did you encounter that led you to entering the division of corrections? The respondent stated, “I was carrying guns.” During the interview he indicated that his disinterest in attending college correlated with his desire to possess guns and his desire to possess guns was related to his addictive ways. Another respondent stated that people with addictions would be more receptive to learn if they were being taught by recovering addicts. And yet another respondent was hesitant to enroll in school because he didn't want to take the chance of failing. Finally another respondent expressed his frustration with the drug therapy program as being “a joke”. It appeared that his feelings about the drug program seemed to interfere with his ability to meet his academic demands.

### **Factors Influencing Career Choices**

When asked about the influencing factors that affected their career choice, one of the respondents said that he was influenced by the Black Mafia Family, an organized crime syndicate that originated in Detroit, Michigan. Black Mafia Family is one of the largest cocaine distribution organizations in the history of the United States (Shalhoup, 2010). They also have ties with some major cities in the Midwest region which is the residential location of all of the respondents. Since all of the respondents were incarcerated for drug related issues, one could

assume that many of them were affiliated with a gang despite there was very little mention of gang affiliation by the majority of the respondents during the interviews.

A few of the respondents indicated that they decided, on their own, what career to pursue. Maggioncalda (2007) describes this type of student/inmate as a self-directed learner; one whose motivation leads him to diagnose his own learning needs and develop goals for learning (Maggioncalda, 2007). This is a quality that is evident in a proactive person with a great sense of purpose. So when the researcher asked the respondents, “Do you feel that your college program was beneficial in you helping to achieve your academic and career objectives,” their responses were concise and job related. Their responses included the following: “Yes, because I want to get my life together and be a working man,” “Yes, because it can help me with a job when I come home” and “Yeah, because now I got somethin' to show on request.”

Several respondents stated that their instructors influenced their career choice. According to Honeycutt (1995), student/inmates sometime develop a mentor/protégé relationship with their instructor. When a student inmate acknowledges the instructor's competencies, he develops a mentor-protégé relationship with the instructor whom the inmate views as a mentor (Honeycutt, 1995). So when the aforementioned respondents addressed the question, “What people or organization(s) had an impact on your career choice,” they provided the following response: “You (the researcher) and Mr. Smith (a fictitious name in place of the actual instructor).” Some of the participants were students of the researcher and their responses reflected a mentor-protégé relationship when they indicated that their career choices were impacted by the researcher.

Most of the respondents said their biological family influenced their career choice. A study conducted by Hairston (2001) reported that the positive roles and functions that families serve indicate that families are important to prisoners and to the achievement of major social

goals. A vast majority of the respondents in this study displayed a formal relationship with family members when they responded to the question, “What people or organization(s) had an impact on your career choice?” Their responses included: family, grandmother and sisters.

### **Analysis of Thematic Concepts**

The thematic concepts that were identified in this study were further analyzed to reflect their relation to the research questions. Therefore, the researcher assessed how the themes that resulted from data analysis contributed to the two research questions-Student Inmate Experience and Barriers to Pursuing Education. One of the themes, “issues that deter progress in education attainment,” directly addresses, “barriers to pursuing post secondary education.”

**The student inmate experience.** The question that guided the research regarding student inmate experience was as follows: What are the educational experiences of African American male prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in a college vocational program at a Midwestern correctional facility? The respondents were reduced to inmates in the division of corrections because they committed criminal acts to get what they wanted. Some of the criminal acts included: gun possession, DUIs and aggravated battery. Moreover, the most commonly practiced criminal acts were drug solicitation and drug use. However, after being exposed to the educational programs in the division of corrections, the respondents experienced transition in their thought process. After coding the themes the researcher identified a relationship between change in thought process and motivation to attend college. Many of them came to a realization that they needed an education or some type of skill before reentering society. During the transitional period, the respondents became motivated to attend college vocational programs because they believed that obtaining a vocational certificate or college degree was the means by which to obtain job employment upon release from prison. They also thought that attending

college would position them to pursue their career objectives. The participants were motivated to go to college because they missed out on going to college before they were incarcerated. Still others believed that a college education would help them learn how to run their own business. They also believed that the vocational programs in the division of corrections not only gave them hope but would provide them with the tools they needed to create a better life for themselves. While enrolled in the programs, the respondents felt that the courses exposed them to new ideas which enabled them to learn about different trades and obtain skills to gain employment and further their education so that they won't participate in unlawful activities upon parole.

Most of the respondents were receiving support from individuals external to the division of corrections regarding the pursuit of their career choices upon completion of the college vocational programs. The strongest supporters who influenced their career choices were family members and friends, and several of the respondents have embraced the advice of their instructors regarding their career choices.

Since the analysis of this study did not yield a theory in the narrow sense of the term: a systematic set of propositions and a statement of how they interrelate, the researcher restricted himself to a summary of the data that resulted from the research. Schunk, Pintrich & Meece (2008) explained situational interest as feelings of hope, self-improvement and aspirations that the student/inmates experience in an environment of higher learning. Most of the respondents were motivated to attend vocational programs because they directly linked vocational programs with job prospects upon their release from prison. The researcher theorized that the participants' desire to make changes in their lives regarding a pursuit of a college education as opposed to continuing the path of their prior lifestyle exemplified their ability to master behavior that is needed to overcome difficult tasks. Their ability to overcome difficult tasks was a strong



indicator of self efficacy beliefs, which refers to one's belief that he possesses the ability or skills to make a difference in his life. The participants sustained a level of motivation which was a factor in their continuing to pursue a college education. They associated obtaining a college education with a change in life that they felt was needed to acquire job skills and personal goals.

**Barriers to pursuing postsecondary education.** The question that guided the research regarding the barriers that student inmates faced while pursuing a postsecondary education was as follows: What barriers do prison inmates encounter in the division of corrections that may impede their desire to pursue a postsecondary education and/or their opportunity to complete a postsecondary degree? The theme that addressed barriers to completing a postsecondary degree was: issues that deter progress in education attainment. One of the interview questions that was neutral and non-leading elicited many responses that addressed the factors that will keep them from pursuing a college degree. The researcher asked the respondents, "Do you plan to pursue a college degree once you have been released from prison?" Some of the responses were, as mentioned above, "College was too hard," and "It goes too fast."

Fear of failure is a common concern for some respondents. Rather than continue their pursuit of a formidable education, some respondents chose to maintain a minimum level of accomplishment. Other respondents appeared to succumb to memories of their criminal acts, as was expressed by one of the respondents. He expressed his love for guns which served as a mental barrier to his educational pursuit. Because the prison is housed with inmates who have drug addictions or offenses, some of the participants believed that people with addictions would be more receptive to learn if they are taught by recovering addicts. Other participants' resistance to the drug therapy program poses a problem for some of the participants because they feel that they are the victim in their present circumstance and not the victimizer (Injuries Unseen, 2012).

The common result of inmates who display this attitude is a lack of participation in their drug therapy program and as a result, they are denied the right to attend the college vocational programs.

Two of the nineteen participants allowed the fear of failure to be a deterrent in their pursuit of accomplishing goals. However, seventeen of the nineteen participants continued their pursuit of college completion after receiving support from their family and teachers. Although African American male inmates enter the division of corrections having been involved in some criminal act, all of the participants showed an interest in and participated in college vocational programs that offer them life improving skills and education that will prevent them from being reincarcerated. Nevertheless, two of the nineteen participants who sustain the fear of taking chances and who hold on to thinking errors create barriers between themselves and their opportunity to continue pursuing a college vocational education.

Of the six themes that emerged from the study, four themes received greater support from the data that was provided during the interviews. Two themes that developed from the study were “criminal behavior” and “change in thought process”. These themes generated factual descriptions but did not create as much rich information as the four themes that were more relevant to the development of the research: “motivation to attend college”, “personal feelings about attending college”, “issues that deter progress in education attainment” and “factors influencing career choices”. The last four previously mentioned themes were addressed by most of the participants.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter reports the emergent themes that were derived from the data extracted during the interviews of 19 participants. These themes were used to explain the educational

experiences of African American male prison inmates who voluntarily enroll in a college vocational program at a Midwestern correctional facility and the barriers that prison inmates encounter in the division of corrections that may impede their desire to pursue a postsecondary education.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

Many African American male inmates have shown a keen interest in attending a college vocational program while incarcerated (Harlow, 2003). The purpose of this study is to document the educational experiences of African American prison inmates who are voluntarily registered in college vocational programs in the division of corrections.

This research was completed to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of African American male student inmates. There are several reasons why this study is significant. First, African American men represent the majority of the state prison population in this country and according to Carson & Golinelli (2012), 637,400 inmates reentered society in 2012. Therefore, citizens should have some interest in understanding the college experience of the inmates to determine if their experience equates to reformed behavioral characteristics prior to reentering society. Secondly, it is important for society to be aware of the college programs that are offered in the prison system. Prison administrators and policymakers need to be aware of the success of these college programs and the future goals of these students/inmates in order to identify the types of programs that should be offered to students (Hall & Killacky, 2008).

The researcher's experience as a college instructor of a prison created a foundation from which the study developed. Chappel (2004) stated that students will develop a protégé/student inmate relationship with the instructor. Protégé/student inmate relationships create trust between the student and instructor. This suggested that the participants offered authentic responses.

This study examined the experiences of African American male inmates who are enrolled in a college vocational program and the barriers that prison inmates encounter that may impede their desire to pursue a postsecondary education and/or their opportunity to complete a

postsecondary degree. Interviews were conducted with this group to address the research questions of this study. A number of thematic concepts were derived from these interviews, and the categories that emerged are as follows: (1) criminal behavior, (2) change in thought process, (3) motivation to attend college, (4) personal feelings about vocational programs, (5) issues that deter progress in education attainment and (6) people or organizations who influenced the career choices of the participants. However, two of the six themes, “criminal behavior” and “change in thought process,” were eliminated from the findings of this study. The “criminal behavior” theme did not include enough data that could contribute to the research. Also, the “change in thought process” theme served as a strong support to the theme “motivation to attend college.” It was also determined that the concepts that led to the development of the theme “issues that deter progress in education attainment” were quite similar to the concepts that led to the development of the theme “personal feelings about vocational programs.” Therefore the researcher collapsed the theme “issues that deter progress in education attainment” with the theme “personal feelings about vocational programs.”

The purpose of a conceptual framework is to use theories to analyze ideas that develop from observing an event or occurrence (Jabareen, 2009). Therefore, theories that were relevant to this research study were selected. It helps the researcher view the phenomena of interest more intensely by limiting the scope of the study to the use of selected theories, therefore providing a more accurate interpretation of the results. Initially, the conceptual frameworks used for this study included self efficacy theory, self worth theory and self determination theory. However, after careful analysis of the results, it was determined that the findings were more strongly supported by self worth theory and self determination theory.

### Summary

The research that served as a foundation for the development of this study began with the reformation of the prison system that was historically punitive in nature and evolved into a system that offers drug and college/vocational programs for inmates. A variety of socioeconomic factors have significantly affected the African American community. These socioeconomic factors include: living in poverty; high unemployment rates; lack of education within the community; exposure to and use of high consumptions of alcohol; tobacco and street drugs; the exhibition of antisocial behavior and high incidences of involuntary psychiatric behavior (Ethnic and Racial Minorities & Socioeconomic Status, n.d.).

As a result of the socioeconomic factors that impact the lives of African Americans in the United States, many black men have resorted to the use and sale of drugs. Such unlawful acts have led to alarming rates of arrest, and consequently black men represent approximately 40% of the state prison population in the United States (Drug Sentencing Practice and Issues, n.d). Black male inmates became prime candidates for drug and vocational training in prison.

Vocational programs increased in its availability throughout the United States after the approval of the Truman Commission Report in 1946 (Laster, 2013). The Brown vs. Board of Education court-decision also increased access to education for minorities. In this case the separate but equal doctrine was outlawed/abolished. The Pell Grant made it possible for inmates to enroll in college programs and receive vocational certificates and college degrees in prison (McCarty, 2006). However, by 1991 President Clinton signed a bill which disapproved the use of federal funds to finance prison education (McCarty, 2006). As a result, fewer programs were offered throughout the prison system. Nevertheless, there was still a high demand for college

programs by inmates who were motivated to acquire a vocational skill and obtain a college education.

Empirical research was conducted in prisons to gain an understanding of the experiences of inmates who pursued an education. The research documented the college experience of inmates which included motivating factors such as seeking knowledge, avoiding contact with security officers and the perception of instructor's competency (Parsons & Langenbach, 1993). Additional research resulted in a personality modification for student inmates which involved establishing a protégé/student relationship with an instructor (Honeycutt, 1995). Other researchers explored the difference between the educational preferences of black and white inmates. White inmates tended to derive more value from college level courses while African American inmates credited greater value to vocational programs (Case & Fasenfest, 2004).

The prison environment affects inmate learners in different ways. Since most inmates enter prison having acquired poor learning skills, they must participate in structured programs that consist of continued professional development so that the student inmate can recognize changes in his life. But during their tenure as students prison inmates encounter a number of barriers. Some dispositional barriers that they encounter include drug and alcohol abuse, situational barriers such as the inability to complete a vocational program due to administrative changes and institutional barriers such as unqualified staff that provide a poor learning experience for the student inmate. Despite the obstacles with which student inmates contend, some of the student inmates have transcended beyond these barriers and found success during their college experience in prison and once released from prison (Scurrah, 2010). For instance, a former inmate who is also a university professor formed a group of ex-convicts who also have PhDs to conduct a study on experiences of prisoners and ex-prisoners (Richards, 2008). He also

trained college interns on how to teach college courses to inmates in prison. The purpose of this program was to impart to student interns the fundamentals of teaching inmates how to transition from a prison environment to a college or university environment (Richards, 2008).

The following theories were used to explain student inmate behavior and their motivation to enroll in vocational programs: self efficacy theory, self worth theory, self determination theory and social learning theory. Self efficacy theory relates to the intrinsic rewards of competency that a person experiences when he exhibits the ability to accomplish a task. It is based on the assumption that mental or emotional events in a person's life provide a means of creating and strengthening expectations of personal efficacy or value (Bandura, 1977). Self worth theory pertains to the positive self image that develops in a person when a task is performed successfully (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). However, self worth theory also applies to low self-esteem that occurs when a person performs a task poorly and therefore withdraws self from further executing that task (Rabideau, 2005). Self determination theory explains the difference between internal and external motivation that attributes to why a person chooses to perform a specific task (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991). Social learning theory suggests that a person learns how to perform a task based on observing others' performance of that task. The task must be self-fulfilling in order for the observer to repeat that task in the future (Cherry, 2005).

The qualitative approach was used to document the experiences of African American male inmates who are enrolled in a college vocational program. Grounded theory was used as the methodological approach to develop the formation of categories that derived from the data collected during the interviews with 19 student/inmates. Several data collection techniques were used to capture their educational experiences, including semi-structured interviews and a coding



system. Categories were evaluated to create themes. The themes were supported by research literature and theories that created new themes about the experiences of African American male inmates who are enrolled in a college vocational program.

### **Discussion**

Three of the six themes generated rich information and were strongly relevant to the development of the research. They were: (1) motivation to attend college, (2) personal feelings about attending vocational college, and (3) factors influencing career choices. Provided below is a discussion of the themes and their correlation with supporting theories and the research questions that are the focus of this study.

#### **Theme One: Motivation to Attend College.**

The participants' primary source of motivation to attend college is either extrinsically grounded in their desire to obtain skills and to achieve goals or intrinsically grounded in their desire to seek a change in their lives. Participants enroll in classes like sociology to learn how to assess their own behavior. They want to find out why they engage in criminal behavior. A vast majority of the participants commit crimes as a result of drug and alcohol use. Therefore they determine that they can develop skills in self-assessment to modify a drug-induced lifestyle that leads to criminal behavior by enrolling in a sociology class. Other participants attend college to learn how to operate a forklift because they believe it is a marketable skill. Many of the participants set their sights on receiving a certificate after completing a vocational program. These participants are seeking the opportunity to show others the reward they receive as a result of completing a task. These extrinsic motivating factors are rooted in determination theory (Bess, 1997). Extrinsic motivation refers to actions that a person takes that are stimulated by the consequences of carrying out those actions. Quite often, these actions are not intrinsic, which is

the case for the participants who are developing skills in forklifting or enrolling in vocational programs to receive a certificate upon completion. The specific type of behavior that the students display is external regulation, which is a form of self determination theory. Learning how to operate a forklift and receiving a certificate serves as the locus of behavior that motivates the students to enroll in vocational programs. Receiving external rewards is the factor that motivates these participants to enroll in college.

On the other hand, some of the participants are interested in enrolling in college because of the intrinsic rewards that it offers. Since the majority of the participants' crimes were drug related crimes, the participants believe that sociology classes will provide the information they need to reconcile their criminal lifestyle. They are seeking information that they believe will alter the behavioral characteristics that resulted in their prison confinement. Cohen (n.d.) conducted a study that addressed the motivating factors associated with the enrollment of student inmates in college programs. The study included interviews that were provided by student inmates who were enrolled in a college program at Bard Prison. Cohen (n.d.) indicated that student inmates at Bard Prison were enrolling in college programs to improve their perception of their own life, to build their self-confidence and to relate better with other inmates. Each factor is symbolic of intrinsic motivation since they result from behavior that is conducted voluntarily without the necessity of material rewards or constraints (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991).

Chappel's (2004) study states that student inmates who enroll in college programs will occasionally develop a mentor-protégé relationship with the instructor. The trust that they develop with the instructor helps them to envision themselves as successful based upon their own abilities and to become self-directed individuals. Motivation that develops as a result of self enhancement is described in self determination theory as intrinsic in nature. Deci's research

implies that intrinsic motivation relates to self-determined behavior that improves academic performance in any discipline that is pursued and therefore leads to a continuance of the behavior in that particular discipline (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991). For instance, a person who performs a task because that person enjoys it is internally motivated to perform the task (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991). According to Deci, Vallerand & Ryan (1991), self-directed behavior is associated with a freedom of choice in decision making, with no coercion from outside forces. This was apparent for those participants whose motivation stemmed from their expectation of receiving information that could lead to behavior modification after enrolling in the sociology class.

The participants also perceive their participation in college programs as an indirect path toward their will to sustain freedom from prison incarceration. Their perception of reaching this goal by participating in educational programs correlates with their pursuit of a change in lifestyle. They conceptualize their participation in college programs as (1) something new; (2) a change in their lives; and (3) they are tired of spending their lives in and out of jail and they are looking forward to doing something different upon their release from prison. There is a relationship between two goal-pursuing a college education and maintaining a lifestyle that will prevent them from returning to prison. Both goals are important to the participants because their identity is defined by the personal sacrifice to attain an education, which will sustain them from reentering prison. This is quite similar to the research about the person who believed that being a good student and being a good athlete were both important qualities (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991). In that study, it was important that the student was determined to integrate both goals and therefore define the character and personality and purpose for why the person was pursuing those goals. Self determination theory supports the idea that the participants' pursuit of a college

education is based upon motivating factors that are intentional and not coercive. Specifically, integrated regulation addresses the participants' goals to attend college and choose an alternative lifestyle since both goals are valuable and both goals help them to discover a purpose for their lives.

### **Theme Two: Personal Feelings about Vocational Programs.**

There are a number of reasons why inmates enroll in vocational programs in prison. Vocational programs help students develop the patience they need to endure the tension of living in their housing units. Inmates who enroll in a vocational program either attend school in the morning and report to a drug therapy session that takes place in their housing units in the afternoon or report to their drug therapy program that takes place in their housing units in the morning and attend school in the afternoon. The inmates dislike participating in the drug therapy program because it requires that they verbally repeat their drug treatment philosophy several times per day and continue that practice upon their release date from prison. They dislike counselors who make demeaning remarks about the inmates during group therapy because it provokes the inmates to consider verbal or physical retaliation against the drug counselors. Also, they dislike the responsibility of a daily reprimand against fellow inmates for actions that the drug counselors deem as inappropriate behavior by the inmate. However, many inmates choose not to reprimand other inmates because of the possibility of receiving retaliatory actions from inmates who are reprimanded. Also, they don't like the tension that results between inmates after they complete a drug therapy exercise in which they conduct a one-on-one session with a fellow inmate and discuss with the other inmate his bad life choices and poor decision making skills. The exercise is designed to heighten awareness among the inmate population, via their group, regarding their poor decision making skills. The inmates don't believe that the

process that the drug counselors present to them will transform their psychological understanding of developing life skills that do not promote a criminal lifestyle. They don't believe that the drug treatment programs equips them with tools that they need to survive, identify a job nor provide resources for their family upon release from prison.

However, they prefer to attend school and participate in college vocational programs because vocational programs provide a structural foundation. The participants are able to follow the curriculum and gain an understanding of information that enhances the development of life skills. Many of the participants learn how to become more patient by adhering to instructions, lessons and directions from their instructors whom the participants believe are providing them with educational discipline that the participants perceive as useful information. Their participation in vocational programs enhances their cognitive skills which allow learning to take place. Once they learn a new trade, they feel that they are learning more about themselves and they feel better about themselves. The participants' belief patterns and positive self image are related to self worth theory. Participation in vocational programs creates a general positive self image for the students (Covington, 2009).

Some of the participants choose not to continue attending college programs in prison because they have a fear of failure. They have a fear of failing in college because the academic demands are greater than what the participants are willing to endure. Prior to their incarceration, some of the participants attended classes at a community college. Because of their poor academic performance, they have a preconceived belief that the college curriculum in the prison is too difficult for them to understand. They express no desire to attend college upon their release from prison. The negative experiences that they have had as a result of their poor performance in school causes them to refrain from further participation in vocational programs.

According to Rabideau (2005), self worth theory applies to students who withdraw the effort needed to complete a task which results from an experience of failure. Some of the inmates who sustain the fear of taking risks create barriers between themselves and their opportunity to pursue a college education. For instance, Sinha and Gupta (2006) conducted a study in which 100 subjects were asked to complete two insolvable line drawing activities. They were asked to complete the task without lifting the pencil from the paper or retracing marks that they previously created on the paper. The task was not as important as the participants' self assessment following their attempt to complete the task. After completing the task, the subjects were asked to fill out an attributional style questionnaire which is a questionnaire that reflects how individuals explain bad events that happen to them (Dykema, Bergbower, Doctora & Peterson, 1996). The research administrators determined that some of the participants displayed low self esteem after completing the line drawing activity. They were labeled high self worth protective subjects because they protect their self esteem by using a defensive technique in which they learn to refrain from situations that reflect their low ability (Sinha and Gupta, 2006). The high self worth protective subjects received counseling before they were redirected to work on the insolvable line drawing activity again. It was concluded that high self-worth protective subjects found themselves occupied with negative thoughts, lack of confidence and a feeling of helplessness. Their attitude was very pessimistic (Sinha and Gupta, 2006). This clearly revealed that failure in any task tend to increase the repertoire of internal attributions of high self-worth protective subjects (Sinha and Gupta, 2006).

**Theme Three: People or Organizations Who Influenced the Career Choices of the Participants.**

Several sources of influence determine the type of career choice that the participants make. The sources of influence include: organizations, friends, family, teachers, and self. Some participants claimed that they made choices uninfluenced by others. Three of the participants were influenced by organizations regarding their career choices. One of these three participants has retained gang affiliation with the Black Mafia Family which is an organization that originated in Michigan and migrated to the Midwestern region where the interviews occurred. He maintains allegiance to them and refers to them as his primary family. Four participants have been influenced by their friends to choose their careers. Seven of the participants in the current study were influenced by family members to pursue a career. Therefore, the participants were attending school because their grandmother, mother and sister have suggested doing so. Hall and Killacky (2008) suggest in their study of correctional education from the perspective of a prisoner that family members outside of the prison want their incarcerated relatives to pursue an education to minimize the amount of idle time they experience. Three participants were influenced by their teachers to pursue a career. These students established a mentor/protégé relationship with their instructors (Honeycutt, 1995). The mentor/protégé relationship reflects the trust that the participants have in their instructor as a result of the instructor's affirmation of the participants' academic skills and abilities in the classroom (Honeycutt, 1995). As mentioned, two of the participants made an independent choice to pursue a career. They didn't require the support of anyone regarding their educational and career plans. They feel a sense of choice in valuing their behavior (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991). Unlike some of the participants who rely on family and friends to facilitate the decision making process, two of the

participants were motivated to choose their own careers for personal reasons instead of being influenced by external pressure or support (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991). Deci, Vallerand & Ryan (1991) calls this behavior identified regulation which occurs when the person has come to value the behavior and has identified with and accepted the regulatory process (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991). The authors further state that the regulatory process has fully become a part of the self, so the person engages in the activity more willingly. The study by Deci, Vallerand & Ryan (1991) indicated that students who do extra work in mathematics because they may feel that it is important to succeed in math does so because the goal of improving their math skills is linked to success in future endeavors (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991). Therefore, the two autonomous participants in this study are similar to the math students in Deci, Vallerand & Ryan (1991) study because they have decided to pursue their career plans, not because the act of pursuing their goals is interesting but because their goals are useful (Deci, Vallerand & Ryan, 1991).

### **Conclusions**

Several theories were introduced to explain African American male inmates' propensity to attend vocational school while other theories explained the reason why student inmates attend college. As the interviews with 19 participants in this study show, each theory helped to explain the decisions that defined their college experience. While themes were developed according to the responses from the participants, the data from this research study suggested that student inmates' exposure to a college education facilitates the development of thought patterns and plans that direct them away from a lifestyle that is associated with criminal activity although some student inmates discontinue their pursuit of college based on a fear of failure.



The results of the study revealed several interesting findings about the educational experiences of African American male inmates and barriers to their education. First, the study showed that upon entrance into prison, African American male inmates possessed criminal thoughts. This was evidenced in the participants' confession to possessing guns and drugs. However they overcame those thought practices by participating in college programs. The participants' desire to change their lifestyles regarding a pursuit of a college education as opposed to continuing the path of their prior lifestyle exemplified their ability to master behavior that was needed to overcome difficult tasks. Their ability to overcome difficult tasks was a strong indicator of self efficacy beliefs. Some of the participants were motivated to pursue a college education. They associated obtaining a college education with a change in lifestyle that they felt was needed to acquire job skills and personal goals. Most of the participants continued their pursuit of college completion after receiving support from their family and teachers. However, one of the barriers to the participants' pursuit of an education was fear. Some of the participants allowed the fear of failure to be a deterrent to their pursuit of accomplishing goals. Those who feared taking chances may not pursue a college education. Not only does self worth theory support the proud feelings that resulted from the participants' accomplishments, but it also applied to those who withdraw effort to avoid experiencing failure (Covington, 2009).

### **Quality Standards and Limitations of the Study**

The quality of the research may have been compromised for several reasons. First, the research participants are incarcerated for no longer than 2 years. Since they reside in prison for a short term, the researcher was unable to conduct a longevity study. A longevity study consists of continued research over a designated period of time. Also, the results could not be compared with results of similar studies from other prisons due to lack of accessibility to other prisons.

Therefore, there was no observation to triangulate the data to determine how authentic the responses were to the interview questions.

### **Significance**

The researcher was aware of how the general public might see a lack of significance in this study because it addresses prison inmates who are receiving a college education. There is a widespread assumption that prison inmates receive a free college education. Parents of college-age children are livid with their inability to pay for their children's college education, yet the government has made provisions for prison inmates to obtain a free college education. However, less than 1% of tax dollars attribute to the funding of college programs in the division of corrections. Also, they assume that it is a waste of their tax dollars to finance the cost of an education for prison inmates because they believe there is a great likelihood that an ex-inmate will commit crimes again once released from prison. Yet, providing college programs for prison inmates will allow them the opportunity to use their education as a means for job attainment upon their release; and once they are employed then they can pay taxes. As crime increases in communities throughout the United States, homeowner's insurance increases to cover the interest of insurance companies and taxes increase to cover losses that result from criminal acts. However, an ex offender who receives some vocational training while incarcerated is more likely to pursue employment and less likely to reenter a lifestyle of crime. Statistics indicated that the more formal education that an inmate obtains, the greater his chances are to stay out of the prison system once he has been released from the division of corrections (Salsbury, 2011).

### **Reliability/Dependability/Auditability**

Once the researcher created a table that included codes and themes that were derived from the interviews, relationships between codes were established which led to meaningful

results from the research. However, one of the interview questions that were presented to the participants was vague. Therefore, the participants provided responses that were analyzed incorrectly. The participants were asked, “What people or organization had an impact on your career choice?” The participants provided the following responses: “girlfriend,” “family,” and “grandmother.” There was an attempt to use social learning theory as part of the framework of study to support the researcher’s opinion. The responses did not support social learning theory in which Bandura indicated that most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling from observing others (Cherry, 2005). However, the responses did not offer enough information that would have allowed the researcher to determine if social learning theory did or did not apply to their responses. The question did not provide enough detail that could have given the participants the opportunity to fashion their responses in a more descriptive or detailed format.

Informed Consent Forms were given to each participant that contained detailed information regarding the research that was conducted, information about the researcher’s position as primary investigator. The participants were also informed of their rights to agree or decline to participate in the research project.

Although there was no peer review in place for this research, two members from the dissertation committee conducted periodic reviews of the dissertation proposal and the dissertation over the course of five years. The dissertation advisor and methodologist primarily contributed information and advice that were used in the revision and refinement of the details and format of the dissertation.

**Internal Validity/Credibility/Authenticity**

The researcher anticipated that the majority of participants would express their desire to attend vocational programs when asked the following questions: “When entering the division of corrections, what were your thoughts regarding college?” and “Why did you feel this way?” The majority of the participants did not respond favorably to attending vocational programs as anticipated. Instead, 9 participants indicated that they had an interest in attending vocational programs and 10 participants indicated that they had an interest in attending college programs. These findings did not support Case & Fasenfest’s research which reported that black prisoners prefer enrolling in vocational programs and white prisoners prefer enrolling in college or university programs (Case & Fasenfest, 2004).

The analysis of the results were convincing because the findings from this study were similar to the findings that were provided by researchers who conducted similar studies with the same sample population. First, the theme “motivation to attend college” addressed the correlation between the participants who enrolled in college programs for the purpose of seeking information that they believe would alter the behavioral characteristics that resulted in their confinement in prison and Cohen's (n.d.) study that indicated that student inmates at Bard Prison were enrolling in college programs to improve their perception of their own life, to build their self confidence and to relate better with other inmates. The comparison between these findings indicated that both were results of intrinsic motivation. Secondly, the theme “personal feelings about vocational programs” revealed similarities between the participants in the study who rejected school and the findings of Sinha and Gupta’s (2006) study which showed that their participants will refrain from situations that reflect their low ability. In this study, the participants have preconceived beliefs that the college curriculum in the prison is too difficult for

them to understand because they attended classes at a community college and reported poor academic performance prior to their incarceration. Similarly, in Sinha and Gupta's (2006) study, the participants were labeled high self worth protective subjects when they protected their self esteem by using a defensive technique of refraining from situations. Both studies addressed the issue of students who display their self worth by not participating in activities that the participants feel will lower their self esteem if there is a chance that they will fail in performing the activity. Finally, the theme "people or organizations who influenced the career choices of the participants" addressed students who were self determined to pursue their goals. In the research, two participants pointed out that they motivated themselves to go to school and pursue their career goals. These results are similar to Deci's (1991) study which indicated that a student who does extra work in mathematics because he may feel that it is important to succeed in math does so because the goal of improving his math skills is linked to him succeeding in his future endeavors. Both studies were supported by self determination theory which indicates that a person can voluntarily accept the behavior that is carried out and thus conducts the behavior willingly, without coercion.

The researcher was able to link the themes that developed from the research with theories that were addressed in the study. For instance, the theme "motivation to attend college" was supported by self determination theory, "personal feelings about vocational programs" was supported by self worth theory and "organizations or people who influenced their career choices" was supported by self determination theory. Also, there was a link between two themes, "thought process" and "motivation to attend college" because both themes shared similar codes such as: pursuing goals in vocational programs, learning new things in college programs, achieving academic objectives and pursuing a certificate.

According to Miles & Huberman (1994), all results from research include some area of uncertainty. During the interviews, there may have been some desirability bias that was reflected in the responses that the participants provided. Desirability bias involves telling the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear. Inmates who participate in interviews may provide responses that reflect desirability bias for several reasons: the inmates might believe that the responses provided could be shared with staff members in the correctional facility and, as a result, might be incriminating or the inmate may give a response that he believes will give him an advantage with the researcher. Some of the participants in the research were students and former students of the researcher. As a result of the student and staff relationship, some of the participants' responses to some questions may not have been trustworthy. The participants may have tried to offer a type of response that they believed would be a good answer for the type of question that was presented to them. Because of the familiarity between the participants and the researcher, the researcher predicted that the participants would provide lengthy and detailed responses to the interview questions. However, the responses were short and concise.

### **Objectivity and Confirmability**

Because the researcher is employed at the correctional center where the interviews took place, there was direct access to the location for the interviews and immediate access to the participants. Since the participants are housed in the division of corrections, this poses a threat to the generalizability of the study. The general public can't freely enter a prison without the approval of a prison warden and major. A researcher from the general public must write a letter to the deputy director of the state prison and prison warden that explains the purpose for entering the correctional facility. The letter should include a copy of the research proposal and the university's IRB approval. The research proposal must be approved by the state review board.

A police report of the person conducting the research must be sent to the prison warden for review to assure that the person has never been convicted of felony charges that will prevent him/her from entering the prison. These stringent regulations for conducting research in the division of corrections could deter other researchers from attempting to examine a similar sample selection therefore posing a threat to the generalizability of the research.

The sample selection of African American male inmates who are enrolled in a vocational program in prison is a diverse sample population. However, the results of the study were general and relevant to inmates of other ethnic groups. Gall, Gall & Borg (2007) documented a study in which a self-proclaimed white, middle class, middle-aged instructor attempted to gather data from a target population that consisted of low-income black and Hispanic adolescents. The study involved an ethnographic perspective and interviewing was the primary method of data collection (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). To alleviate the potential difficulties that could surface from attempting to gather information from another culture and race, the primary investigator of the study hired interviewers who shared the same ethnic background as the participants (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). The participants were less hesitant to answer the interview questions when they were familiar with the researcher. According to Gall, Gall & Borg (2007) similarity in culture and ethnic background between the interviewer and respondent built trustworthiness during the interview process.

There was a small group of readers who read this dissertation; they included members of the researcher's dissertation committee. Although the committee members' specialized area of research did not include the study of inmates, they offered resource material that described theories that could be used to develop the research study about the behavior of student/inmates. Self efficacy theory, self worth theory and self determination theory were relevant in the study of

similar inmates in previous research. These theories were used as well in this study for the purpose of developing a theoretical foundation that could potentially support the research results.

In terms of their personal feelings regarding vocational programs, the participants provided vague descriptions regarding their perspective on vocational programs. For instance, the participants believed that their enrollment in vocational programs was the key to success in life because education was enlightening and helped them better themselves in life. There was some difficulty in deriving conclusions from responses provided by the participants, such as: vocational programs were the key to success in life and vocational programs helped them better themselves in life.

The following measures were used to develop an audit trail which was designed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Carcary, 2009):

**Identification of the research problem.** While working as a college instructor at a prison in the Midwestern region, the researcher observed many African American male inmates who were former college vocational students, released to return home and returned to prison within 1 to 2 years of their release date. It is the belief of the researcher that a college education would alter the thought process of inmates to allow them to make better lifestyle choices therefore deterring them from a life of crime.

**The interview schedule.** The interview questions were carefully constructed to guide the participants' responses toward addressing the research questions. A semi-structured interview was used because questions could be altered based upon the responses provided by the participants.

**Selection of the place for research interviews.** A prison in the Midwestern region was selected to conduct the research study. The prison was selected as the primary location for



research for several reasons: immediate access to the classroom where the interviews took place and familiarity with the participants in the research study which alleviated any tension between the participants and researcher.

**Evidence collection.** Nineteen interviews were conducted over a 2-day period. The responses were transcribed. The transcription served as the primary source from which data was gathered to develop the research.

**Managing and analyzing the empirical evidence.** The analysis did not yield a theory in the narrow sense of the term. Therefore, grounded theory was not used to analyze the findings as anticipated by the researcher. However, after reading the transcription, code words were created for each line of transcription. Categories were created based upon the commonalities among the two. After confirming three primary themes, the research findings that derived from the themes were formulated in a storytelling format to address the two research questions.

#### **External Validity/Transferability/Fittingness**

The characteristics of the population under study were described in great detail in this research study. Since the participants in the study were African American men who are prison inmates, the same research prototype can be evaluated for research is assessable in communities that are outside of a prison facility. Several situations may differ when conducting research with a prison inmate as opposed to conducting research with someone who is not an inmate but are of the same gender and ethnic background. First, in order to collect data for research that is conducted in a prison, the person conducting the research must receive approval from the warden of the prison where the research will take place. Following the warden's approval, the letter of consent must be approved by the prison administration department. To conduct research outside of a prison, the consent form is the primary tool that must be approved by the

IRB committee before data collection can commence. Also, the setting in a prison differs from a setting outside of a prison. For instance, the classroom where the interviews took place was enclosed behind very large windows; therefore as prisoners and correctional officers walked down the hallway, they looked in the window to view the participants during the process of interviewing. While the interviews were in process, the participants looked out of the window to see who was looking at them. Interviews that take place outside of a prison can be arranged to avoid distractions by non participants who may want to witness the interviews.

A rich description of results included the use of slang terms by the participants, the sense of motivation to pursue a better life and an environment with several distractions during the interviews. First, the responses to the interviews were often riddled with slang terms that reflected the culture of expression in prison. Such words as “thangs” were used in place of things and “cause” was used in place of because. The expression, “you know what I’m saying” was used by the participants as a term of confirmation that the response the participant offered after a question was correct and to ensure that the response was understood. This use of grammar may be reflective of the low level of educational skills that most of the inmates possess (Braggins & Talbot, 2003). According to Braggins (2003) half of the inmate populations have reading and writing skill levels comparable to an 11-year old. Secondly, most of the participants presented themselves as a motivated person who was eager to do something different with their lives other than to commit crimes. This was evident after analyzing the findings, as most of the findings were descriptive of self determination theory. Finally, the environment where the interviews occurred was constant with distractions in the hallway outside of the classroom where the interviews took place. In the hallway, correctional officers were monitoring the activities of

inmates; inmates were walking past the classroom and looking in the windows and college staff members were walking past the classroom during the process of conducting their work duties.

The findings in this study have been replicated in studies that have occurred in other prisons. For instance, Jeanne Contardo and Michelle Tobert's (2008) reported a prison study that addressed the usefulness of prison literacy and vocational programs. The study indicated that inmates participated in vocational programs if they believed that their participation would lead to employment after their release from prison. The results of their study also showed that inmates who participated in postsecondary correctional education programs displayed improved behavior during incarceration (Contardo & Tobert, 2008.). Lawrence (1994) reported a survey that was conducted in a prison in Oklahoma that provided some reasons why inmates enroll in correctional education programs. The findings from the research included reasons such as the inmates enroll to seek knowledge, they believe that their loved ones want or expect them to, they are responding to gang or peer group expectations and they believe that education will minimize their risk of returning to prison once released (Lawrence, 1994).

There are several outcomes of this study that would be beneficial to those who is interested in the education and future preparation of African American inmates. For instance, African American prison inmates pursue a college education primarily as a means of staying out of prison. Many of them do not have concrete plans. They envision the process of obtaining a college education as a direct correlation to avoiding reincarceration. Many African American inmates require family intervention which serves as the motivating factor in their decision to pursue an education in prison. Some of these inmates encounter great difficulty as they attempt to rebuild their self esteem after encountering a series of disappointments in the past. Therefore,

some of the African American inmates must possess the motivation that can serve as a catalyst to developing self confidence and the ability to process information in a college setting.

### **Utilization/Application/Action Orientation**

The results of the research stimulated some interesting thoughts regarding the participants' future. After the participants are released from prison, it would be interesting to determine if they sustained the changed thought patterns that led them from a life of crime toward a desire to attend school. If in fact they sustain these thought processes, further research could address the collaborative effects of the two themes, "change in thought process" and "motivation to attend college," to determine if their prison college experience impacted their future endeavors.

The research provides usable knowledge regarding future employment for ex-prisoners that is accessible to colleges that offer vocational programs in prison. Prison inmates do not have the means to conduct job searches, speak with potential employers or interview with potential employers. Therefore, the colleges' administrative staffs have the opportunity to assist the prison graduates by conducting job searches on their behalf. As a result, college graduates could become employed upon their release from prison to begin a career in their chosen field of study.

The research findings were inspirational for several reasons. First, it is interesting to recall the crimes that the participants committed prior to their imprisonment and subsequently acknowledge the psychological transition from the violation to commit crimes to that of obtaining a college education or vocational skill. Also, a number of participants indicated that if they were still residing in their own communities, they would not have attended college. Once they were incarcerated, they became motivated to pursue a college education. As an instructor

who administers college programs in a prison, it is inspiring to observe the changes in thought and action by the participants that led to the pursuit of educational and occupational goals that are antithetical to their prior goals of pursuing criminal acts. There are some ethical issues that were raised in the research study. Prior to 1992, the Pell Grant provided funding for inmates to pursue various college and university degrees while incarcerated. However, after President Bill Clinton passed a bill in 1992 that prohibited the use of Pell Grants for prison education, many educational programs were eliminated for prisoners. In part, this decision stemmed from opposition of taxpayers who believed that their tax dollars should not contribute to funding education for prisoners. Instead they thought it should be directed toward an investment in a college fund for non incarcerated children of taxpayers, therefore making college more affordable for them.

Also, African Americans constitute 12.3% of the United States population; however African American men represent the majority of inmates in state prisons throughout the country. Based upon the present rate of incarceration, an estimated 32% of black males will be imprisoned in a state penitentiary during their lifetime, as compared to 17% of Hispanics and 5.9% of white males. Due to the economic downturn and reduction in state appropriations, educational programs in the division of corrections have been vastly affected. Therefore, fewer programs are being offered to inmates (Prison-based, 2014). According to Mathis (2005), when education is made part of a comprehensive prisoner re-entry program that includes substance abuse counseling and psychiatric evaluation, society at large reaps the benefits of reduced crime rates, stronger communities and lowered tax burdens. He reported that according to the U.S. Department of Justice statistics, state prison systems cost taxpayers almost \$30 billion a year (Mathis, 2005). Most of this money is spent building new prisons and keeping old ones running;

staff salaries and construction make up a bulk of the costs. By reducing recidivism, the prison population would be reduced, and prison spending could be drastically cut (Mathis, 2005). As a result, the more educational programs that inmates complete, the lower the recidivism rate. It makes better economic sense to invest \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year needed to educate an inmate than it does to spend the \$70,000 a year it takes to incarcerate them. The tax money that is saved could then be earmarked for other social programs (Mathis, 2005). So policymakers and American taxpayers should be aware of the benefits of offering, and the effectiveness of, college and vocational programs for African American male inmates because it contributes to a lower recidivism rate that equates to lower taxes that are needed to facilitate prison operations.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The result of the research indicated that prison inmates' fear of failure is a deterrent to completing a college degree. According to self worth theory, an inmate may withdraw the effort that is required to complete a task for fear of enduring low self esteem (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). It is important for a student inmate to develop self worth by exhibiting the ability to do a specific task or possess competence in a specific field (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). Therefore for future research, one of the questions that should be addressed to the participants is, "What vocational program would you like to see this prison offer, and why do you feel this way?" The student inmates' self worth might develop if they are involved in a task or enrolled in a program that they encounter success following their completing the task or program.

Regarding the mentor-protégé relationship, once a student inmate completes a vocational program, a transformation occurs when the student changes from protégé status to peer status (Chappel, 2004). The protégé/student inmate subsequently develops trust in the instructor that results in him envisioning success as it relates to his own abilities (Chappel, 2004). As a result, a

student inmate is able to make qualitative changes and achieve legitimate success in life upon his release from the division of corrections (Chappel, 2004). However, there are no agencies or entities that track the progress of student inmates once they have been released from prison. As a result, it is difficult to determine how effective their education is upon their release. Therefore, there is a need for additional research in the lives of ex-prisoners who enrolled in a vocational program while incarcerated to determine if their exposure to educational programs assisted them in improving their decision-making skills.

Another suggestion for future research is to track the participants after their release from the penal system to determine if they continued their education, what area of study they pursued and if they were able to obtain employment in their field of study. Education is part of the therapeutic program that is offered at the prison where this research took place. By providing a means of tracking the educational pattern of former inmates, that process may determine the effectiveness of educational programs in prison, as well as deficiencies in correctional education programs that are offered in the prison. Since the recidivism rate, which is based on a 3-year abstinence from reentering prison (Urahn, 2011), has long been used as the benchmark for determining the effectiveness of prison programs, further research should be invested in a longitudinal study that addresses the outcome of a former student inmate for three or more years of post-incarceration. A comparative analysis can reflect upon potential deficiencies in the prison vocational training of the inmates who recidivate within 3 to 5 years of post-incarceration in comparison to those under study who sustained from reincarceration for 5 years or more. By filling the voids in correctional education programs, this may result in a more complete vocationally trained ex-inmate who will not recidivate. The effectiveness of this study may provide a public awareness of the parallel between a lower recidivism rate and a lower amount

of taxes attributed to paying for housing an increasing number of inmates in the Midwestern region.



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**Appendix B**

## Informed Consent Form



**Department of  
Educational Leadership  
and Policy Studies in  
the College of Education**

269 Marillac Hall,  
South Campus One University Blvd.  
St. Louis, MO 63121-4499  
Telephone: (314) 516-5944  
(314) 516-5942 Fax

## University of Missouri-St. Louis: Informed Consent Form

Researcher Name: Kenton Mershon  
Address: Southwestern Illinois Correctional Center  
950 South Kingshighway  
Phone: (618) 394-2200; ext. 401

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which will take place from \_\_\_\_\_ PM to \_\_\_\_\_ PM on the dates of \_\_\_\_\_. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant. The purposes of this project are:

To better understand how higher education attainment affects the lives of African American male inmates who are housed in the division of corrections. About 20 people will be interviewed.

The methods to be used to collect information for this study are explained below.

1. A digital recorder will be used to record the researcher's questions and responses of the participants during the interview
2. Pencil and paper will be used to manually jot notes that will be used to assist in analyzing the responses of the interview
3. Transcription software will be used to record the results of the interview

You are encouraged to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the study and the methods that I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me.

I will use the information from this study to write a research report about you (the respondent). This report will be read by you, in order to check on the accuracy of the report. The research report will not be available for any other person to read without your permission and the report will not include your name or other identifying information. In addition, the report will be part of my dissertation study and may be presented at a conference and/or published. However, no identifying information will be included in any presentations or publication based on this study.

I guarantee that the following conditions will be met:

- Your legal name will not be used at any point during information collection, nor in the written research report; instead, you and any other person and geographic information relevant to this will be replaced with fake names that will be used for all verbal and written records and reports.
- If you grant permission to the researcher to conduct audio taped interviews, no audiotapes will be used for any purpose other than to complete this study, and these tapes will not be played for any reason other than to conduct this study. At your discretion, these tapes will either be destroyed or returned to you. All data will be destroyed within 5 years of the end of the study.
- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question you do not wish to answer and continue to participate in the study. In addition, you have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice, and the information collected and written records will be surrendered to you.
- The recordings of the interview and the written transcriptions of those interviews will be secured using a locked filing cabinet and password-protected computers. Only fake names will be on the tapes and transcripts.
- There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day activities. There are no direct benefits for you, other than contributing to the improvement of our understanding of education for African American men in correctional facilities.

Do you grant permission to be quoted directly?    Yes \_\_\_\_\_                  No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you grant permission to be audiotaped?        Yes \_\_\_\_\_                  No \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to the terms:

Respondent \_\_\_\_\_                  Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to the terms:

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_                  Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C**

## Interview Protocol

1. What personal challenges did you encounter that led you to entering the division of corrections (DOC)?
2. When entering DOC, what were your thoughts regarding college? Why did you feel this way?
3. As you entered the college program, what were your views regarding the specific vocational program that you preferred and selected? Why did you feel this way?
4. What people or organization(s) had an impact on your career choice?
5. How were you able to address the demands of the vocational program?
6. How helpful was the vocational program regarding your personal development?
7. Is DOC conducive for conducting vocational programs? Why or why not?
8. Do you feel that your college program was beneficial in you helping to achieve your academic and career objectives? Why or why do you feel that way?
9. Do you plan to pursue a college degree once you have been released from prison? If so, why?
10. Do you believe that a college degree will increase your chances of obtaining gainful employment? To what extent?

**Table 1**

## Initial Codes Informing the Themes

<b>1a. Criminal behavior that the inmates displayed prior to entering DOC</b>
Aggravated robbery,
Drugs
Drugs
Probation violation
DUI
Carrying guns
Drugs (fast living)
Selling drugs
Trying to take care of myself
Unregistered guns
Drugs and alcohol
No responsibility and low self esteem
Financial and Addiction
Drug selling

<b>1b. Change in thought process</b>
Drug treatment
Prison had great schooling
Vocational program was something new
Want to use brain
Wanted to do something in life
Pursuing college for change in life
Thoughts have changed about the drug program to better self
Applying drug therapy created change in life
Realized he needed more education which is an element for change
This time I'm taking it serious
Because of the vocational program, I'm accomplishing goals now.
Came to a drug facility because I was tired of spending my life in and out of jail
Chose the vocational program because I needed some kind of skills
Get skills in school that will allow me do something different upon my release
Putting the same energy in that I once used on negative things to positive things and these are things I really need in my life

<b>1c. Motivation to attend college</b>	
Girlfriend push me to do better and strive for the best	
Family impact me toward education	
Want to get degree someday and obtain employment	
Pursue school upon release to learn to own my own business	
Going to college to achieve career objectives	
Went to college to further my education and better myself in life	
Want to get a certificate in Warehousing	
Get schooling for free in prison	
Pursuing college degree to get life together and be a working man	
Pursue college degree to get CADC license	
Go to college to become a certified addiction counselor	
Achieve academic career objectives	
Pursue a college degree to increase chances of obtaining a job	
Receive good time credit if you go to a drug treatment facility	
Motivated to go beyond a GED	
Wanted to take Sociology to learn about the behaviors he's displaying	
Wanted a certificate to show people upon request	
His kids and the courts motivated him to attend school	
Achieving goals in voc. classes like forklifting because it's a marketable skill	
Would like to pursue a masters in psychology	
Learning new things in college program gives hope	
Bring my TABE score up to attend Warehousing class	
Missed out on college and wanted a chance to go to college	
Further my education to pertain a better job	
Achieving my GED in jail made me want to go beyond a GED	
Had a chance to selected classes I'm interested in	
I believe these credits will help so I plan on getting a degree	
Encourages inmates to go to school	
Before enrolling in school I couldn't read or write	

<b>1d. Personal feelings about vocational programs</b>	
Teaches me patience	Learn about business plans
Enlightening	Help me better myself
Help for my addiction	Provides insight to bring my grades up
Help me learn about myself	It will give me the opportunity to get information for jobs
Create structure in my life	Gives direction in life
Provides coping skills	teaching me about business opportunities
To better my life	It's the right thing and smart thing to do
It will improve my thought pattern	Get more skills that will help me in society

Good for people who have a drug problem	With education you can get more information for jobs
You can earn good time credit for participation	Learn a new trade
Helpful because I have been having emotional problems	Help you better yourself later on in life
Help open my feelings	So I can get a better job to take care of my family
The vocational programs thus far is a good look	The only way I can get somewhere in life
Going back to school to get bachelor's degree; better chance of gaining employment	Education is the key
Teaches me about business opportunities that will help in the long run	Getting help in hands on training
Get a college degree to get a job so I can stop selling drugs	Not becoming incarcerated again
Learn a new trade	School has a lot of tools we need, to make people successful and become better students of life
Help open my mind to learning	Education is the key to success
Several things that I accomplished that I can use in the world	To obtain a better paying job
Helped me learn some things and skills that will assist me in re-entry back into the world	College assists me with employment
Needed some skills	Needed school to help me reach my goals
The more education the more chances at gaining employment	With a college degree you can go for top dollar employment
Better myself and make me a better person	Education is the key in this society; they can take my freedom but they can't take my education
	Take advantage of school to better chances of employment

<b>1e. Issues that deter progress in education attainment</b>
We should have more than two hours in school
Might fail
Upon entering prison, wasn't thinking about school because I was still in my addictive ways
People with addictions would be more receptive to learn if they are being taught by recovering addicts
The groups at times are like a joke



<b>If.</b>	<b>Factors influencing career choices</b>
	Girlfriend
	My family
	My family
	Wasn't None
	Seize Fire (an organization)
	My sister, NA, AA and school
	Black Mafia Family
	Grandmother tried but I was in the street
	Old friends
	Myself
	My babies and grandbabies
	A man named Mr. Carter
	Family and friends
	You and Mr. Tuck
	You and Mr. Tuck
	None